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Social Media Crisis Communication in the Global South: Lessons From BPJS Affiliated Clinics in Indonesia Using Austin & Jin's SMCC Model

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Abstract

This study examines how Social Security Administrator for Health (BPJS Kesehatan)-affiliated clinics in Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi employ social-media-enabled communication strategies to manage slow-burning crises, maintain patient trust, and protect institutional reputations. Operating within Indonesia's National Health Insurance program (*Jaminan Kesehatan Nasional, JKN*), these clinics face administrative bottlenecks, heightened patient expectations, and competition from private providers, making effective crisis communication essential. Guided by Austin and Jin's Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model, with insights from Crisis Informatics and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), this research reframes health communication as a hybrid, participatory process co-constructed by organizations, patients, and broader publics. A mixed-methods design combined a survey of 200 primary healthcare facilities with patient interviews and document analysis to assess the adoption and effectiveness of digital communication tools. Findings reveal that 92% of clinics use the *JKN* mobile application for complaint handling and teleconsultations, with 78% supplementing these functions through WhatsApp for personalized engagement, while Instagram and Facebook extend outreach and offline counseling supports elderly patients. Patients valued acknowledgment and empathetic responses, which improved perceptions of credibility even when resolutions were delayed. The study extends SMCC to systemic healthcare crises in the Global South, recommending stronger social listening, empathetic communication training, and improved *JKN* reliability to enhance patient-centered care.

Keywords: social-mediated crisis communication, crisis communication, patient trust, BPJS Kesehatan, digital health communication

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly reshaped the global healthcare communication landscape, exposing structural gaps and accelerating digital adoption across health systems. In Indonesia, which faced significant surges in healthcare demand between March 2020 and mid-2023, the pandemic underscored the urgent need for effective communication between providers, regulators, and patients to maintain trust and ensure service continuity in a volatile environment. This context is especially relevant in Indonesian Social Security Administrator for Health (Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial Kesehatan, or BPJS Kesehatan), which administers the National Health Insurance program (*Jaminan Kesehatan Nasional, JKN*). By the end of 2024, 23,682 first-level primary health care facilities (FKTP)—including both public and private clinics—were partnered with BPJS Kesehatan under JKN, covering 98.45% of the population (~278 million people) (The Jakarta Globe, 2025). In urban regions like Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi, where competition among healthcare providers is intense and patient expectations are rapidly evolving, these BPJS Kesehatan-affiliated clinics represent a crucial frontline of the national healthcare system.

Yet this frontline is also where complex systemic challenges converge. Clinics must navigate administrative bottlenecks, limited resources, and growing pressure to sustain public trust in a program frequently criticized for inefficiencies and inconsistent service quality (Ratnawati & Hidayat, 2023; Sadiq et al., 2024). These realities create what scholars describe as “slow-burning crises”—long-term, cumulative disruptions such as patient dissatisfaction, reimbursement disputes, and reputational erosion, which are less visible than acute crises but equally damaging to institutional legitimacy (Bukar et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2012). These challenges underscore that health communication in this context is not a peripheral activity but a core organizational strategy for maintaining credibility, mitigating risks, and fostering resilience.

The *JKN* mobile application, launched as part of BPJS Kesehatan’s broader digitization agenda, illustrates how digital tools have transformed the communication ecosystem of Indonesian healthcare. Initially designed to simplify administrative processes—including registration, complaints management, teleconsultations, and medicine delivery—the platform has evolved into a vital two-way communication channel connecting clinics and patients in real time. This functionality proved especially critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, where telehealth proved essential for maintaining access to mental health care during the COVID-19 pandemic (Office of Behavioral Health, Disability, and Aging Policy, 2024). Patient feedback gathered in this study highlights the app’s role in sustaining trust: timely information, empathetic interactions, and clear complaint-handling pathways were consistently cited as features that helped clinics address dissatisfaction, prevent grievances from escalating, and maintain patient loyalty in an increasingly competitive healthcare marketplace (Ratnawati & Hidayat, 2023).

Reframing health communication through the lens of crisis management deepens its strategic importance. Traditionally, health communication research emphasized improving patient education, enhancing satisfaction, and supporting service marketing (Dutta-Bergman, 2005; Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020; Fortenberry & McGoldrick, 2016). However, contemporary scholarship has shifted to recognize communication as a reputational shield, capable of safeguarding institutional legitimacy during periods of strain (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). This shift is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where public trust in government-run services is

often fragile, and dissatisfaction can quickly escalate into viral social media criticism, undermining the credibility of BPJS Kesehatan and its partner clinics.

These pressures are further compounded by a rapidly changing healthcare environment. The sector is transitioning from what Cascio (2018) describe as a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) context to one that is increasingly Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, and Incomprehensible (BANI). For BPJS Kesehatan-affiliated clinics, this means balancing regulatory demands of a capitation-based payment model, ensuring compliance with evolving quality standards, and competing with private providers for patient loyalty (Porter, 1985; Thompson et al., 2010). Within this fragile and highly scrutinized environment, communication emerges as a form of organizational risk mitigation. Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) reinforces this perspective, arguing that timely acknowledgment of public concerns, transparent information-sharing, and demonstration of corrective action can buffer organizations against reputational harm (Cheng, 2018; Mundottukandi et al., 2024). For BPJS Kesehatan and its clinic partners, adopting these strategies is not optional—it is essential for sustaining legitimacy and public trust in an era of heightened scrutiny.

However, digital communication in Indonesian healthcare is not without its challenges. Despite its potential to increase efficiency and reach, adoption is uneven across patient populations. Elderly patients and those with low digital literacy often struggle to use the *JKN* application effectively, creating new forms of inequity in access to information and services (Hisyam & Mussry, 2025; Lupton, 2013). Addressing these gaps requires culturally sensitive, inclusive communication strategies that combine digital tools with traditional methods, such as face-to-face interactions, multilingual education programs, and community-based outreach.

Against this backdrop, this study integrates theoretical perspectives from the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model, Crisis Informatics, and SCCT to reconceptualize health communication as a tool for crisis management and institutional resilience. Specifically, it investigates how BPJS Kesehatan-affiliated clinics in Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi use digital platforms—particularly the *JKN* application, WhatsApp, and social media—to engage patients, manage dissatisfaction, and safeguard their reputations in a complex and evolving healthcare ecosystem. By combining survey data from 200 clinics with patient feedback, this research not only contributes to the growing body of Global South crisis communication scholarship but also offers actionable guidance for policymakers and practitioners on embedding empathetic, multi-channel, and culturally grounded communication strategies into everyday operations.

Literature Review

Austin and Jin's Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model provides a relevant framework for examining how BPJS Kesehatan-affiliated clinics manage communication during slow-burning crises. The model conceptualizes crisis communication as a hybrid, participatory process involving three publics: influentials, who generate and frame crisis messages; followers, who consume, share, and engage with these narratives; and inactives, who access mediated information through traditional or interpersonal channels (Austin, et al., 2012; Cheng et al., 2022; Jin et al., 2014). In BPJS Kesehatan-affiliated clinics, these groups map onto digitally active patients and health advocates, the wider patient population engaging through the *JKN* application and social media, and those relying on offline interactions with clinic staff or family networks. This framework highlights the need for BPJS and its clinics to

communicate across multiple channels, balancing official messaging with engagement in citizen-driven discourse (Cheng, 2018; Eriksson, 2018).

The SMCC model's strength lies in recognizing that organizations no longer fully control crisis narratives. These narratives emerge from interactions between institutional messaging, user-generated content, and peer-to-peer discourse. This is especially salient in Indonesia, where patients voice grievances on platforms like X and Instagram, transforming private complaints into public crises. By engaging publics with timely, empathetic, dialogic communication, BPJS Kesehatan-affiliated clinics can mitigate reputational risks and restore trust (Cheng et al., 2022). Although widely applied in Western corporate and governmental contexts, SMCC's application in Global South healthcare systems remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by adapting the model to resource-constrained environments, offering insights into how digitally mediated communication can stabilize public confidence in national health insurance schemes.

Integrating the SMCC model with Crisis Informatics expands understanding of how patients and providers co-construct healthcare narratives. Crisis Informatics, as described by Palen et al. (2009) and developed by Reuter et al. (2018), frames crises as socially constructed processes unfolding through networked communication rather than discrete events. In BPJS clinics, this includes viral posts about administrative failures, WhatsApp discussions amplifying grievances, and formal complaints lodged through the *JKN* app. These citizen-to-citizen interactions often escalate into citizen-to-authority engagements as patients tag BPJS Kesehatan, the Ministry of Health, or legislators to demand accountability (Adi, 2020; Cheng et al., 2022). Such dynamics underscore how public discourse pressures institutions to respond transparently, blurring boundaries between informal and formal communication.

Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) complements these frameworks by emphasizing audience-centered communication for protecting organizational legitimacy. SCCT posits that reputational harm can be mitigated when organizations acknowledge concerns, provide timely updates, and demonstrate corrective action (Coombs, 2007). For BPJS clinics, adopting these principles means crafting responses that combine factual updates with empathy, addressing both informational and emotional needs. This is critical in slow-burning crises, where reputational risks accumulate over time rather than erupting from a single event.

By applying these frameworks to BPJS Kesehatan-affiliated clinics, this study advances understanding of how crisis communication models can be localized to Global South healthcare systems. It contributes to scholarship on participatory crisis communication by illustrating how hybrid strategies—blending digital and offline channels—help maintain patient trust in resource-limited, high-scrutiny environments (Mohamad et al., 2025). Practically, it offers actionable guidance for BPJS and its partners: embedding empathetic, multi-channel strategies responsive to public discourse can strengthen relationships, reduce reputational risks, and enhance institutional legitimacy (Cheng, 2018; Eriksson, 2018).

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods design to investigate how Social Security Administrator for Health (BPJS Kesehatan)-affiliated clinics in the Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi area utilize social-media-enabled communication channels to manage slow-burning

crises and maintain patient trust. The primary data collection method was a structured survey administered to 200 primary healthcare facilities partnered with BPJS Kesehatan. Clinics were purposively sampled to capture diversity in geographic location, patient load, and service capacities. The survey examined the extent of social media adoption for patient engagement, perceptions of the *JKN* mobile application as a two-way communication tool, and the effectiveness of digital platforms in addressing patient complaints, reducing reputational risks, and sustaining loyalty. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize clinic-level communication practices and perceived outcomes, providing a broad overview of trends across the sample.

To complement the survey findings, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with patients from selected high-performing clinics. These interviews explored patient perceptions of how clinics used digital communication platforms—such as the *JKN* mobile app, WhatsApp, and social media—to manage dissatisfaction, respond to complaints, and maintain transparency during service disruptions.

Additionally, a document review analyzed BPJS policy guidelines, internal communication strategies, and publicly accessible social media content from clinics. This secondary analysis provided contextual insights into how organizational frameworks support the use of digital tools in managing patient interactions and reputational challenges.

By integrating survey results, patient interviews, and documentary analysis, this study offers a comprehensive perspective on how BPJS Kesehatan-affiliated clinics deploy social-media-enabled communication strategies for crisis mitigation and patient engagement.

Result and Discussion

This study examined how *BPJS Kesehatan*-affiliated clinics in Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi employ social-media-enabled communication strategies to manage slow-burning crises, sustain patient trust, and protect reputations. Using Austin and Jin's Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model as the analytical lens, the findings reveal that crisis communication in this context emerges from a dynamic interplay between organizational actors, patient advocates, and diverse publics across multiple channels. Survey responses from 200 clinics and patient feedback demonstrate that communication flows are multi-layered, dialogic, and shaped by interactions between institutional messaging, citizen-generated discourse, and offline exchanges.

Figure 1

SMCC Informed Communication Flows in BPJS Kesehatan-Affiliated Clinics



Communication Flows: From Unidirectional Messaging to Dialogic Engagement

The findings make clear that communication is no longer unidirectional but a co-constructed narrative involving patients who actively shape and disseminate their experiences. Official BPJS communication—policy updates, service responses, and corrective actions through the *JKN* mobile application—forms a central source of crisis messaging. These top-down communications are complemented by clinic-level updates addressing localized concerns, often delivered via WhatsApp or in-person interactions.

Patients, particularly the “influentials” in the SMCC model, play an increasingly significant role in shaping public discourse. They share complaints and experiences on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram, frequently tagging BPJS accounts and government agencies to amplify grievances into public demands for accountability. One patient explained, “When I posted on Instagram about a delayed referral and tagged BPJS, I received a response within 48 hours. My earlier complaint through the app had been pending for over a week.” This aligns with Austin and Jin’s observation that public framing of crises accelerates organizational responses through reputational pressure (Austin, et al., 2012; Cheng et al., 2022).

Additional patient feedback emphasized that perceived responsiveness directly influences trust. Several respondents noted improved perceptions of BPJS and clinic reliability when their online complaints were swiftly acknowledged, even when resolutions took longer. This finding reflects Liu et al.’s (2012) assertion that acknowledgment alone can diffuse frustration in digital crises by validating stakeholders’ concerns. In this way, digital channels serve not only as information conduits but also as trust-building mechanisms when organizations engage interactively and promptly.

These dynamics echo Cheng’s (2018) observation that publics in digitally networked crises do not merely consume organizational messaging but actively reframe and amplify issues, transforming localized grievances into reputational threats with national visibility. In the Indonesian context, this amplification is heightened by collectivist advocacy norms, where online complaints quickly gain support from peers, advocacy groups, and influencers who use their platforms to exert additional pressure on BPJS and clinics (Mohamad et al., 2025). Clinics that fail to engage with these influential voices risk losing narrative control, allowing public discourse to be shaped by speculation, frustration, or misinformation—a risk highlighted in Eriksson’s (2018) review of social-media-driven crises.

Consequently, many clinic managers report monitoring social media to identify emerging complaints early, allowing for timely intervention. This proactive engagement reflects the SMCC model’s call for dialogic communication—acknowledging that organizations no longer control the narrative but must participate in shaping it collaboratively. As Eriksson (2018) argues, social-mediated crisis communication demands organizations move beyond message dissemination toward active involvement in discursive spaces where publics negotiate meaning, assign blame, and demand remedies.

Channels: Navigating a Hybrid Media Ecosystem

Survey results reveal that 92% of participating clinics actively use the *JKN* application for complaint management, appointment scheduling, and teleconsultations, with 78% supplementing these functions through WhatsApp for personalized communication. Social

media platforms, particularly Instagram and Facebook, are widely used to share health education content, service updates, and responses to frequently asked questions. This multi-channel strategy allows clinics to engage with “followers” in SMCC’s typology, who consume and redistribute organizational content, expanding the reach of crisis messaging.

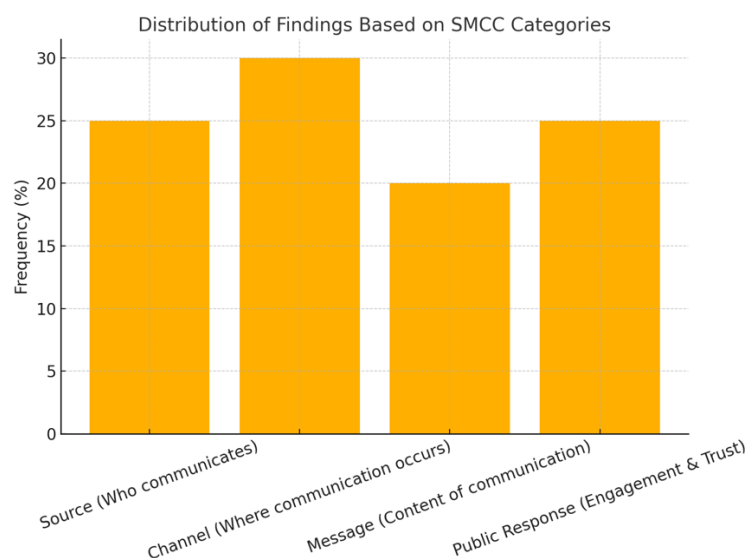
Offline interactions remain indispensable. Many elderly patients, identified as “inactives” in the model, struggle to navigate digital tools. To bridge this gap, clinics offer in-person counseling sessions and community education programs that complement digital efforts. This multi-layered approach underscores the practical value of SMCC’s hybrid model: crisis communication is most effective when it addresses publics across the spectrum of digital literacy and engagement.

Comparisons with global SMCC applications show that while Western healthcare organizations tend to emphasize Twitter/X for rapid broadcast messaging (Eriksson, 2018; Jin et al., 2014), Indonesian clinics prioritize WhatsApp and Instagram for their conversational and community-oriented affordances. This reflects a cultural adaptation of the SMCC framework, where communication platforms are selected not only for reach but for their accessibility and ability to foster trust. As one clinic administrator explained, “Patients feel more comfortable messaging us on WhatsApp than posting on Twitter—it feels more personal, and we can reassure them directly.” This demonstrates how the SMCC model can be localized, underscoring the value of understanding communication ecologies through a cultural lens when applying global frameworks in the Global South.

Message Content: Informational, Corrective, and Empathetic Responses

Figure 2

Distribution of Findings Across SMCC Dimensions



The content of communication delivered across these channels reveals an intentional blend of informational updates, corrective actions, and empathetic responses. Informational messages dominate, providing clarity on policy adjustments, referral procedures, and administrative processes. Corrective messages, such as announcements of improved complaint-handling systems or explanations for delays, are essential for restoring trust following service failures. Yet empathetic messages emerged as particularly impactful in patient interviews. Several

patients highlighted that simple apologies or acknowledgment of their frustrations improved perceptions of the clinic, even when underlying issues remained unresolved. One patient described, “When I was told my medication would be delayed, the staff explained why and apologized sincerely. That made me feel respected.” This aligns with Coombs’ (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory, which emphasizes tailoring responses to stakeholder expectations and incorporating empathy to mitigate reputational damage.

Notably, some clinics are expanding their communication strategies beyond reactive crisis management toward proactive health promotion. By using social media to share preventive care tips, wellness programs, and patient success stories, clinics reframe their communication as collaborative public health engagement. This reframing builds reputational capital, shifting from a defensive posture to a proactive stance that strengthens community relationships and reinforces institutional legitimacy. Such approaches echo Mundottukandi et al.’s (2024) argument that resilience in social-media-driven crises is enhanced when communication strategies prioritize relevance, authority, and trust-building.

Bridging the Gap Between Organizational Intent and Public Expectations

Our findings reveal a gap between organizational intent and public expectations. While clinics report that informational updates constitute their primary crisis content, patient interviews indicate a preference for empathetic and corrective messages that directly acknowledge their distress and outline tangible solutions. This misalignment mirrors Coombs’ (2007) assertion that information alone fails to meet stakeholder needs in high-anxiety situations. By contrast, patients expressed strong appreciation for communication combining transparency with compassion, describing these interactions as “reassuring,” “humanizing,” and “proof that the clinic cared.” This echoes Liu et al.’s (2012) findings that personalized engagement increases publics’ perceived legitimacy of organizational responses.

Implications for Patient Engagement and Trust

Patient engagement provides a key metric of these strategies’ success. Clinics reported increased satisfaction and loyalty when multi-channel approaches—integrating the *JKN* app, WhatsApp follow-ups, and in-person counseling—were implemented. Eighty percent of respondents observed improved patient retention after adopting these hybrid strategies, suggesting that participatory, dialogic communication builds trust and fosters long-term relationships. Social media interactions indicate that patients use these platforms not only to express grievances but also to share positive experiences, recommend clinics, and publicly commend transparent communication. These findings confirm SMCC’s central proposition: effective crisis communication is inherently dialogic, with publics actively co-creating narratives that influence organizational responses and outcomes.

The implications of these findings extend beyond BPJS Kesehatan-affiliated clinics. They demonstrate how the SMCC model applies to slow-burning crises in resource-constrained healthcare systems, highlight the need for culturally sensitive strategies that address digital divides, and offer actionable lessons for policymakers. Clinics that pair digital platforms with offline outreach report higher levels of trust, particularly among elderly and low-literacy populations. BPJS Kesehatan could institutionalize these hybrid strategies, expand empathetic communication training for clinic staff, enhance technical reliability in the *JKN* app, and invest in community education programs to improve digital health literacy.

Conclusion

This study provides critical insights into how BPJS Kesehatan-affiliated clinics in Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi manage communication in the face of slow-burning crises within Indonesia's national health insurance system. Drawing on Austin and Jin's Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model, complemented by Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Crisis Informatics, the findings demonstrate that crisis communication in this context is inherently participatory and multi-layered. Clinics rely on hybrid strategies that integrate digital platforms—such as the *JKN* mobile application, WhatsApp, and social media—with offline counseling and community outreach to engage diverse publics. This multi-channel approach enables clinics to address the needs of “influentials,” who actively shape public discourse online, “followers,” who engage with institutional updates, and “inactives,” who depend on interpersonal interactions.

Patients underscored the importance of empathetic responses, transparent corrective actions, and prompt acknowledgment of concerns, revealing that trust is built through both informational clarity and relational engagement. Clinics that move beyond transactional communication to adopt dialogic, compassionate strategies are better positioned to transform grievances into opportunities for strengthening relationships and reinforcing institutional legitimacy.

Theoretically, this study extends the applicability of the SMCC model to resource-constrained, under-regulated healthcare environments, showing its relevance for managing chronic, systemic challenges in the Global South. Practically, it provides actionable recommendations for BPJS Kesehatan and policymakers, including institutionalizing real-time social listening, expanding empathetic communication training for clinic staff, enhancing the reliability of the *JKN* platform, and addressing digital literacy gaps through inclusive community programs. By embedding these practices, BPJS Kesehatan-affiliated clinics can position communication as a central pillar of organizational resilience, enabling them to maintain public trust and effectively navigate Indonesia's evolving healthcare landscape.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-4o model) was used under full supervision to assist in the writing, editing, and revision of this manuscript. The usage was limited to improving academic structure, refining clarity and fluency, cross-referencing citations, and ensuring adherence to the IAFOR conference proceedings formatting and style guidelines. The AI tool did not autonomously generate content, fabricate references, or produce findings. All ideas, arguments, data interpretations, and analyses presented in this manuscript are the original work of the author, with all factual claims verified and cross-checked to maintain scholarly integrity and accuracy. The author retains full responsibility for the content, and the use of AI tools did not replace scholarly judgment or critical analysis.

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From Song to Novel: Intermedial and Transmedial Analysis of *Norwegian Wood* by Haruki Murakami and The Beatles

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Abstract

This contribution presents a multidisciplinary and cross-boundary analysis of the transmedial connections between Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* (1987) and its homonymous Beatles classic. Grounded in intermedial analysis, it examines the articulation between lyrics and music in The Beatles' song and explores how its verbal and musical elements resonate throughout Murakami's novel. *Norwegian Wood* establishes its intermedial dialogue with The Beatles' song from its very opening scene, in which the protagonist hears an orchestral arrangement of the piece—a narrative device that activates a process of self-exploration and inner turmoil. The Beatles' lyrics are reflected in the dynamic, sexual, and emotional transitions experienced by Toru as he reaches adulthood, in stark contrast with his best friend Kizuki, who inexplicably committed suicide without undergoing such transformation (Cruz, 2019), unfolding a narrative of the self—a process instrumental in the construction of selfhood. Murakami's fiction transliterates musical genres—jazz, pop-rock, classical—into prose, enacting a form of translation that, alongside linguistic mediation, renders his work globally resonant. His narrative style, described as *magical realism*, bridges East and West, the conscious and the unconscious (Strecher, 2002), capturing the spirit of the 1960s–70s generation while underpinning our globalised and transcultural age (Juen, 2017). Framed by the idea of *everyday cosmopolitanism* (Wakatsuki, 2018), this contribution guides the reader into a labyrinth of references that constitute *obligatory and optional intertextualities* (Fitzsimmons, 2013), explored through musical and literary modes of analysis.

Keywords: intermediality, transmediality, *Norwegian Wood*, Haruki Murakami, Beatles

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Introduction

This contribution aims to unravel the intertextual connections between Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* and the homonymous Beatles classic, tracing the musical elements of the song that resonate within the novel. Starting with its title—which according to Cruz (2019), constitutes an *obligatory intertextuality*—and moving through the song's stanzas as well as the novel's eleven chapters, this study examines how The Beatles' song is represented and reinterpreted within the literary text. The objective of this inquiry is to identify the melodic and lyrical features of The Beatles' song that resonate within the narrative structure of *Norwegian Wood*, and to propose a concluding reflection on how such intermedial analysis can foster a multimodal and multisensory engagement with literature. The musical analysis draws on *The Beatles for Solo Piano* (The Beatles, 2009, pp. 69–72), as well as on transcriptions specifically produced for the purposes of this study. The song lyrics are quoted from *The Complete Beatles Lyrics* (The Beatles, 1982, p. 90). Finally, the literary analysis refers to the Vintage Books edition of *Norwegian Wood* (Murakami, 2011), translated by Jay Rubin.

Theoretical Framework

A *performative intermedial analysis* is a methodological approach that investigates the articulation between lyrics and music as an integrated cultural object through the act of playing and performing the song. Such an approach fosters embodied forms of knowledge (Araya, 2017; Gallagher, 2005), enabling a deeper understanding of the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of the artefact under analysis. Thus, the linguistic and musicological analysis of *Norwegian Wood* has been complemented by a multisensory exploration of the song to better understand the songwriters' creative process as simultaneously intellectual and physical.

The intermedial references between The Beatles' *Norwegian Wood* and Murakami's novel can be framed within Scher's (1968, 1970) typology of word–music relations and Wolf's (2002) theory of intermediality. In Scher's terms, Murakami's novel exemplifies *music in literature* as an instance of *explicit reference*, since The Beatles' song is not only cited in the title but also interwoven thematically and symbolically throughout the narrative. In addition, the text displays structural analogies, as its rhythm and tonal qualities mirror the song's musical architecture, producing what Scher would describe as *verbal music*. As Murakami himself explained in his 2005 conversation with Jonathan Ellis and Mitoko Hirabayashi: “At one point, I thought I should write the book as if I was playing good music. What good music requires is good rhythm, good harmony, good melody line. Three things. Writing is the same—rhythm, harmony, and melody. Once I realized that, it got easier for me to write” (Ellis et al., 2005). From Werner Wolf's perspective, these correlations exemplify *extracompositional intermediality*, in which the dialogue between distinct media—song and novel—generates new meanings across their respective semiotic systems.

Alongside the intermedial analysis of The Beatles' classic, a literary-structural inquiry into Murakami's novel has been conducted. To frame this approach, it is useful to recall Bruner's (1960) observation in *The Process of Education*, where he notes that understanding the structure of a work requires recognising how its constituent elements are interrelated. According to this view, meaning arises from the dynamic interplay between the parts and the whole. Another key reference is Walker's *The Structure of Literature* (1966), which—after an extensive review of major theories and schools of literary structure—argues that literary analysis should begin with a close examination of the text itself, in order to identify the internal patterns and relationships that organise it. Investigating structure, he suggests, requires an

inductive process that moves from the observation of specific textual details toward a broader understanding of how the work functions as a coherent whole. These principles ground the methodological approach adopted in the present study, which considers not only the plot, characters, and language of the novel but also the biographical, historical, and transcultural elements that inform it—particularly the ways in which music contributes to the organisation of the narrative structure.

Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*: A General Overview

Norurwei no mori, published in 1987 as Haruki Murakami's fifth novel, sold more than four million copies, marking Murakami's transformation into an international literary phenomenon (Wakatsuki, 2018) and paving the way for the so-called *Murakami genshō* 村上現象 (*Murakami phenomenon*) (Juen, 2017; Seats, 2006). Haruki Murakami's international success is also linked to his self-described *nomadic spirit*—that is, the capacity, as outlined by Yama (2016), to *dissolve and coagulate* his transcultural life's experiences, stored in the *drawers of memory*, and transform them into creative material for his novels. *Norwegian Wood* narrates the story of Toru Watanabe, a Japanese literature student from Kobe who falls in love with Naoko, the former girlfriend of his best friend Kizuki, who died by suicide as a teenager. The narrative revolves around the tension between sexual desire and mental illness, framed by Naoko's traumatic exposure to suicides among those close to her and the resulting derailment of her psyche. As Strecher (2002) observes, the narrative depicts Naoko's struggles through Toru's perspective, revealing her profound psychological trauma and the deep dichotomy between her inner and outer selves, which prevents her from engaging in sexual intimacy. The theme of sexual desire is central both to The Beatles' classic and to Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*, where it is explored from multiple perspectives: the guilt and frustration embodied by Naoko, the confusion and ambivalence experienced by Toru, the hedonism represented by Nagasawa, the illicit sexual attraction personified by Reiko, and the curiosity and spontaneity expressed by Midori.

In portraying these contrasts, Murakami constructs a *bildungsroman* that departs from his usual magical-realist style, adopting certain conventions of the formulaic romance while focusing on the transition from adolescence to adulthood. *Norwegian Wood*'s finale is left open to the reader's interpretation, who—especially during the first reading—may feel momentarily abandoned to their own conclusions, compelled to determine for themselves what lies ahead for Toru. As Strecher (2017) explains, Murakami's fiction situates itself beyond the dichotomy between *junbungaku*—which instructs and interprets reality for the reader—and other forms of serious literary engagement. His narratives, in fact, leave a series of unresolved inquiries, contributing to what Strecher terms an *empty narrative*—a structure sustained by open-ended questions that invite the reader's interpretative participation for the text's completion. Moreover, Murakami enriches his fiction through a transnational and nomadic perspective that fuses Western and Japanese elements (Juen, 2017). As a passionate music enthusiast, he has been, in fact, profoundly influenced by Western genres such as jazz, classical, and rock, recontextualising them as transcultural objects within his narratives.

One Title, Two Cultural Objects: The Beatles' Song and Murakami's Novel

As outlined by Cruz (2019), who followed Fitzsimmons' (2013) classification of intertextualities, the title of the novel constitutes an *obligatory intertextuality*—a form that arises when an author explicitly compares or associates two texts. Murakami's translation of The Beatles' song title renders *wood* as *mori*, a term that in Japanese denotes *forest* rather than

lumber. This represents a deliberate linguistic choice, given Murakami's mastery of English and his experience as a literary translator—having translated works such as *The Great Gatsby* into Japanese. The song's title was, in fact, inspired by the contemporary fashion of furnishing rooms with inexpensive pine—marketed at the time as *Norwegian wood*.

In *Paul McCartney: Many Years from Now*, Barry Miles (1997) reports McCartney's explanation that the phrase *Norwegian wood* was intended as a playful reference to the type of girls whose flat was decorated in that style: "It was pine really, cheap pine. But it's not as good a title, 'Cheap Pine,' baby" (Miles, 1997, p. 270). As Runner (2022) observes, Murakami's translation of the title aligns with Kiriyaama's (2016) interpretation that his recurrent use of *mistranslation* draws attention to the interstitial space between texts and cultures. Moreover, the fact that the *Ami Hostel* sanatorium—where Naoko receives treatment for her mental illness—is situated within a forest further strengthens the analogy between the title and the setting. The Beatles' song appears already at the beginning of the novel, upon Toru's landing at Hamburg Airport, underscored by an orchestral arrangement of *Norwegian Wood*. In addition, the song recurs several times throughout the narrative, taking centre stage on page 146:

Play Norwegian Wood, said Naoko. Reiko brought a porcelain beckoning cat from the kitchen. It was a coin bank, and Naoko dropped a hundred-yen piece from her purse into its slot. What's this all about? I asked. It's a rule, said Naoko. When I request Norwegian Wood, I have to put a hundred yen into the bank. It's my favourite, so I make a point of paying for it. I make a request when I really want to hear it. (Murakami, 2011, p. 146)

Towards the end of the novel, Murakami quotes the song once again as the first piece in a long sequence of tunes that accompany an intimate, informal commemorative ceremony shared by Reiko and Toru in memory of the late Naoko:

We are going to have our own funeral for Naoko, just the two of us. . . . Now what I want you to do is lay down a match every time I play a song, just set them in a row. I'm going to play every song I can think of. Reiko moved on to the Beatles, playing 'Norwegian Wood,' 'Yesterday,' 'Michelle,' and 'Something,' then played 'The Fool on the Hill.' (Murakami, 2011, p. 383)

In doing so, Murakami assigns The Beatles' song three key appearances—at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the novel—each endowed with a distinct symbolic function: remembrance at the opening, vitality and emotional engagement at the centre, and commemoration at the close.

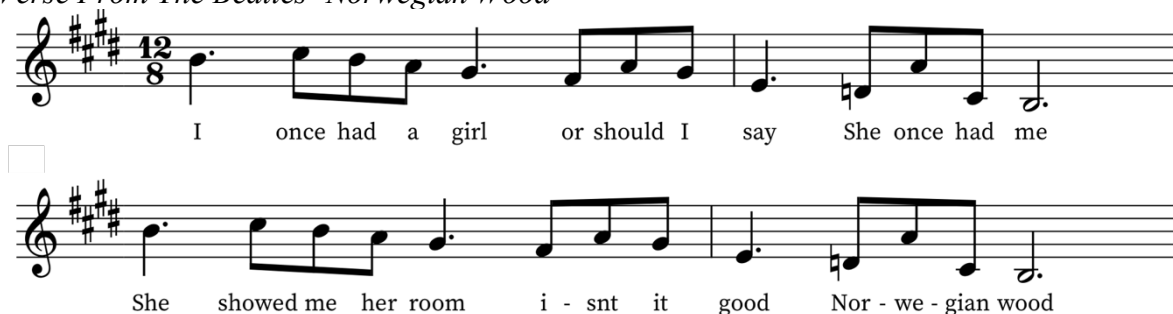
Intermedial Analysis of The Beatles' Classic

Written for The Beatles' 1965 album *Rubber Soul*, *Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)* is primarily attributed to John Lennon, who first conceived its idea and narrative during a skiing holiday in the Swiss Alps and later completed it with Paul McCartney in England. Structurally, *Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)* adopts a strophic verse–bridge design. The melody corresponding to the verse (see Figure 1) is countered by the bridge section, thereby mirroring the previously discussed dialectic of opposites that lies at the core of *Norwegian Wood*.

The melodic line is built around a reiterated rhythmic cell—a dotted crotchet followed by three quavers—in which the first two motifs move predominantly by descending stepwise motion. In contrast, the closing motif unfolds through a leap-based contour that recurs at the end of each verse, occupying what Pattison (1991) defines as a *power position*—a structurally salient point that enhances mnemonic retention—and coinciding with the utterance of the song’s title. The words *Norwegian wood* are sung over the notes D–A–C#–B, with the D natural establishing the Mixolydian modality, a musical scale that conveys a sense of suspension, nostalgia and unresolved openness.

Figure 1

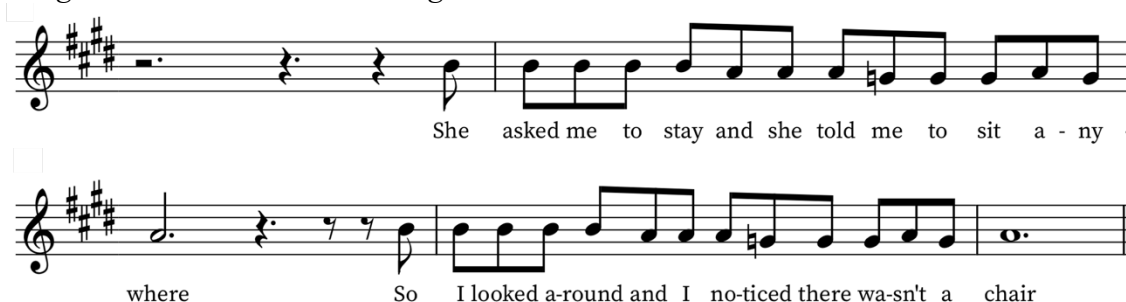
Verse From The Beatles’ Norwegian Wood



The lyrics *I once had a girl / Or should I say she once had me*, reflect Toru’s subjugation to Naoko’s psychological condition in the dynamics of their relationship. Early in the novel, Toru recalls: “We kept on walking like this almost every weekend. She would lead, and I would follow close behind” (Murakami, 2011, p. 35). Later, after their sexual encounter (pp. 52–54), Naoko’s loss of virginity triggers the resurfacing of her past traumas so intensely that she withdraws from the world, retreating to a sanatorium deep within the woods, becoming increasingly inaccessible—almost unreachable—to Toru.

The melody in Figure 2 shows the bridge, which contrasts with the primary melodic idea of the verse. It introduces a *modal interchange*, shifting from E Mixolydian—a major mode—to E Dorian, a minor mode as signalled by the presence of G natural. The lyrics *So I looked around and I noticed there wasn’t a chair*, can be compared to the description of Naoko’s apartment: “The room was small and neat and so lacking in frills that only the stocking drying in the corner by the window gave any hint that a girl lived there” (Murakami, 2011, p. 47). In the subsequent stanzas, the song continues to recount the night the protagonist spends with the woman of the apartment in *Norwegian Wood*, who, despite having invited him in, ultimately proves unavailable to him: *We talked until two and then she said / ‘It’s time for bed.’ / She told me she worked in the morning and started to laugh*. The narrator, left alone, *crawled off to sleep in the bath*, a mildly humorous yet poignant image. A similar scene occurs also in Murakami’s *Norwegian Wood*: “I got undressed first and sat in the bathtub drinking beer with a vengeance. (...) She was gone when I woke at twelve-thirty. I found no note of any kind” (Murakami, 2011, p. 112).

Although the image of sitting/sleeping in the bath/bathtub is similar, the contexts differ. In the novel, the episode does not refer to Naoko but to a random, occasional encounter—one of the many casual relationships encouraged by Nagasawa—in which Toru actually consummates the liaison. This contrasts with the song, where the protagonist is instead sent to sleep alone; nevertheless, what emerges as a point of similarity is the scene of the male protagonist retreating to the bathroom and sitting/sleeping in the bathtub.

Figure 2*Bridge From The Beatles' Norwegian Wood*

According to several sources, Lennon's lyrics are autobiographical, recounting an extramarital affair. Paul McCartney, the song's co-composer, explains: "She makes him (Lennon) sleep in the bath and then finally in the last verse I had this idea to set the Norwegian wood on fire as revenge." (Miles, 1997, p. 270). The final verse refers to this gesture: *And when I awoke I was alone / This bird had flown / So I lit a fire / Isn't it good Norwegian wood?* The imagery of fire recurs also in Murakami's text, notably during Toru's first kiss with Midori, which occurs as they watch a blaze in a neighbouring building, and again at the novel's close, when Reiko and Toru hold the aforementioned musical ceremony for Naoko—lighting a match for every tune Reiko plays: "For our forty-ninth song, Reiko played 'Eleanor Rigby,' and the fiftieth was another performance of 'Norwegian Wood.'" (Murakami, 2011, p. 382). In this passage, *Norwegian Wood* reappears as the fiftieth and final piece, concluding both the musical sequence and the narrative arc, and thus completing the circle bridging memory, music, sexual desire, and loss. Lastly, the image of a *bird that had flown* resonates with Toru's repeated experiences of abandonment—the bitterness of being left alone following Kizuki's suicide, Naoko's retreat and death, and even the sudden disappearance of his roommate, Storm Trooper, who vanishes without leaving a note.

Conclusion

This contribution has aimed to highlight the intermedial and transmedial processes that connect Haruki Murakami's *Noruei no mori* (1987) and The Beatles' *Norwegian Wood* (1965) shading light on how Murakami reifies The Beatles' song as a transcultural artefact within his storytelling. Wakatsuki (2018) outlines how Murakami's notion of *everyday cosmopolitanism* is embodied in his capacity to write seamlessly beyond the confines of national identity, embracing universal human experiences that have become the hallmark of his fiction and the basis of his global appeal, while integrating narrative elements drawn from cultures beyond Japan. Moreover, as Rubin observes, Murakami's narratives evoke psychological conditions shared across humanity and express them through imagery and language that transcend cultural and linguistic borders. A similar dynamic can be observed in the work of The Beatles, who transform personal experience into universally recognisable emotions through their music. As previously argued "songs speak for us, and we respond to them when those who write them are capable of treating, in a personal manner, themes of universal interest" (translated from Italian; Pantano, 2023, p. 45). Further inquiry into the role of music in shaping and reflecting Murakami's fiction could extend beyond *Norwegian Wood*. Music plays a pervasive role throughout his oeuvre, with particularly high densities of musical references in *Dance, Dance, Dance* (195 songs), *1Q84* (96 songs), and *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (59 songs) (Oshima, 2022). To give a further example, Murakami's *Killing Commendatore* structures its narrative—and even derives its title—from a pivotal scene in Mozart and Da

Ponte's *Don Giovanni*, itself inspired by *El burlador de Sevilla*, the play traditionally attributed to Tirso de Molina. This intertextual lineage once again illustrates the profound interweaving of musical and literary imagination in Murakami's work. From an educational perspective, these intermedial correspondences could inspire innovative university and school laboratories that employ music as a gateway to literature—encouraging younger generations to engage with reading through multimodal and multisensory approaches to learning.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that OpenAI's ChatGPT was used exclusively during the proofreading and cross-checking stages of this manuscript. Its use was limited to verify the accuracy and consistency of references and citations and ensuring compliance with APA 7th edition standards as well as the formatting and stylistic guidelines of the IAFOR conference proceedings. All ideas, interpretations, and analytical claims presented in this manuscript are the author's original work. The author retains full responsibility for the content, and the use of AI-assisted technologies did not replace scholarly judgment, critical analysis, or academic authorship.

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From Fans to Unofficial Translators: Exploring Thai Fan-Subtitle Creators in Japanese Drama in the Digital Age

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Abstract

Despite being praised by global fans and acclaimed on international stages, Japanese media are still constantly victims of copyright infringement, as most Japanese studios lack expertise in international distribution. Such problems led to the “Fan-Subtitle” movement, in which fans translate content and distribute it illegally on video-sharing platforms without the original creator’s approval. This study examined Thai Fan-subtitle creators of Japanese drama. The Grounded Theory was adopted to explore and comprehend the phenomenon of Fan-Subtitling. This study also involved stakeholders by conducting In-depth interviews with 10 Thai fan-subtitle creators and three official copyright holders to identify fan-subtitle creators’ opinions, and the studio’s challenges in overseas distribution. Initial findings revealed that 1) Fan-subtitling is a global phenomenon that emerged from latent demand, the significant trait is that fan-subtitling can be considered as “*Prosumption*”. 2) Comparing with past studies, the practice of Fan-subtitling is similar to the past decades, but more digitalized due to the technology advancement, and 3) Japanese studios encounter 4 major challenges in reaching global markets, including the cultural differences and resource limitations in working with platform providers. This study also discusses the implications of the fan-subtitle mechanism, whether it has the potential to develop into business practices, and its application to other industries to encourage Japanese creatives to export their works globally, and mitigate the damage from copyright infringement.

Keywords: fan-subtitle, Japanese drama, online streaming, prosumption

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Introduction

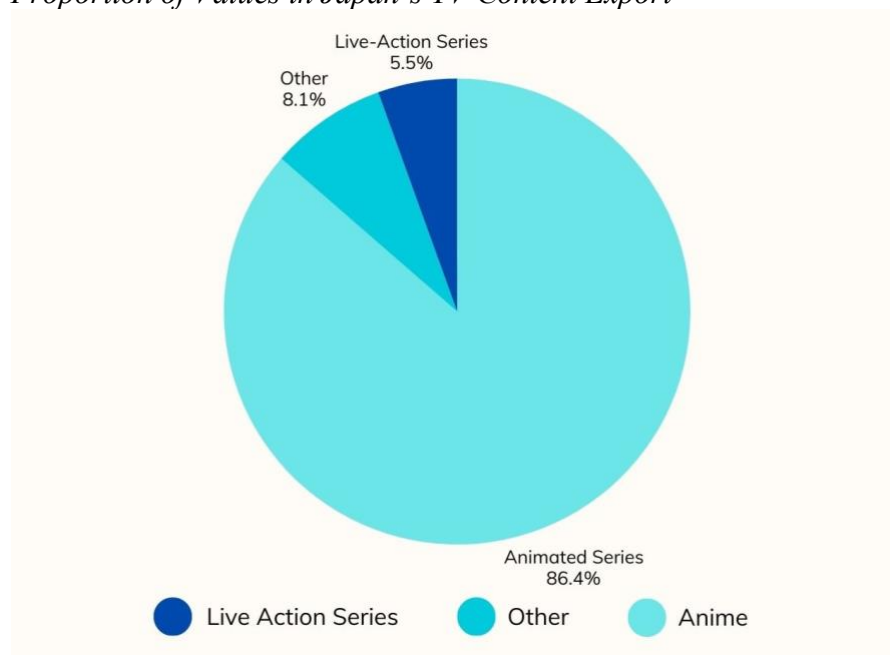
Japan is one of the countries with a prominent position in the entertainment industry. Monty (2010) defined Japan's creative works as "cultural software" export since they produced the media that captured fans' attention across the globe. Japanese creative works, such as Japanese-style comics (Manga), animated films (Anime), and dramas. These played a major role in driving Japan to success in developing Joseph Nye's "Soft Power", introduced as a tool to attract confidence on the global stage in diplomacy, economics, and politics without forcing or any forms of pressure (Pantumsinchai, 2012).

Since 2010, Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) has launched the policy of Cool Japan Initiative, promoting Japan through cultural industries, such as martial arts, beverages like sake and tea, and Creative industries; J-pop music, manga, anime, and games, especially Japanese motion picture (Choo, 2015). As a result, the initiative has catapulted Japan to success in anime, while from 2020s Japan's motion pictures are constantly recognized by the audiences, starting from the 2022 Academy Awards' Best Foreign Language Film *Drive My Car* (2021), *One Piece* (2023), and highly acclaimed *Monster* (2023) on international stages, including *Kokuhō* (国宝) (2025), a film directed by a Korean-Japanese director, Lee Sang-il. The film earned \$8.26 million in 10 days and was selected to screen at the International Cannes Film Festival in May 2025, followed by the Shanghai International Film Festival (Schley, 2025).

Though it is widely recognized by critics and viewers, according to Fuyuhiko (2024), Japanese motion pictures are in the shadow of Anime and underperform. Japanese anime has dominated the market, accounting for \$421 million (86.4%), while film value is only \$23.3 million (5.5%; See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Proportion of Values in Japan's TV Content Export

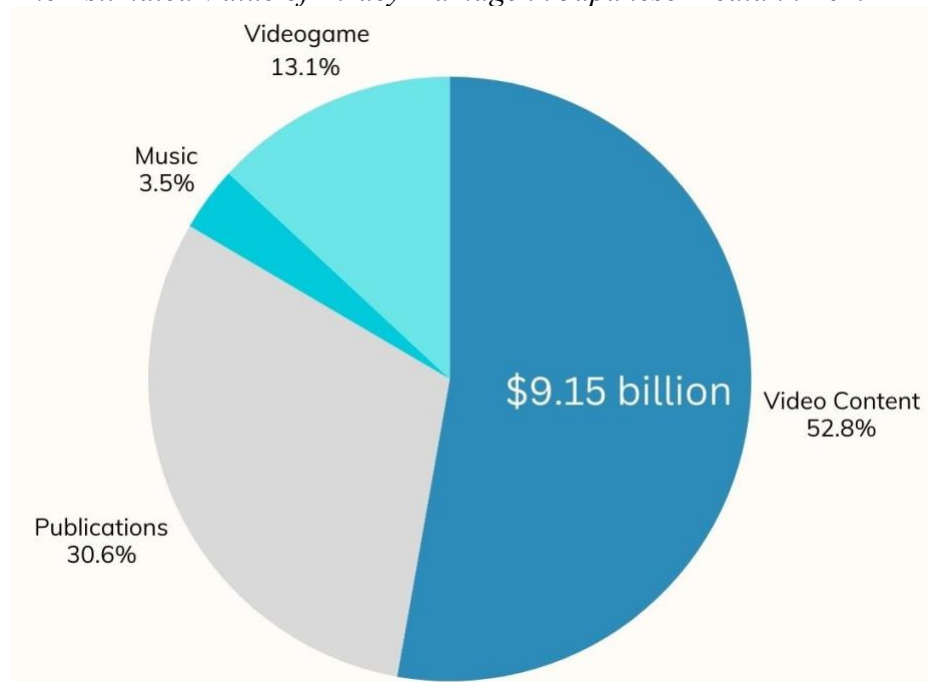


Japan's success comes with an unavoidable problem of copyright compliance. Japanese Creative workers are constantly victims of copyright infringement. From 2016 to 2018, the

scandalous Manga-mura (漫画村), the illegal online manga website, caused a total loss to the Japanese manga industry of approximately \$2.05 billion (¥320 billion) (Craig, 2020: 186). According to Figure 2, the Content Overseas Distribution Association (2023) estimated that copyright infringement damage in Japanese creative could reach \$14.1 billion in 2020, while video content, e.g., broadcasting, streaming subscription, DVDs, and cinema tickets, accounted for 53% (\$9.15 billion).

Figure 2

The Estimated Value of Piracy Damage in Japanese Media in 2019



Nevertheless, Japanese creative works are still struggling to reach international fans worldwide. Craved by international fans, *Godzilla -1.0* (ゴジラ-1.0) failed to achieve its full potential due to limited distribution channels in the global market. Frew (2024) reported that *Godzilla -1.0* has become the most pirated on torrent sites, as Toho Studios and Japanese creative workers still lack practices in global distribution, leading to the endorsement of the piracy movement.

Besides piracy issues, Japanese creative workers are constantly struggling. They are unaware of international fans waiting to witness their works. In 2022, despite receiving overwhelming acclaim from Japanese and international fans, Miku Ubukata, the writer of *Silent Drama*, responded that she did not appreciate her scripts being translated into other languages. Additionally, she emphasized that the drama *Silent* was meant to be broadcast only in Japan (Cloverblossoms, 2022; Daisuki JDrama Plus, 2022; Taylor, 2023). In response to Ubukata's comment, one of the pioneer Thai fan-subtitle pages replied that even though they are simply a fan-subtitle page, they also worked hard to pay due respect to originality by preserving every message in the show, and the Thai fan-subtitle creators also claimed they helped the studio promote the drama.

As explained above implied the gap between Japanese film industries and global audiences, along with Ubukata's controversial comment led author's attention to study the phenomenon of fan-subtitle movement as it represents several issues the problems of latent demand in the

international audiences, the advancement in technology that facilitating the new form of copyright infringement so-called “fan-subtitling”, and Japanese broadcaster’s challenges in distributing their works to global audiences.

Fan-subtitle groups need to be examined in several aspects: legal, linguistic, cultural, Media distribution, and business practices. This study has explored the related stakeholders: fan-subtitle creators and original creators to identify problems that are emerging from the fan-subtitle movement in Thailand, and the original creators’ viewpoint on the phenomenon.

What is Fan-Subtitle?

Subtitle was accounted as the practice of transcribing and translating the film’s dialogues (Cintas & Remael, 2021). It has to be synchronized with the film’s three major components: footage, dialogue, and subtitles themselves, making it an influential tool in dissolving barriers of languages and cultures, and above all, it facilitates access to the hearing impaired and vice versa (DeGuzman, 2023). Original copywriters generally create subtitles to ensure that they will convey to the audience.

Unlink the traditional subtitle that generally made by copyrighters, Condry (2010) has defined Fan-subtitle as “the practice of overseas fans digitalizing, translating, generating subtitles for Japanese-related media: animated films and television shows, and unauthorized upload online”, while a decade later, Leksuwat (2020) has a more concise definition as “subtitles created by fans for fans”.

History of Fan-Subtitles Movement

From the 1960s to the 2000s, mainstream Japanese Animated series (Anime) such as *Dragon Ball Z* and *Sailor Moon* were broadcast internationally. It was only offered in a voice-over (dubbing) version to the international fans. As a result, some fans opposed the idea of dubbing, failing to preserve the originality and cinematic experience (Romano, 2020).

Lupin III is presumed to be the earliest content that was fan-subtitled in 1975 in the United States by English-speaking American audiences (Leonard, 2005). While in Thailand, despite the record indicating when the fan-subtitle group emerged, it can be seen that Thai audiences are widely adopting foreign media through Social Networking Services (SNS).

Though fan-subtitles could be considered promoters that introduce content to new audiences, it is undeniable that they perform the fan-subtitling practice illegally, considering it as copyright infringement that needs to be discussed further.

As the history and context of fan-subtitles explained, what is fan-subtitling and how fan-subtitling originated, this research intends to identify the rationales behind the phenomenon of fan-subtitling. Fan-subtitling was performed by volunteer spirit and collaborative networks (Díaz-Cintas, 2018). However, the fan-subtitle movement emerged from the gap between broadcasters and global viewers as studios failed to distribute the media to the local audiences or the localized translations, leaving international audiences' demands unfulfilled. Massida (2020) illustrated that the practice of fan-subtitling is widely spread through several regions, and worldwide fans adopted the alternative of content consumption. However, Massida’s illustration still focused on Fan-subtitling in only non-English speaking countries (see Figure 3).

Figure 3*Landscape of Fan-Subtitle Movements Active (Massida, 2020)***Fansubbing around the world**

Barriers in International Distribution for Japanese Creative Workers

Although the Cool Japan Initiative aims to promote Japan's creative industries internationally, its success has been limited, and global demand for Japanese content remains unmet. Craig (2020) identified four major challenges that Japanese creators must address.

1. **Japan's population size of 127 million** is a sufficient market for Japanese creative workers to focus on the domestic market. Moreover, they are familiar with comprehending viewers' preferences, and there is no necessity to export their work for foreign audiences.
2. **Japan's homogenous social structure:** as Japan is an ethnostate that encounters low diversity issues, it leads Japanese creative workers to consider the domestic market rather than the international market. Fukao et al. (2006) discussed empirical evidence that Japanese corporations are lagging in localization. Transforming, translating, modifying, and localizing content to foreign markets causes more cost and burden to the organization. While some artists perceived that localizing their works could depreciate the aesthetic senses and originality.
3. **Lacking know-how in foreign markets:** As SMEs are the major that thrives Japan's economy, most Japanese businesses lack international business practices. Hence, resources in terms of finance and workforce are required to reach the global market.
4. **Worker's perception:** McGray (2002) explained that due to the culture of humbleness and complacency, Japanese artists perceived that craving for fame and success on the international stage.

Business Model of Fan-Subtitling

In the VDO streaming industry, businesses are driven by a subscription model. In other words, corporates provide goods or services to the end-users on a current basis, while end-users will pay the subscription fee. Such a method occurred in several industries, for example, e-commerce, software, and specifically streaming platforms (Lindstrom et al., 2023).

In the video streaming industry (as shown in Figure 2), the emergence of platform providers connected the studios and audiences worldwide. Starting from studios and production houses, these companies created content and broadcast the show through platforms. While audiences

apply for membership and pay subscription fees to the platforms, these subscriptions will be transferred to the studios as royalties, commissions, or license fees based on their contracts.

However, the value chain becomes more complicated after fan-subtitling disrupted the flow, for instance, though platforms facilitate legal channels for foreign language dramas, limitations in reaching content, or language barriers still exist. Eventually, fan-subtitle creators decided to take the fan-subtitle creator's role. Damage from this phenomenon needs to be investigated. Observing fan-subtitle pages, they received income through donations by posting the QR code of their account.

Figure 4

A Comparison of Business Models in Streaming Industries & Fan-Subtitle Group



Prosumer Economy

Due to the emergence of Web 2.0, which makes the internet more interactive, Ritzer & Jurgenson (2010) defined *Prosumption* as the activity that involves both “production” and “consumption” rather than either one (production) or the other (consumption). Instances of prosumption: Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and other SNS, allowing users to create blogs by uploading photos, videos, and text; or YouTube, where users can upload and share their videos. Additionally, these platforms allow users to connect and interact with others in online communities.

Ritzer & Jurgenson (2010) emphasized that *prosuming* must consist of 4 traits: emerging from 1) the new form of economy that 2) is driven by passion, 3) influences abundance, and 4) Disruption, as *prosumption* differs from traditional markets that stem from scarcity, and thrived by monetary returns, *Prosumers* are passionate about performing their roles voluntarily, or expecting only a handful of returns, causing the abundance in the market.

Literature Gaps

Past studies on fan-subtitle groups concentrated on linguistic aspects, especially the comparison of translation quality, while in legal aspects, the issues of fan-subtitles are highly related to fair use. Past literature leaves gaps in 3 areas that need to be covered:

- 1) **Population gap:** in the past study, English-, Spanish-, and Chinese-speaking fan-subtitle creators were widely explored as the market is scalable and its potential. For example, a study conducted by Díaz-Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez (2006) focused on English-speaking fan-subtitle creators, while Pérez-González (2007) conducted studies on the fan-subtitle creator group of Spanish-speakers, followed by Gao (2019)'s study that highlighted the Chinese fan-subtitle group.
- 2) **Conceptual gap:** Fan-subtitle, as defined by Condry (2010), and later by Leksuwat (2020), is narrow and vague, respectively. After digitalization, fan-subtitling is not limited to a specific country or media any longer. This study aims to extend the definition of fan-subtitles by examining whether the practice of fan-subtitling could be considered as another form of *Prosumption*, as Ritzer & Jurgenson (2010) defined.
- 3) **Knowledge gap:** Fan-subtitle phenomena are active around the world; the past literature has not examined in business and media distribution aspect. This study attempts to examine related stakeholders' opinions to holistically comprehend the fan-subtitling phenomenon.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine the phenomenon of fan-subtitled Japanese drama in Thai markets and explore the impact that the fan-subtitle movement has had on the industry. The study will be conducted using a qualitative approach. The grounded theory will be adopted as this approach facilitates researchers to define the concept, develop a theory, and explore the phenomenon's insight. Corbin & Strauss (2015: 6), Creswell & Poth (2018: 82-88) additionally highlighted that Grounded Theory allows researchers to systematically scaffold a theory that explains the phenomenon, procedure, and issues. In this study, 10 Thai Fan-subtitle creators and 3 creative workers volunteered to participate in this study as follows:

Group I: Fan-Subtitle Creators

In this study, the Fan-subtitle creators are Thai, currently working in various industries. In terms of proficiency, Thai Fan-subtitle creators have been studying the Japanese language for 5 years or above, and 8 of 10 respondents possess the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) from N3 to N1, while the other two have never taken the proficiency test.

In terms of Japanese proficiency, only 2 of 10 respondents have never studied the Japanese language since they only understand a few words and have never taken formal study. While the other 8 respondents possess the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) from N3 and 4 of the respondents have been performing the role of fan—subtitle creators for a decade. Whereas the other started to run fan-subtitle pages around 2020, the respondents also claimed that they had decided to become a fan-subtitle creator during the pandemic of COVID-19 pandemic, as it significantly changed their media-consumption behavior. Though all of them perform fan-subtitling as a hobby, only 2 of the respondents are interested in working as professional subtitle creators in the future.

Group II: Official Copyrighters

For this group, the investigator managed to contact a respondent who is a film director, has been working in the motion industry for over 20 years, and is also currently serving at the

managing level, while the other 2 respondents in this group are workers from 2 different platform providers whose headquarters are based in China and Taiwan.

Conclusion

As literature was reviewed, and the interview was conducted, the initial findings can be concluded in 3 aspects as follows:

Can Fan-Subtitles Be Considered as *Prosuming*?

Fan-subtitle creators' response that they are voluntarily taking on the fan-subtitle creator's role because the Japanese drama in the Thai market is limited, with only a few dramas being distributed in Thai theaters and online platforms. Even fan-subtitle creators are aware that fan-subtitling is considered copyright infringement and illegal, but it is driven by passion and their preferences. Some respondents also revealed that on some occasions, they received a handful of donations from their followers, and they added that it does not matter, as they still want to do fan-subtitling as a hobby.

In this case, fan-subtitling is aligned with Ritzer & Jurgenson's definition of "*Prosumption*", the practice involving both "production" and "consumption" rather than either production or the other consumption, as the fan-subtitle creator has taken both roles as an audience who generates and distributes fan-made subtitles online.

Additionally, findings are also aligned with the 4 components of *Prosumption* as:

1. **New form of economy:** respondents highlighted that they voluntarily translate Japanese drama, despite doing it for free or for a handful of monetary returns.
2. **Driven by passion:** unlike professional subtitle creators, a fan-subtitle creator was driven by their passion and interests, willing to translate their preferred drama.
3. **Influencing abundance:** Unlike the traditional market that was founded on scarcity, fan-subtitling promotes abundance by breaking down the language barriers, promoting accessibility.
4. **Disruption:** Fan-subtitling also significantly transforms how viewers consume media, instead of consuming through the available official platform. Fan-subtitles led to a discussion of copyright compliance and criticism of official providers' backlogging and expertise in delivering their work on the global market.

Do Thai Fan-Subtitle Groups Have Any Differences From the Other Groups?

This study compared the findings with the Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez (2016), Pérez-González (2017), and Gao (2019) studies, which focused on English-, Spanish, and Chinese-speaking audiences, respectively. As the past studies have mainly concentrated on these markets due to their potential. This included the comparison of previous studies and this study.

According to Table 1, it can be summarized that fan-subtitle movement has been active over the period. It can be seen that the process of how fan-subtitle creator generate their fan-subbed content remained unchanged, while other factors were transformed over time.

Table 1
Result Comparison of Past Studies & Thai Fan-Subtitle Groups

Year	2006	2007	2019	2025
Author (s)	Cintas & Sánchez	González	Gao	This study
Groups	English- & Spanish-Speaking	English-Speaking	Chinese	Thai
Factor Influenced	- Web 2.0 - Globalization - Language	- globalization - Language barriers	- Censorship - State Intervention (Hu, 2014 & Jirattikorn, 2023)	- Underpromote - Limited Channels - Language Barriers
Genres	Japanese Anime	Japanese Anime	American Drama Korean, Japanese, Thai, etc.	Japanese Drama
Work Process	1. Download the Raw Video 2. Translation 3. Timing 4. Editing 5. Quality control 6. Encoding 7. Distribution	1. Download the Raw Video 2. Transcribe dialogue 3. Translate the subtitle 4. Timing 5. Quality Checking 6. Embedding Subtitles 7. Distributing	1. Download the Raw Video 2. Adjust the Timing 3. Translating 4. Proofreading 5. Special effects 6. Distributing	1. Selecting Contents 2. Downloading Files 3. Translating the Subtitles 4. Timing & Synchroniz Subtitles 5. Quality Checking 6. Embedding Subtitles 7. Uploading Videos
Platforms	- TV ripped - P2P Streaming - On-demand Download	- TV ripped - P2P Streaming	- P2P Streaming - Web 2.0 Video Sharing - On-demand Download	- P2P Streaming - Web 2.0 Video Sharing - On-demand Download - Cloud Storage

Due to globalization and Web 2.0, which influence fan-subtitle creators in the early stage, the fan-subtitle group, the causes that influence fan-subtitle movement nowadays are problems of under-promotion, censorship, limited channels, and language barriers. In addition, in the past, analog methods, especially TV-ripped, played a crucial role. In the past years, the fan-subtitling approach has become more digitalized, such as on-demand streaming, cloud storage, and AI dialogue transcribers. Lastly, early fan-subtitle groups are limited in Japanese anime, while years later, the genre is in wider ranges.

What are the Challenges for Japanese Creatives in Distributing Their Work?

This section will discuss the challenges of Japanese film workers and streaming platform providers.

Challenges of Japanese Film Producers

According to Craig (2020), Japanese creative workers are struggling to reach international markets due to 4 major reasons. However, after interviewing a Japanese film director, the director revealed this opinion that goes against Craig's conclusion:

1. **The population size:** Unlike most Japanese film producers, the respondent strongly believed that the size of Japan's market is not sufficient; he recognized the importance of the international market.

2. **Localization:** The respondent emphasized the importance of subtitles as a tool that dissolves the language barrier; however, subtitles must be handled by professional translators working closely with the original creators.
3. **Lack of know-how:** Though Craig concluded that most Japanese creative workers tend to lack expertise in the international market, the respondent has been working in the film industry for over 20 years, with experience in participating in international film festivals.
4. **Workers' attitude:** The respondent opened up to overseas markets; however, he commented that most of the younger filmmakers are still focusing on creating films, but not considering the distribution.

Challenges Between Film Producers and International Platform Providers

Even the video streaming industry has played a significant role in shaping media consumption. Globally, Japanese film creators are still struggling to reach the audience's demand, leaving the latent demand that eventually emerged in the fan-subtitle movement. Two major obstacles are:

1. **Cultural Differences:** Platform providers are aware of audiences' demand for Japanese drama, and intend to acquire a license as official distributors; however, respondents stated that one of the particular reasons that slows the process in Japanese film distribution is the differences in working culture. Respondents also referred to the term "Backlogging". For instance, to upload the drama and advertising materials, they have to wait for the approval process from the original copyrighter, and eventually, it passes the prime time in promoting.
2. **Minimum Guarantee:** The Japanese director also revealed that in the streaming industry, there is a concept of "Minimum Guarantee". Film directors will receive the royalties or commission based on views; the respondent had given an instance of "One yen per play" 「一再生一円」 and "Two yen if they watch longer than certain minutes" 「何分以上見てもらって2円」. As a result, to achieve the minimum guarantee, several resources such as budget and workforce in promoting are required.

Implications

Though the fan-subtitle movement has promoted accessibility by unofficially distributing the Japanese drama, it is undeniable that fan-subtitling also causes damage to original creators and the entire motion industry. The implications of this study will be discussed to develop plausible practices and mitigate the damage.

What Could Be the Business Practice for Fan-Subtitling

As the current business model of fan-subtitling is based on donation-based, the original has never received a return from such practice. However, 2 current platforms can balance the practice of fan-subtitle movement and copyright compliance:

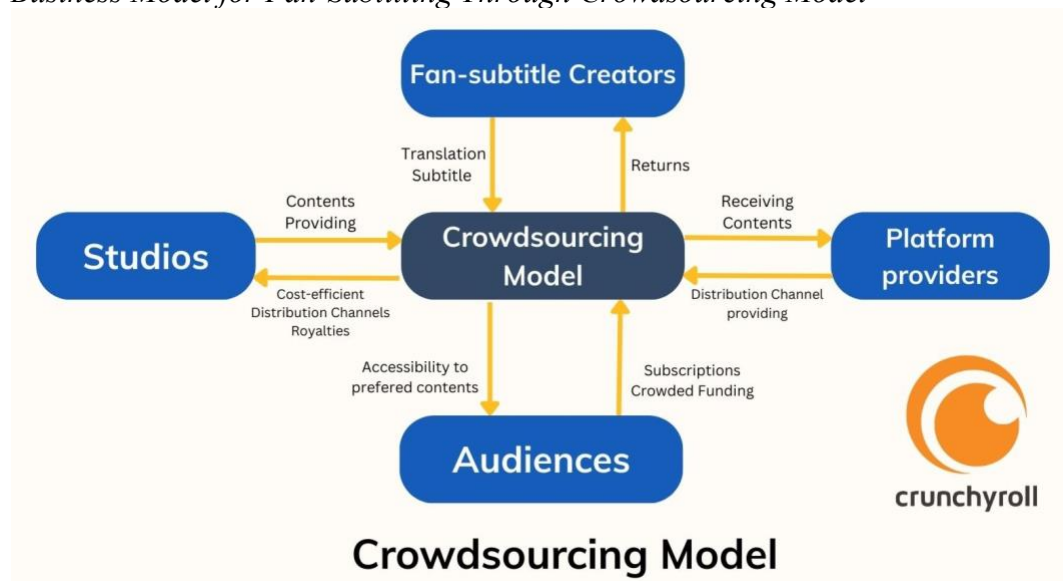
1. **Rakuten Viki:** founded in Singapore, later acquired by Rakuten, a Japanese company, Viki is a legal streaming platform, as it is a licensee that receives the distribution rights from Japanese studios, which allows viewers to deliver the fan-made English and other languages subtitles in promoting accessibility to other audiences. Fan-subtitle creator can maintain their role while promoting the legal consumption (Dwyer, 2020; Hwang, 2018).

2. **Crowdsourcing Model:** According to Bhatti et al. (2020), Crowdsourcing is one of the effective business models that facilitates business cost efficiency and open innovation, and scalable growth. Crowdsourcing is a user-oriented expertise as it developed from users' demand and customized to their needs (Goh et al. 2016) (see Figure 5).

Crunchyroll, a platform that was once a hub of pirated anime, has shifted its role from a pirated site to an official anime channel. Eventually, Crunchyroll has become one of the prominent anime distributors that encourages legal anime consumption (Blair, 2020).

Figure 5

Business Model for Fan-Subtitling Through Crowdsourcing Model



International Market Expertise of Official Distributor

Referred to the respondent from film sector, suggesting that younger film producers are thinking of producing the film, and overlook the important of distribution, along with Craig's conclusion that made in 2020, that Japanese creative workers are lacking know-how in distributing their work globally, to improve and extend their knowledge, the following are the recommendation for Japanese film producers and production houses:

1. **Establishing an exporting organization to foreign markets:** The fan-subtitle movement emerged as Japanese studios were constrained by resource and international distribution channels, leading to audiences having latent demand in consuming Japanese drama. Unlike large-sized or corporate studios that manage to export content internationally, Medium- and small-sized studios are recommended to form a body or organization to increase their capability in international exports. Additionally, experienced studios and producers could offer their know-how by being mentors and guiding young talents and small studios' pathways to perform their works in international film festivals and on global stages.
2. **Collaborating with potential partners:** As Fan-subtitle creator served significantly as prosumer who breaking down the barriers in languages and cultural differences, while Japanese film producers are struggled in localization and workforces' shortage, both fan-subtitle creators and filmmaker could collaborate and optimizing their specialty since fan-subtitle creator can provided their language proficiency skills, and

facilitated studios the distribution channels, allowing them to reach international audiences. In addition, the collaboration can strengthen copyright compliance and become a mechanism that relieves producers' concerns in preserving the aesthetic and cinematic experience of the film by working closely with fan-subtitle creators.

Applying Fan-Subtitling to Other Industries

Fan-subtitling is widely considered another form of copyright infringement. Apart from the motion picture industry, several sectors, such as music, publication, and other cultural exports, are also struggling with localization and workforce shortages. By transforming their prosumer role, fan-subtitle creators are assets to these industries as they can become professional translators, proofreaders who assist press companies and music studios in conveying the message to other audiences.

Recommendation

Based on the summary of this study, 2 major recommendations are proposed to guide future researchers to be more comprehensive in the phenomenon of Fan-subtitle movement:

Quantitative Studies are Required

Though fan-subtitle creators claimed that fan-subtitling is a practice that introduces the new content to new potential audiences, while studios and platform respondents claimed that the fan-subtitle groups caused an impact on the studio's confidence in exporting content, diminishing translators' wages, which eventually backfired entire film industry. This is still the study conducted by a grounded theory approach that is scaffolded by the response of informants. Further quantitative studies are necessary to extend to identification of the empirical evidence.

Apart from quantifying the impacts, the number of audiences who consume Japanese content via fan-subtitle pages in Thailand has never been examined. Surveying to determine whether audiences who consume Japanese drama through fan-sub channels are scalable and have the potential to become a major market for Japanese film producers and platform providers is highly recommended.

Different Population to Examine

Since the fan-subtitle movement is a global phenomenon that nowadays is not limited to a certain type of media, genre, and languages, this study only concentrated on Thai fan-subtitle groups in Japanese drama. Studying in different populations and samples is recommended to investigate, e.g., Bahasa-speaking translators on Japanese drama pages and Korean Fan-Subtitle communities.

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“Screen With a Mouth”: Deconstructing the Narrative Significance of Fourth-Wall-Breaks in Ten English-Feature-Films From *Annie Hall* (1977) to *Deadpool* (2016)

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Abstract

The term “breaking the fourth wall” is used in film, theatre, television, and literary works. It refers to a character directly addressing an audience, or actively acknowledging— through dialogue or breaking character— their fictional reality. Fourth-wall-breaking cinema requires purposive thought and preparation. *Annie Hall* (1977), *Ferris Bueller’s day off* (1986), *Fight club* (1999), *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), and *Deadpool* (2016) are a few films involving fourth-wall-breaks, box-office success, and critical acclaim. The researchers studied a total of eighty-three fourth-wall-breaking scenes from ten English-language feature films (including aforementioned films) using a multipronged-framework-backed narrative-analysis (Qualitative Method). These films feature characters, especially the protagonist, who address the audience in at-least four scenes. Special care was taken to apply this analysis to the nuances of films’ diverse genres-&-contexts. This research borrowed some elements from Tom Brown’s book *Breaking the Fourth Wall—Direct Address in the Cinema*. These were: the number of fourth-wall-breaking characters, their confessions, their honesty, and their effort to build an emotional connection. The researchers formulated additional elements to suit the specific needs of the research. These were: characterization, the attempt to retain attention, the effort to entertain, the significance of the scene, and the placement of fourth-wall-breaks in the scene. The study garnered pivotal insights into the quintessential narrative elements of fourth-wall-breaking cinema. These elements are agency, characterization, engagement, ingeniousness, intimacy, showmanship, significance, synergy. The research quantified the multifaceted usage of fourth-wall-breaks, and undertook a nuanced examination of their intricacies. Patterns, range, and uniqueness emerged among the chosen films.

Keywords: fourth wall, direct address, metafiction, narrative analysis, audience engagement

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Introduction

“I sometimes feel that my movements are being watched by otherworldly beings just beyond the veil of my perception” (Stephen Colbert, The Colbert Report).

“Hey! Yeah, you! I'm down here, busting my ass, while you sit on yours watching me jump around? How is that fair?” (Deadpool, Marvel vs. Capcom 3).

“It is not that these characters are oblivious to the camera. There is no camera in their world” (Perkins, 2005, p. 24).

“We accept the reality of the world with which we are presented, it's as simple as that” (Christof, The Truman show, 1998).

The fourth wall is a conceptual barrier between those presenting some kind of a communication and those receiving it. The term originated in theatre, where it refers to the imaginary wall at the front of the stage separating the audience from the performers. The concept is usually attributed to the philosopher, critic and dramatist Denis Diderot.

The term breaking the fourth wall is used in film, theatre, television, and literary works; it refers to a character directly addressing an audience, or actively acknowledging that the characters and action going on is not real (Glynn, 2010).

The *Great Train Robbery* (1903) can be considered the first film to break the fourth wall. In the years that followed, Charlie Chaplin was criticized for using this concept. Critics are more welcoming of it today. Breaking the fourth wall is an interesting device used by filmmakers to increase cognitive involvement.

There are instances in modern cinema where “talking to the audience directly” has become an important element of the film. Breaking the fourth wall may allow characters to comment on topics they wouldn't typically talk about and encourages a more intimate sharing of thoughts and emotions. The audience is thus expected to function as an active participant (Rai, 2009).

Clips that broke the fourth wall were rated significantly more entertaining and sophisticated. Further analysis of such involving techniques may help producers achieve the goal of getting audience members to attend to the message (Davis, 1992).

Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977) was a pivotal turn for this concept and it has grown in strength since. *Deadpool* (2016) and *The Big Short* (2015) are recent examples of this concept being an integral element of the storytelling. In films like *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, a fourth-wall-break can create a conspiratorial bond with the audience. With dramatic projects like *House of Cards*, we see that the effect isn't limited to comedy (Henne, 2013).

Television audience analysis has been done in this area before. However, what can be studied is the inherent structure of the storytelling. In the assembly of fourth-wall-breaks, other than participation, there are elements like number of fourth-wall-breaking characters, their confessions, honesty and effort to build emotional connection. There are further elements like their attempt to retain attention, effort to entertain, characterization, significance of scene in the film, and placement of fourth-wall-break in the scene.

Looking at this device from the film storytelling point of view is the premise of this research. A comprehensive study of post-modern fourth-wall-breaking films through its fourth-wall-breaking scenes is the central focus here. Ten English language films from *Annie Hall* (1977) to *Deadpool* (2016) were studied. Every fourth-wall-breaking scene from the chosen films was analyzed based on the elements from the above paragraph. The research's interest is in the underlying and internal construction of fourth-wall-breaks, its interwoven bond with the narrative and the possible enhancement in storytelling.

This study began with a deceptively simple question. Audiences have all seen it: a character turns to the camera and speaks to them. But what is that moment really doing? Is it a cheap gimmick, or is it a sophisticated narrative tool? This study's thesis is firmly the latter. Its aim was to move beyond simply identifying when it happens to understanding why it happens at that specific moment, and what narrative heavy lifting it performs. It sought to deconstruct the significance of fourth-wall-breaks across a pivotal period in modern cinema, from the introspective 1970s to the meta-aware 2010s.

Literature Review

Stories are everywhere. It creates a different meaning every time the same story is told by different person. The story-telling is what makes the difference. In film, literature and other art forms, different techniques and tropes have been used to make the story appealing; to bring together the writer/director and the reader/ viewer into a mutual, collaborative and interactive relationship to understand the better meaning of the text. Fourth-wall-break is an important and inseparable technique used in films. Fourth Wall is not a "new" concept. It has been here in the field of visual art and literature for over a century now though the concept was first developed by Denis Diderot in the 18th century where he proposed to fill the gap between two mutually exclusive genre "Tragedy" and "Comedy" by promoting natural style of acting addressing the audience which would break down the voyeuristic attitude of audience to a more participative one. As the practice of "realism" progressed, the demarcation between stage area and audience space gradually sharpened. "In some ways, the concept of theatrical realism has had its ultimate fulfilment in the motion picture. This has done something for the theatre roughly analogous to what photography has done for painting" (Stevenson, 1995).

In films, theatre, television and children's cartoons, animation and literature, the creative liberty on hand is exponential- one can follow, assemble or experiment with new forms of art. In 1903, an American silent film called *The Great Train Robbery* created the final shot in an unconventional way, firing point blank at the audience. As immediately it was open to interpretation, a new technique was introduced in film-making which had an additional engagement and entertainment value in terms of narrative. This can be considered as the first Fourth-wall-break in cinema history. The term Fourth Wall has a theatrical origin where the first three walls being stage left, the background, and stage right. Fourth Wall is this imaginary boundary between performers and audience where former is not aware of latter and is absorbed in his own fictional universe. While the audience can see through the wall, the conventions assume that actors can't. When a character addresses the audience directly, the Fourth Wall is broken.

Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy broke the Fourth wall in his films by staring at the camera to seek comprehension from the audience. Mel Brooks in his films *Blazing Saddles*, and *Spaceballs* frequently broke the fourth wall and used primarily as a comedic element. Woody Allen broke the fourth wall several times in his film *Annie Hall*, as he explained, "Because I

felt many of the people in the audience had the same feelings and the same problems. I wanted to talk to them directly and confront them” (Fourth Wall, Wikipedia). *Goodfellas* (1991) ends the film firing at the audience just like it has been done in *The Great Train Robbery*. Contemporary films like *Funny Games* (2007) and *Deadpool* (2016) break the Fourth Wall as a comedic device between character and audience.

This study deals with the usage and connection of Fourth-wall-breaks to fiction films and how it has been used over time. Each time a character addresses the audience he/she has some specific purpose in mind. Tom Brown while analyzing the Fourth-wall-breaks in the 1997 Austrian film *Funny Games* talks about how the film and addressing the audience are bound thematically and structurally. No clear segregation is possible between the narrative and the character Paul talking to the camera. Fourth-wall-breaking is closely associated with self-referential nature and medium awareness. Past works on Fourth Wall stress on the point of giving rise to illusion- because once the character acknowledges the audience, he knows he is being watched and admits its fictionality. On the other hand, Fourth-wall-break is used as “An emphasis on reason and objectivity rather than emotion, or a type of critical detachment” (Kattwinkel, 2004).

Philip J. Auter conducted a research study with college students where he found out “Clips that broke the fourth-wall were rated significantly more entertaining on a semantic differential-scale, and significantly more sophisticated than were clips that did not break it. The study concluded that programs that break the fourth-wall are more cognitively involving” (Auter, 1991). Philip J. Auter concluded from his research that “Techniques as ‘Fourth-wall-breaking’ may help program producers to achieve the goal of getting audience members to attend to the message” (Auter, 1991).

Independent researches have been done on the topic previously. By going through the literature of the topic, the theory of “direct addresses” in cinema history have been strongly stressed on. By attempting to break the fourth wall of the screen, the involvement and method in which the actor does so have been criticized. Studies have shown the impact on audiences is also different with each different method of breaking the fourth wall.

Studies and observations have been done widely on the Netflix TV series *House of Cards* and is being considered one of the best executions of breaking the fourth wall phenomena in contemporary times. Similar researches have been conducted on films like *High Fidelity*, *Vanilla Sky*, *The Great Train Robbery*, *The Circus*, *La Dolce Vita* and *Submarine*.

That special interaction with the normally passive relationship is redefined with Fourth-wall-break. He also talked about the limitations of using Fourth-wall-break where audiences can get habituated with frequent fourth-wall-breaking. Secondly, this is definitely a content manipulation technique but audiences may prefer the “floating suspension of disbelief” and get disturbed when characters make passes to the viewers directly. Lucy Weir traces the traditional way of performance art to modern Avant-Garde techniques- “invisible distinction known as the fourth-wall tended to remain unbroken, aiding in the viewer’s willing suspension of disbelief; the spectator became a passive observer in this ultimately rather conformist model.” However, in the second half of the 20th century, several avant-garde theatre-makers began to reject the use of this device, with some renouncing the fourth-wall entirely (Weir, 2014).

Past studies have tried to point out instances where characters look at the camera but is not considered a Fourth-wall-break. If the character is using a video camera to maintain a diary

inside the narrative, it is not meant for public viewing, hence not a Fourth-wall-break. *Blair Witch Project* is a fine example to this where the film is the footage on the video camera found after all the characters are dead. Identifying a shot as Fourth-wall-break also depends on if the character's eye-line is clear or not (Brown, 2012). Similarly, character may look to the camera on 180-degree axis but is replaced with an object or person in the next shot. Documentaries, interviews and TV Reporters facing camera in films are not direct address to the audience.

The purposiveness, invocation and interactivity of Fourth-wall-breaks have been studied in this research. Each film has specific needs of addressing the audience. Though "Direct Address" has abilities to destroy the illusion and suspension of disbelief and acknowledges the techniques behind the cinema (i.e. camera); also tries to invade the viewer's personal space, becomes bossy at times, markets the film within the film, and creates confusion by creating paradoxical moments, however, the range of approaches it takes to communicate to the viewer finally intensifies the relationship with fiction.

To properly situate this study, it's essential to understand the scholarly conversation it is entering. Its work is built upon a robust academic foundation that spans theatre, film theory, and empirical research. It begins with the philosophical roots. Bertolt Brecht, in the 1930s, used his "Verfremdungseffekt" or Alienation Effect: which included actors directly addressing the audience: not to create empathy, but to foster critical, intellectual engagement and prevent passive emotional absorption. This is the philosophical precursor to breaking the illusion. Moving to cinema, film theorist Christian Metz in the 1970s described the "cinematic apparatus": the entire environment that creates an immersive, dream-like state. Breaking the fourth wall is a direct and jarring violation of this very apparatus. The most pivotal modern work for this study is Tom Brown's 2012 book, *Breaking the Fourth Wall*, which provided this study's core analytical framework. Furthermore, crucial empirical studies by scholars like Philip J. Aufer demonstrated that these breaks were quantitatively rated as "significantly more entertaining" and "cognitively involving" for audiences. However, the study identified a clear research gap. Most preceding work focused on historical cataloguing, audience response, or theoretical implications. What was missing was a systematic, internal analysis of the device's narrative function. This analytical study was developed to fill this exact gap. It did this by conducting a comparative analysis of its storytelling role across four decades of mainstream cinema.

Aim and Objectives

Aim

To deconstruct the narrative significance of fourth-wall-breaks in ten English-feature-films from *Annie Hall* (1977) to *Deadpool* (2016).

Objectives

To study breaking the fourth wall in cinema in terms of:

1. Agency (Who breaks the wall?)
2. Characterization (How does it shape the character?)
3. Engagement (How does it hold attention?)
4. Ingeniousness (How is honesty/confession used?)
5. Intimacy (What kind of bond is formed?)
6. Showmanship (How is it used to entertain?)

7. Significance (What is the scene's value in the film?)
8. Synergy (How is it merged with the storyline?)

To conduct this deconstruction, this study developed a comprehensive 8-factor framework. These are not just a checklist; they are interconnected analytical lenses. For instance, “Agency”: who speaks: directly shapes the “Characterization” and the kind of “Intimacy” formed. “Showmanship” and “Synergy” then determine the break’s ultimate effectiveness and purpose. This framework allowed movement from subjective observation to a structured, repeatable analysis, dissecting each moment for its specific contribution.

Operational Definitions

- A. Breaking the fourth wall in Cinema: When characters use first person narration, gestures (physical movements, nods, glances, stares) and direct talk to converse with the audience.
- B. Narrative significance: Enhancement in seriousness and strength of storytelling of the film.
 - 1) Agency: Direct address will be the province of a single character who is often the protagonist of the narrative; in some cases, called the narrator. There are rare exceptions to this. The context of the scene, number of fourth-wall-breaking characters and the characters presentation are a part of this factor (Brown, 2012).
 - 2) Characterization: The characters awareness of being watched by audiences and how he/she acknowledges it. His/her qualities and peculiarity of the character’s fourth-wall-breaks together determine how the character is seen/wants to be seen. This factor is about how the character is shaped.
 - 3) Engagement: What activity the character is doing and the settings he/she goes through. How he/she maintains the conversation with the audience in an attempt to hold their attention.
 - 4) Ingeniousness: The honesty and confessional nature of the 4th wall breaking characters is heightened in this category of films and is a peculiar aspect of the character and storytelling (Brown, 2012).
 - 5) Intimacy: To have a character in a film address the film spectator directly is clearly a very particular gesture towards intimacy. Dialogues, Honesty and emotional projection of the character amount to a specific kind of bond the character attempts to form with the audience (Brown, 2012).
 - 6) Showmanship: The antics, treatment of dialogues and situations by the fourth-wall-breaking character/film. The purpose of this factor is to understand how these aspects are linked with entertainment.
 - 7) Significance: To understand the value of fourth-wall-breaking in the film; it’s important to understand the importance of fourth-wall-breaking scene in the film.
 - 8) Synergy: How strategically fourth-wall-breaks are treated and merged with the storyline and subplot; decides the effectiveness of storytelling. This factor aims at studying the enhancement of narratives through application of fourth-wall-breaks.

Methodology and Data Collection

The convention of “what happens inside a screen is a different world” is embedded in the way films are made and seen. That is why real-world time and facts do not match that of the fictional world. Genres like sci-fi, fantasy, magic, sword and sorcery exist because this veil is firmly guarded.

Characters becoming aware that they are being watched, read, heard, and observed changes their behavior. More so, they start interacting with the other side. Hence when this boundary is broken, it gives rise to a different dynamic of film viewing experience. And in this new fourth-wall-breaking world, there are multiple stories and different ways of storytelling. Each film comes with its own brand of storytelling. But we know this only on the surface. What are the latent layers under every fourth-wall-breaking scene, is not clearly visible. Humor and confessions dominate the attributes that these characters adopt in films. But other aspects are not clearly visible.

It changes the traditionally established convention that the screen and the audience share. What effect it has on the seriousness and impressiveness of the narrative, and how it synergizes with the traditional style of narration is of importance to this study. The intricacies of the fourth-wall-breaks matter more than their documentation here. The total run-time of all the chosen films put together is approximately around 900 minutes.

To comprehend the value of fourth-wall-breaks with regards to storytelling in such a large amount of data, the following choices were made:

Methodology: Qualitative

Method: Narrative Analysis

Sampling Technique

The research was conducted using Non-Probability Sampling, under which the Purposive Sampling method was the best to suit the needs of the research.

Sampling Size and Criteria

For the purpose of this study:

- A. The film has a character/characters that break the fourth wall in at least 4 scenes in the film.
- B. It is an English language full length feature film made in/after 1977 and in/before 2016.
- C. Every fourth-wall-breaking scene was analyzed based on the operational definitions stated in section 4.
- D. Only fourth-wall-breaking scenes were under the purview of the analysis.
- E. The main priority here was Fourth-wall-breaking in films and not the entire individual film.
- F. The significance of the fourth-wall-break in the storytelling of the film, fell under this study. The main reason for this was that fourth-wall-breaks can only be studied in the context of the narrative.

Ten such films were recognized and selected by the researchers:

1. Annie Hall (1977)
2. Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986)
3. Spaceballs (1987)
4. Wayne's World (1992)
5. Kuffs (1992)
6. Fight Club (1999)
7. Alfie (2004)
8. The Wolf of Wall Street (2013)
9. The Big Short (2015)
10. Deadpool (2016)

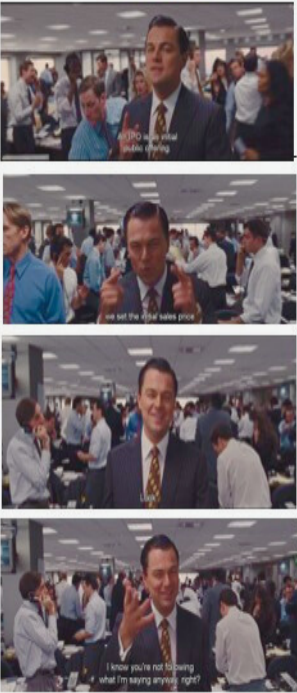
This corpus was designed to capture evolution. It begins with *Annie Hall* in 1977, a film that proved this device could achieve mainstream and critical success, and ends with *Deadpool* in 2016, which essentially weaponized it for a new generation. This forty-year span, encompassing everything from comedy to psychological thriller to financial drama, allowed to see how the technique adapted to different genres, directors, and cultural moments.

A total of eighty-three individual fourth-wall-breaking scenes across the aforementioned ten English-feature-films were analyzed. Every single one of these scenes was meticulously coded by both researchers using this study's eight-factor framework to ensure analytical consistency and depth.

Figure 1

Example/Template of Analysis of a Scene

Scene 4
01:06:26-1:06:53



Agency: Jordan Belfort walks down his crowded office, with everyone working on the trading floor, he talks to the audience but no one notices him.

Characterization: Jordan explains the concept of IPO- Initial Public Offering. He wants the audience to understand the stock market terms which runs in the market. But in middle of explaining IPO, he stops and acknowledges that it is too complicated for a non-stock exchange person to understand. So, he simplifies it to the business he's doing as 'illegal'. The camera follows him till he was explaining, once he stopped to say that audience don't follow things that he explained, the camera stays still till he moves out of the screen after speaking to the audience.

Engagement: The audience probably followed what Jordan was trying to explain. Then when he stopped and said everything was illegal, audience took away their own meaning from the scene that Jordan was making more money than he knows what to do with.

Ironiousness: Jordan confesses that everything was illegal while this was his own secret of making more money. It is a confidential plan; IPO is a complicated subject but Jordan admits he was making more money than he could have ever imagined. The scene ends with a question where he gives a hint on what he does after making substantial amount of money.

Intimacy: The relation Jordan tried to establish was to include audience into the secrets of running the stock market- the illegal ways in which he makes money.

Showmanship: Jordan walks straight, starting the shot which looked like an info-dump. Then he changes it to a comical way and puts things lightly.

Significance: Explaining IPO was important.

Synopsis: The fourth wall break infuses Jordan's knowledge about stock market terms, whether he wants it to explain to the audience and also, he exposed his way of making more money.

Results and Discussion

Key Findings

Key Finding 1 - Agency & Characterization

The first major finding revolved around “Agency” and “Characterization.” The study identified twenty-seven characters who broke the wall, but a clear pattern emerged: in nine out of ten films, this power was held by a single, dominant protagonist. This grants them immense control over the narrative’s perspective. Crucially, this ties directly into “Characterization.” The way a character breaks the wall fundamentally defines who they are. Alvy Singer's breaks are neurotic and self-justifying: that is his character. Jordan Belfort's boastful, unapologetic confessions are the essence of his narcissism. The device is not just something they do; it is a core mechanism for constructing their on-screen identity.

Agency: The “Who”.

Identified 27 characters across the films.

Central Control: In nine out of ten films, a single protagonist (e.g., Alvy Singer, Jordan Belfort) was the primary agent, controlling the narrative.

The Ensemble Exception: *The Big Short* used multiple narrators to explain complex concepts.

Characterization: The “How” of Identity.

The breaks are a primary tool for character shaping.

Examples: Alvy Singer's breaks define his neurotic, self-analytical persona. Deadpool's meta-commentary establishes his irreverent, anarchic identity. Jordan Belfort's confessions paint him as a charismatic but morally bankrupt narrator.

Key Finding 2 - Engagement & Significance

This study found that this device is a masterful tool for commanding and retaining viewer attention. Ferris Bueller does this by making audiences his co-conspirators. *The Big Short* does it to ensure audiences grasp complex financial concepts. This leads directly to “Significance,” where this study assessed the narrative weight of each break. This study categorized them on a spectrum. On one end, you have low-significance throwaway gags, like in *Spaceballs*. On the other, you have breaks of the highest significance—such as those in *Fight Club*, which are the very key to unlocking the film's central psychological mystery and are structurally indispensable to the plot.

Engagement: Holding Attention.

The device is used to command viewer focus.

Techniques include: Direct questions (Ferris Bueller), shocking confessions (*The Wolf of Wall Street*), and clarifying complex plot points (*The Big Short*). It forces the audience to actively process information directly from the source.

Significance: The Narrative Weight.

This study assessed the importance of each break to its scene and the overall film.

Scale of Significance: Ranged from minor, throwaway gags (*Spaceballs*) to pivotal narrative moments. In *Fight Club*, the breaks are crucial to the film's central twist and psychological unraveling. In *Annie Hall*, they are the foundational structure of the entire narrative.

Key Finding 3- Intimacy, Ingeniousness, & Showmanship

This cluster of factors explains the qualitative nature of the connection. “Intimacy” and “Ingeniousness” often work in concert; a character's raw, honest confession: like Alfie admitting his fears or Belfort boasting about his crimes: fosters a deep, and sometimes unsettling, personal bond with the viewer. This confessional “Ingeniousness” builds a unique form of trust. Meanwhile, “Showmanship” leverages the device for pure entertainment and meta-commentary. It's the difference between Alfie sharing his insecurities and Deadpool making a joke about the film's budget or the superhero genre itself. This is where the device directly entertains the audience by acknowledging the performance.

Intimacy & Ingeniousness: The “How” of Connection.

Intimacy: Creates a “conspiratorial bond” (Ferris Bueller) or a deeply personal connection through shared vulnerability (*Alfie*).

Ingeniousness: Used for raw, confessional honesty that builds a perverse trust with the viewer (*The Wolf of Wall Street*).

Showmanship: The “What For” of Entertainment.

The primary tool for meta-humor, parody, and pure entertainment (*Wayne's World*, *Deadpool*). It allows characters to perform for the audience, elevating the entertainment quotient through direct address.

Key Finding 4 - Synergy: The Ultimate Measure

The study identified “Synergy” as the ultimate measure of a fourth-wall-break's success. It is the golden thread that ties the other seven factors together. A break can be funny, intimate, and significant, but if it isn't synergistically woven into the plot, it can feel jarring or gratuitous. The most effective breaks are those where removing them would fundamentally damage the narrative. For example, in *The Big Short*, the breaks are the primary vehicle for exposition. In *Spaceballs*, it's a plot device where they use the film's own VHS to find the characters. This strategic integration is what separates a clever moment from a masterful and essential one.

Synergy: Strategic Integration.

This was the crucial factor determining the device's overall effectiveness.

High Synergy: The Break Is Seamlessly Woven Into the Plot and Feels Essential.

Exposition: *The Big Short* uses it to explain subprime mortgages.

Plot Device: *Spaceballs* uses the VHS of the film itself to find the characters.

Character Arc: *Kuffs* uses breaks to track the protagonist's growth from immaturity to responsibility.

Low Synergy: The Break Feels Like an Isolated Gag or Narrative Detour.

Conclusion: The Anatomy of a Narrative Device

This analysis proves conclusively that breaking the fourth wall is a foundational narrative tool, not a peripheral gimmick. It has a discernible anatomy that this study's framework can map. One can see how Agency and Characterization build the narrator, how Engagement and Showmanship captivate audiences, and how Ingeniousness and Intimacy build a profound

bond. But the masterstroke, the study found, is always Synergy: the seamless integration that makes the device not just memorable, but essential to the film's structural integrity.

From Gimmick to Foundational Tool

This analysis of 83 scenes conclusively demonstrates that breaking the fourth wall is not a mere stylistic flourish, but a foundational narrative tool. It is a deliberate, multi-functional device that is strategically embedded within a film's architecture.

The 8-Factor Framework in Action

Our framework reveals how the device operates systematically:

- Agency & Characterization work in tandem to establish who controls the story and how their identity is forged through their direct address.
- Engagement & Showmanship ensure the audience is not just a passive receiver but an active participant, either through intellectual complicity or entertained captivation.
- Ingeniousness & Intimacy forge a unique bond of trust and complexity, transforming the protagonist from a character one watches into a confidant one knows.

The Synergy Imperative

The ultimate measure of its success is Significance & Synergy. The most powerful breaks are those that are thematically and structurally indispensable: where removing them would collapse a key narrative pillar, whether it's exposition, character motivation, or the entire plot mechanism.

Inferences: Redefining the Viewer's Role

The inferences drawn from this study are significant. The journey from *Annie Hall* to *Deadpool* marks a fundamental shift in the contract between filmmaker and audience. There is movement from intimate, psychological confession to a culturally-literate, meta-critical conversation about the medium itself. This challenges the classic Brechtian idea that direct address only creates distance; in modern cinema, it's just as often used to achieve the opposite: a deeper, more complicit form of immersion. Ultimately, this study provides a new, structured lexicon for film analysis, allowing scholars to specify how a fourth-wall-break functions, moving beyond vague description to precise critical understanding.

The Evolution of a Contract

The device's journey from *Annie Hall* to *Deadpool* marks a fundamental shift in the implied contract between filmmaker and audience.

1977: The break is an intimate, psychological invitation into a character's inner world.

2016: The break is a culturally-literate, meta-critical conversation about the medium itself.

Beyond Brecht

This study has moved past the purely Brechtian model of using direct address for alienation. In modern cinema, it is equally, if not more, often used to achieve the opposite: profound narrative and emotional immersion by making the audience a co-conspirator.

A New Analytical Lexicon

This study provides a replicable, structured lexicon for film analysis. It allows critics and scholars to move beyond subjective labels like “breaking the fourth wall” and instead specify how it functions—as a tool for characterization, engagement, intimacy, or all three at once.

Final Reflections: Significance Beyond the Screen

In final summary, the significance of this device extends beyond the screen. It represents a benchmark for sophisticated, self-aware storytelling: a technique that builds intelligence and trust with its audience. By deconstructing its power, this study has highlighted a fundamental shift in how stories are told and experienced. The screen is no longer a one-way window; it has become a door, and these characters are inviting audiences to step through.

A Benchmark for Storytelling

This study concludes that the strategic breaking of the fourth wall is a benchmark of sophisticated, self-aware storytelling. It is a device that trusts its audience with complexity, acknowledges the artifice of cinema, and uses that acknowledgment to create a deeper, more resonant, and more engaging truth.

The Conversation Starts Now

By deconstructing its narrative significance, this study has not only quantified its power but has also opened the door for its further evolution in digital and interactive media. The screen hasn't just developed a mouth; it has learned to speak with purpose, nuance, and profound effect.

Scope for Further Research

1. This research hasn't been able to include *High fidelity* (2000) and *it's kind of a funny story* (2010). Also, films before *Annie Hall* (1977) like the first *Alfie* (1966) can be studied. All the films given above have fourth-wall-breaks.
2. Fourth-wall-breaking Non-English language cinema can help analyze different dimensions that were overseen or not shown before. To be precise, Hindi film: *Pyaar ke side effects* (2006) and French film: *Amelie* (2001) along with Italian film: *Happy family* (2010).
3. Research into the Indian performance art *Tamasha* is also a possibility.
4. Brechtian theatre will serve as a fertile ground for effects study of the live audiences.
5. There can be an analysis of the landmark events leading up to the development and acceptance of this concept in cinema. This research can be of a documentary nature.
6. Audience analysis can be conducted where the key questions are related to the confusion between real and reel, the extent of interest it generates among them, the dramatic and comedic effect of the dialogues, repeat value and the emotions they go through.
7. “Audience empowerment” can be studied through detailed research of video games, mockumentaries, horror and reality TV.
8. Netflix's *House of Cards* (U.S. TV series) can also be studied based on any of the aspects listed on this list.
9. A semiotic analysis of such films might reveal meanings that a normal person might not think of at face value.

10. The latent and underlying ideologies can be shed light upon through a discourse analysis of films that have used this concept.
11. The rhetoric value of this concept in advertisements is a fertile ground for study.
12. Psychoanalysis of the protagonist, who speaks to the audience, can identify commonalities and differences between each protagonist. Psychopathic, sociopathic, narcissistic and schizophrenic traits can be the focus of this analysis.
13. It's an era of change in message and medium, like the convergence/exchange content between mobile, TV and computers. It won't be long before characters from web-series start breaking the fourth wall. The intermediality of this concept will be a complex and extensive area of study.

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Visualizing Sound: Interdisciplinary Collaboration as Artistic Correspondence at Bilkent University

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Abstract

Artistic innovation often begins with dialogue, whether between sound and image, movement and word, past and present. French composer Charles Koechlin envisioned many of his piano miniatures as inherently cinematic, composing them in the early 20th century to accompany imagined films. Although this vision was never realized during his lifetime, it reflects a rich tradition of intermedial exchange in which music engages directly with visual narrative. This project reimagines Koechlin's vision through a contemporary lens, situating his work within a broader lineage of cross-disciplinary artistic correspondence, continuing the dialogue of Alexander Scriabin's synesthetic compositions and the visual music of Hans Richter, Walther Ruttmann, and Oskar Fischinger. *Portrait of Daisy Hamilton for Piano and Animation* is an academic project that revisits and reimagines these inter-artistic dialogues. Developed at Bilkent University, the collaboration brought together faculty and students from the Music and Performing Arts Faculty and the Faculty of Fine Arts, Design and Architecture. The project paired live piano performance with original animations created specifically for the music, effectively realizing Koechlin's cinematic vision from the 1930s through contemporary digital tools. Through mutual artistic interpretation, the project foregrounded questions of authorship, visual language, and musical narrative. It also served as a pedagogical experiment in collaborative creation, asking students to work outside their disciplinary silos to co-produce a multimedia work. In revisiting Koechlin's unfulfilled cinematic vision through a contemporary multimedia project, this work contributes to ongoing conversations about how music can function as a form of visual narrative and artistic correspondence within film-inspired contexts.

Keywords: music and visual arts, Charles Koechlin, Daisy Hamilton, interdisciplinary collaboration

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Introduction

Artistic innovation often begins with dialogue. When artists converse across mediums, whether it be between sound and image, or between movement and word, entirely new forms of expression can emerge. This isn't a novel idea, as history is full of examples of artists who found inspiration not within their own field, but across its borders. French Impressionist composer Claude Debussy, for instance, always considered himself a Symbolist before anything else; in other words, he was a composer who thought like a poet. The novelist and poet Thomas Hardy, on the other hand, was a passionate musician at heart, and his musicality influenced both his prose as well as his narratives. This paper traces the lineage of these intermedial connections, specifically moments where music and visual art have intersected, and then situate our project at Bilkent University, *Portrait of Daisy Hamilton for Piano and Animation*, within that lineage, showing how it revisits and reimagines the inter-artistic dialogues manifested in the works of Alexander Scriabin, Hans Richter, Walther Ruttmann, Oskar Fischinger.

Music and the Visual Arts

The relationship between sound and image, between hearing and seeing, goes back centuries. One of the earliest examples is something known as the “ocular harpsichord,” supposedly imagined by the French Jesuit Louis-Bertrand Castel in the eighteenth century. The idea was that each pitch on the keyboard corresponded to one of the seven colors of the rainbow. When a key was pressed, a small panel of that color would lift, illuminated by candlelight. Castel believed he had found a way to make music visible (Arfini, 2013). In other words, he imagined a kind of proto-multimedia instrument. Though it's uncertain whether the ocular harpsichord ever actually worked, the concept is remarkable. It reminds us that artists have long been drawn to the dream of translating one sensory language into another.

Fast forward to the early twentieth century, and that fascination with sound-color correspondence became central to many avant-garde movements. In Russia, Alexander Scriabin's *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire*, which premiered in 1911, called for a “color organ” that would project light in coordination with harmonic shifts in the score. Scriabin envisioned an audience bathed in light and sound, both unfolding in real time (Powell, 2011). The result was not a literal painting of the music, but a sensory correspondence, a mutual illumination between what was heard and what was seen.

Around the same time, painters were beginning to think musically as well. Wassily Kandinsky, František Kupka, and Adolf Hölzel each used musical structures as compositional frameworks for their paintings. Kandinsky's *Fuga* from 1914, for instance, is organized like a musical fugue, with visual “voices” entering one after another, imitating and developing each other (Arfini, 2013). These artists weren't simply inspired by music; they were trying to paint according to musical logic. They were asking: what would it mean to think of color as timbre, or of form as rhythm?

Then, with the invention of cinema, something entirely new became possible. For the first time, time itself, which is the fundamental dimension of music, could be applied to the visual image. Early filmmakers recognized this immediately. The Italian Futurists, for example, tried to make “painted films” that would unfold like musical compositions. Sadly, many of these experiments are lost, but they paved the way for the abstract films of the 1920s by Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, and Oskar Fischinger (Arfini, 2013).

Hans Richter, who was originally trained as a painter, studied counterpoint with the composer Ferruccio Busoni. He wanted to understand how to construct visual counterpoint, how to make lines and forms interact the way melodies do in music. His 1919 *Präludium* is a ten-page picture roll in which visual themes develop and transform across the pages, much like musical motifs.

Walter Ruttmann, also a painter trained in music, took this idea further. His *Lichtspiel Opus I*, created in 1921, paired moving abstract shapes with a live musical performance by composer Max Butting. The result was a true audiovisual dialogue: color and form behaving musically, and sound behaving visually. Then came Oskar Fischinger, perhaps the most famous of these visual music pioneers. Fischinger was a painter and violinist who used the new technology of the synchronized soundtrack to bind image and music together more tightly than ever before. His *Studie No. 7* from 1931 visualizes Brahms's *Hungarian Dance No. 5*, every rhythmic accent and phrase mirrored by pulsating geometric shapes. Later, in *An Optical Poem* (1938), Fischinger worked with Liszt's *Second Hungarian Rhapsody*, creating a dazzling world of moving circles and lines that dance exactly in step with the music, and make a visual representation of Liszt's motivic development and thematic transformations. These early works, sometimes called "viewable music," established an entire genre where music and visual art became partners in motion (Arfini, 2013).

All the above experiments, from Castel's ocular harpsichord to Fischinger's animated abstractions, belong to a long tradition of *artistic correspondence*: artists reaching across the boundaries of their own medium to engage in conversation with another. It's a conversation that continues to evolve, even today.

Portrait of Daisy Hamilton for Piano and Animation

This brings our paper to the central figure of our project: the French composer Charles Koechlin. Koechlin, who lived from 1867 to 1950, is a fascinating and somewhat eccentric figure in the landscape of French music. He studied composition with both Massenet and Fauré, and later taught some of the greats of twentieth-century French music, including Darius Milhaud and Francis Poulenc. His music is deeply atmospheric and often cinematic in nature, though he was writing before cinema had become a dominant art form. Possessing an extraordinary imagination, he would compose hundreds of short pieces in a single sitting, each one filled with unique harmonic color and emotional nuance. Perhaps what's most endearing about Koechlin is his lifelong devotion to movie stars. He wrote entire cycles of music inspired by actresses such as Lilian Harvey, Gladys Cooper, and Jean Harlow. Among these works is a set called *Portrait of Daisy Hamilton*, a scenario for an imagined film in which the leading roles were to be played by Koechlin himself and Lilian Harvey (Ash, 1991). It was never made, of course, but the idea of composing for an imaginary film says a lot about Koechlin's creative world. He was composing not just sound, but implied image. In other words, he was writing music that already contained within it a cinematic sensibility.

Our project at Bilkent University set out to realize that cinematic vision. We (Belinda Chen, pianist; Mehveş Topçuoğlu, animator; Fulten Larlar, advisor) asked: what if we could bring to life the film Koechlin imagined but never made? Could we create a modern-day "Portrait of Daisy Hamilton" through a collaboration between live music and animation? The project, titled *Portrait of Daisy Hamilton for Piano and Animation*, was developed as an interdisciplinary collaboration between the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts and the Faculty of Fine Arts, Design, and Architecture. It brought together musicians, animators, and designers, faculty and students working side by side to interpret Koechlin's music through moving images. The idea

was not to illustrate the music literally, but to create an interpretive dialogue, much like the collaborations between Richter and his composers a century earlier.

The process began with a conversation. Belinda performed the pieces for the animation team on the piano, explaining how her choices in tempo, phrasing, and dynamics reflected the emotional narrative she sensed in the score. In response, Mehveş began to sketch visual sequences that echoed those musical gestures. Mehveş didn't simply follow the rhythm or melody; instead, they responded emotionally and conceptually to what they heard. Over time, the music and animation developed in parallel, each informing and reshaping the other. The result was a dialogue of interpretation, not merely between artist and score, but between sound and image, performer and animator, emotion and structure. Both sides contributed equally to shaping the final work.

In total, we selected six short piano pieces from Koechlin's *Portrait of Daisy Hamilton: Hymne à Daisy, Coquetterie, Souvenir d'anciens jours lumineux dans des heures sombres, Gaîté, Pastorale, and Jeux de lumière*. Each movement carries a distinct emotional tone, and together they trace a subtle narrative arc from idealized love to self-reflection, and finally, to acceptance and peace.

The first, *Hymne à Daisy*, was our point of departure. Knowing that "Daisy" was a character meant to be played by Lilian Harvey, we approached this piece as a musical act of devotion that was almost sacred in tone. Koechlin's harmonies here are reverent, suspended, and full of light. Belinda kept the tempos deliberately slow, with a gentle attack into each chord, to preserve that sense of awe. Mehveş's animation responded with natural imagery, delicate movements of hair, the shimmer of reflected light, all of which evoke the purity and idealism of early love. It's a hymn in both name and character. The hand drawn organic forms and the blinking of the eyes evoke a sense of aliveness. Yet expressed in a black and white scheme, they suggest the feeling of being supra-human.

The second piece, *Coquetterie*, shifts the atmosphere completely. It's lively, flirtatious, even slightly nervous, and full of spark and tension. Belinda's interpretation emphasized that sense of excitement and uncertainty, with quick articulations and sudden dynamic changes. Mehveş's animation mirrored this with bright colors and rapid motion, almost like the fluttering of wings. Together, they wanted to capture that thrilling yet unstable moment when attraction first begins: exhilarating, but already shadowed by the possibility of dissonance. The animation piece starts in black and white, then introduces lively colors one by one, gradually enriching the color palette.

The third movement, *Souvenir d'anciens jours lumineux dans des heures sombres* ("Memory of old bright days in dark hours"), is the emotional center of the set. It's a deeply introspective piece, haunted by regret. In playing it, Belinda focused on Koechlin's dissonances, allowing them to ring with as much rawness as possible. Mehveş's animation contributed to this mood with the monochromatic, repetitive and looped nature of it. The image is the face of a young woman distorted by capture within a translucent object, a glass. This is where the dialogue between our mediums became most intense, as both music and image seemed to ask the same question: how do we process loss and still find beauty within it?

Then comes *Gaîté*, ("Gaiety"), which acts as a kind of release. In our discussions, we talked a lot about what happiness means, how fleeting and mysterious it can be. When joy arrives, we often don't quite trust it, and when it fades, we're left grasping for its echo. In performance,

Belinda kept the phrasing light and transparent, using pauses and silences almost as characters themselves. The animation embraces the chasing of an elusive object by an abstract human-like figure through fluid movements of organic forms. The gentle dissolves suggest memory and the act of letting go. It became a meditation on forgiveness, both of the self and of the past.

The fifth piece, *Pastorale*, offers a sense of renewal. The writing features two distinct melodic voices that often move in contrary motion, sometimes close, sometimes apart. In conversation, Belinda talked about how she imagined them as two lovers walking together: at times converging, at times drifting away, but always connected through the harmony beneath. This was an opportunity to bring out Koechlin's contrapuntal thinking, that sense of independent voices existing in harmony. Visually, Mehveş translated this through fluid, intertwining forms, organic shapes that sometimes separate and sometimes overlap, echoing the natural ebb and flow of relationships. In this piece, the dialogue between sound and image became one of companionship rather than contrast.

Finally, *Jeux de lumière*, ("Light Games"): This piece closes the cycle with serenity and balance. It's inspired by a scene from one of Lilian Harvey's films, *The Girl and the Boy*, where light falls across her shoulders during a comedic burglary scene. Knowing this, we saw the music not as narrative illustration but as a study in radiance, the play of illumination and shadow. In performance, Belinda tried to highlight the harmonic color, allowing Koechlin's subtle modulations to shimmer like shifting light. Mehveş responded by focusing on negative space, the light streaming through, rather than the objects it touches. Forms dissolving into each other over a black background express the contemplative mood of the absent defining the present. Together, these choices give the final piece a sense of resolution, a bittersweet peace that feels both solitary and fulfilled.

Across these six movements, a larger narrative emerged, not just the story of Daisy Hamilton, but of artistic correspondence itself: how two disciplines can learn to speak a shared language without losing their individual voices. The project asked us to think carefully about authorship: who is the "creator" when both sound and image shape meaning? And it pushed our students to step outside their disciplinary boundaries, to engage in creative negotiation rather than unilateral control.

Conclusion

From a pedagogical standpoint, this was one of the most valuable outcomes. In the traditional conservatory model, musicians are often trained in relative isolation: they focus on interpretation, technique, style, but all within the framework of the musical text. Similarly, visual artists may focus on their medium in visual or spatial terms. This project challenged those habits. It asked: what happens when musicians must think visually, and visual artists must think musically? What happens when both must make decisions together, in real time?

The result was not only a successful performance but also a profound learning experience. Students discovered that collaboration is not about compromise in the negative sense; it's about translation, finding equivalences between expressive vocabularies. They also discovered that interdisciplinary work requires vulnerability. One must allow their medium to be affected, to be changed, by another's interpretation, which can be a difficult but ultimately transformative process.

Artistically, what struck us all most was how naturally Koechlin's music lent itself to this form of collaboration. His harmonic language, which is full of shifting colors and atmospheric ambiguity, already invites visualization. It's as if he composed with an eye toward the screen, even though he never had the opportunity to work in film. In realizing *Portrait of Daisy Hamilton* through animation, we were, in a way, fulfilling his unfulfilled dream, turning his imagined cinema into something tangible.

Beyond resurrecting Koechlin's vision, the project also speaks to a larger cultural question: how can academic institutions serve as laboratories for new forms of media art? Universities are uniquely positioned to bring together specialists from different fields who might not otherwise meet: composers and coders, performers and designers, animators and theorists. When those worlds intersect, the results can be startlingly original. Our collaboration at Bilkent is one small example of how that can work in practice: how a classical music department and a design department can join forces to produce something that neither could have achieved alone.

Looking ahead, the project continues to evolve. Mehveş is currently developing a short film that expands on the animation's visual language, drawing on the same themes of light, memory, and transformation.

In revisiting Koechlin's unrealized cinematic vision, we found ourselves part of a larger lineage, one that stretches from the ocular harpsichord and Scriabin's color organ, through the abstract films of Richter and Fischinger, to today's digital multimedia art. Each of these moments represents a renewed attempt to bridge sound and sight, to make one sense visible through another. Our contribution was simply to continue that conversation using the tools of our own time. Ultimately, *Portrait of Daisy Hamilton for Piano and Animation* was not just a performance, but an experiment in how we might think differently about collaboration, not as the merging of mediums, but as a meeting of imaginations.

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G. Aravindan: Myth, Metaphor, and Malayalam Cinema

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Abstract

This paper examines the cinematic artistic styles of G. Aravindan, a celebrated Malayalam filmmaker and cartoonist, focusing on his unique storytelling approach that blends myth, folklore, and social realism. Through an analysis of key films such as *Kummatty* (1979), which uses a bogeyman tale to explore themes of freedom, *Esthappan* (1980), which keen into human perception through a mystic figure, and *Kanchana Sita* (1977), a humanized retelling of the “Ramayana” with nature as metaphor and *Thampu* (1978) is discussed for its symbolic use of a circus tent as a miniature of this world. Aravindan’s minimalist, visually driven narratives, marked by long takes, natural settings, the use of non-professional actors, and poetic silence, reveal his unique cinematic language and representation of existential and societal themes. This paper highlights his contribution to Malayalam cinema as a filmmaker who seamlessly merges myth and reality, creating works of philosophical and aesthetic depth.

Keywords: G. Aravindan, Malayalam cinema, mythopoeic cinema, contemplative cinema

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Introduction

G. Aravindan, born in 1935 in Kottayam, Kerala, began his artistic career as a cartoonist, then filmmaker. This paper examines four of Aravindan's most significant works: *Kanchana Sita* (1977), *Thampu* (1978), *Kummatty* (1979), and *Esthappan* (1980). These films, created during the most productive period of his career, exemplify his mature artistic vision and demonstrate the various ways in which he employed myth and metaphor to explore fundamental questions about human existence, society, and the nature of reality itself. Through close textual analysis of these films, this study seeks to illuminate the distinctive features of Aravindan's cinematic language and assess his contribution to world cinema.

Literature Review

The scholarship on G. Aravindan's cinema has evolved considerably over the past four decades, reflecting growing recognition of his significance not only within Indian cinema but in the broader context of world art cinema. Early critical responses, primarily in Malayalam, focused on thematic interpretations and plot analysis. However, more recent scholarship has begun to engage seriously with the formal and aesthetic dimensions of his work, situating him within broader theoretical frameworks of film studies. In *Kummatty*, the mythical figure is intrinsically linked to the seasons, arriving in spring “when the rain is over and the plants are green in bloom. He is part of that nature” (Dungarpur, 2021). The narrative itself is framed by the natural world, unfolding between a sunrise and a sky full of birds, suggesting a cycle that is more ecological than merely narrative (Venkiteswaran, 2021). This is not a conscious stylistic choice but an organic expression of the director's own discomfort with urbanity; as Aravindan stated, “I love to be close to nature. I'm very uncomfortable in cities” (Aravindan G., *The Ray the came in from the south*, 1985).

Kummatty serves as a central case study in Aravindan's oeuvre. Critics like C.S. Venkiteswaran analyze it as a sequel to his earlier film *Thampu*, noting shared narrative structures where an outsider (a circus troupe in *Thampu*, the mythical Kummatty in *Kummatty*) arrives in a remote, self-contained village, creates ripples, and departs, leaving a transformed community behind (Venkiteswaran, 2021). The film is deeply ethnographic, portraying a village life where “all human activity... is controlled by nature” (Aravindan G., *A filmmaker pitches his tent*, 1984). The narrative is woven with folk songs that “tell stories and fantasise about Kummatty,” creating a “magical folktale world” where the boundaries between “human and non-human, fantasy and reality... all merge and overlap” (Venkiteswaran, 2021). Aravindan himself explained that he constructed a functional, slightly unreal backdrop to make the arrival of the mythical Kummatty feel plausible, locating the character's personality “between myth and reality” (Aravindan, as cited in Venkiteswaran, 2021).

Scholars interpret Aravindan's work as creating what Gayatri Devi calls an “ethical community,” both within the film and among its viewers. His films explore “the capacity of myth and faith” to forge this community by showing the simultaneous existence of the visible world and the invisible world of thought, myth, and faith (Devi, 2016).

The abundant presence of animals, birds, and natural phenomena in *Kummatty* (1979) fosters a “post-human aesthetics” and an “ecological vision” (Venkiteswaran, 2021). The film emphasizes that “the boundaries between the human and the animal are slender,” presenting all life as part of an interconnected web and framing the responsibility of being human as a sentient part of this whole.

Aravindan's work garnered significant international recognition, most notably in Japan, where preeminent critic Tadao Sato hailed *Kummatty* (1979) as “the most beautiful film he had ever seen” (Committee, 2022), inaugurating a lasting appreciation for the director's work in that country.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design centred on auteur theory and close textual analysis to investigate the unique cinematic language of G. Aravindan. The research is structured as an auteur-led case study analysis of four key films, selected for their representation of his mature artistic vision and core thematic preoccupations. The analysis is guided by a synthesis of three primary theoretical frameworks. First, auteur theory positions the director as a distinct cinematic author whose coherent vision is expressed through a signature style. Second, mythopoeic analysis examines the active re-creation and re-contextualization of mythological and folkloric sources. Third, an ecocritical and post-humanist lens investigates the portrayal of nature as an active force and the interconnectedness of life. Primary data consists of the filmic texts themselves. Secondary sources include scholarly literature and the director's own statements, which provide critical context and insight into artistic intentions. The core analytical method is close textual and comparative analysis. This involves detailed examination of mise-en-scène, narrative structure, sound design, and metaphor/symbolism across the selected films to identify unifying techniques and themes, thereby substantiating the argument for a coherent auteur signature. The research is committed to a respectful engagement with the specific cultural context, grounding interpretations in textual evidence and established scholarly discourse while prioritizing the internal logic of the films and the director's stated intentions.

***Kanchana Sita* (1977): Humanizing Myth Through Nature's Metaphor**

In his 1978 film *Kanchana Sita*, G. Aravindan undertakes a radical reinterpretation of the Indian epic, the Ramayana. His primary method is the use of nature as a total symbolic reference for the character of Sita, who remains physically absent throughout the entire film. This approach is rooted in the folk tradition that identifies Sita with the spirit of the natural world.

Aravindan's central thematic device is the application of the Prakriti-Purusha principle, a core concept in Indian philosophy that distinguishes between the material, creative energy of nature (Prakriti) and the spiritual consciousness (Purusha). In the film, Sita is presented as Prakriti itself. During scenes of conflict and agitation among the male characters, her presence is felt through the rustling of leaves or the movement of tree branches. This sudden, audible intervention of nature consistently serves a moderating function, cooling tensions and steering the characters toward reconciliation. By making Sita an omnipresent but invisible force of nature, Aravindan humanizes the myth. He moves away from the mainstream, divine portrayals of the Ramayana to present a more earthly and philosophical narrative. This humanization is further emphasized by his casting choice; he enlisted tribal people from the banks of the Godavari River, who are believed to belong to Rama's clan, to play the characters, grounding the epic in a specific cultural and ethnic reality. Through this framework, Aravindan boldly interrogates conventional notions of “Dharma” and “Adharma” (righteousness and unrighteousness). The film suggests that true dharma may not reside solely in royal decrees or masculine codes of honour but is intrinsically linked to a harmonious relationship with the

natural world, which Sita embodies. Thus, *Kanchana Sita* uses its mythological source not for devotion but as a medium to explore profound ecological and ethical questions.

The film immediately establishes its unique aesthetic from the opening sequence. A slow zoom out from a river, revealing a mountain forest and two figures walking through the mud, grounds the myth in a tangible, primal reality. Rama and Lakshmana are depicted not as celestial beings, but as dark-skinned, bearded tribesmen clad in traditional attire, their humanity emphasised by their earthly surroundings. This visual strategy strips the epic of its celestial grandeur, repositioning it within an anthropological and realistic context. This earthly perspective is the lens through which all subsequent conflicts are viewed, making the gods and heroes relatable, flawed, and susceptible to profound anguish.

One of the most potent conflicts Aravindan explores is that of Varna, the caste system. The episode of Shambuka, a Shudra attempting penance, serves as a critical indictment of socially sanctioned violence. Rama's enforcement of the caste law, leading to Shambuka's death, is presented not as a glorious act of dharma but as a brutal necessity of his office. The film's critique is sharpened through powerful visual juxtaposition, the ritualistic sacrifice of the horse in the Ashvamedha Yaga is paralleled with the killing of Shambuka. This editing choice forces the audience to question the nature of true dharma. The climax of the narrative, the Ashvamedha Yaga, synthesises these conflicts. The use of a golden idol of Sita in the ritual, foregrounded by the sacrificial fire, is a potent symbol of the patriarchal substitution of a living woman with a hollow, man-made effigy. This act critiques a society that prioritizes ritualistic form over human essence.

In conclusion, *Kanchana Sita* (1977) concludes not with royal triumph but with catharsis and tragic ambiguity. The final scenes of the Yaga venue burning, while Rama and his sons call out for Sita, symbolize the collapse of the rigid structures upon which his reign was built. Aravindan's film is a subversive work that dares to humanize a god, presenting a Rama who is a victim of his own duty, haunted by guilt over the murder of Shambuka and the exile of Sita. By making Sita an invisible yet omnipresent force of Nature, the film ultimately affirms her moral and spiritual victory. Through its serene pacing and philosophical depth, *Kanchana Sita* compels its audience to move beyond simplistic notions of right and wrong, inviting them instead to contemplate the heavy, often contradictory, burdens of authority, justice, and the eternal human search for reconciliation with the natural world.

***Thampu* (1978): The Circus as Microcosm of Society**

Thampu (1978), G. Aravindan's third feature film, uses the setting of a travelling circus to create a metaphorical exploration of society, community, and human dignity. The title, meaning "tent" in Malayalam, points to the film's central organising image. *Thampu* (1978) unfolds through a series of nineteen distinct spectacles, tracing the arrival, integration, and departure of a circus troupe within a village, while contrasting transient entertainment with enduring social structures.

The film establishes the circus's entrance as the first spectacle. The arrival of the troupe and the setting up of the large tent on the riverbank serves as a free, preliminary show for the villagers, demonstrating that the very act of creating the spectacle is a performance. This transient world is contrasted with the village's own daily performance of cyclical life and the spectacle of modernity brought by the construction of a new factory. The circus integrates itself by promoting its show through a vibrant announcement rally, marketing its fantasy to every

social stratum. The early shows emphasize the shared experience of the audience, who watch the performance with awe, laughter, shock, and delight. However, the sources emphasize spectacles that deliberately break this illusion to reveal human suffering. The clown, or buffoon, provides the first crack when he responds to teasing children not with laughter but with a deeply sad and silent gaze. This internal reality culminates when the clown is slapped by the manager; he breaks character, identifying himself as Krishnan and revealing a life of forced performance and internal death for survival, marking the climax where the spectacle collapses. Another spectacle of suffering is Lakshmi, the old tightrope walker, who shares her story of being sold at age six and enduring 44 years of lifelong captivity and exhaustion behind her performance. The circus's appeal is eventually overshadowed by competing spectacles. The annual temple festival, announced by the Temple Committee, proves to be a religious spectacle rooted in community and tradition, drawing massive crowds with powerful Chenda drums and rituals. The circus performers, still in their makeup, ultimately become outsiders, standing outside their tent and watching the temple festival fireworks. With their temporary world dissolved, the final spectacle is the troupe's departure, continuing their eternal journey.

The film *Thampu* (1978) masterfully presents the idea that life itself is a series of interconnected spectacles, and we are all performers and audience members within it. The circus is the most literal spectacle, a world of intentional illusion and performance. However, the film shows that the village has its own spectacles: the daily ritual of the pump operator, the construction of the factory, the rich man's display of wealth, and the overpowering religious festival. Each of these is a 'show' that commands attention, conveys a certain narrative, and demands a role from its participants. Humans, like the characters, are part of this endless show. They perform roles dictated by our social status (the Master, the worker, the clown), our economic circumstances (the rich family, the struggling circus), and our traditions. All characters feel trapped by their parts. The most profound truth the film reveals is that the spectacle is often a mask for pain, exploitation, and survival. Krishnan and Lakshmedathi are not just performers; they are prisoners of the spectacle, their personal tragedies hidden behind greasepaint and daring feats. The moment the mask slips, it reveals that the "show" is a mechanism for coping with a harsh world. Ultimately, *Thampu* (1978) suggests that life is a constant cycle of spectacles rising and falling. The circus arrives and departs, the temple festival concludes, the factory is built, and individuals move from one stage to another, like the rich man's son joining the circus.

The tent itself becomes a powerful metaphor throughout the film. The act of erecting the tent, shown in careful detail early in the film, represents community creation, the collaborative work of transforming empty space into a structured environment where performance and community can occur. The film demonstrates Aravindan's ability to find universal themes in specific subjects, creating a work that is simultaneously a document of a particular place and time and a metaphorical exploration of fundamental human experiences. Like the circus tent it depicts, the film creates a temporary world that offers insights into larger realities, inviting viewers to see the extraordinary in the everyday and the universal in the particular.

***Kummatty* (1979): Folklore, Freedom, and the Transformation of Childhood**

Kummatty (1979) represents one of G. Aravindan's most accessible yet profoundly layered works, employing the framework of a traditional Kerala folklore tale to explore themes of childhood innocence, imagination, and the transformative power of freedom. The film's narrative centres on the titular character, Kummatty, a bogeyman figure from Kerala folklore who possesses magical powers to transform children into animals. Through this fantastical

premise, Aravindan creates a meditation on the nature of childhood, the relationship between humanity and nature, and the constraints imposed by social structures.

The character of Kummatty himself is crucial to the film's meaning. Neither fully benevolent nor malevolent, Kummatty represents the ambiguity of nature and the unknown. His magical powers can be read as metaphors for imagination and transformation, the capacity to see beyond the mundane reality of everyday existence. When the children are transformed into animals, they experience a kind of liberation from human constraints, able to move and perceive the world differently. This transformation can be understood as representing the imaginative freedom of childhood, the ability to inhabit other identities and perspectives that adults gradually lose.

Classification 1: The Two Realms of Existence – The Mythical and the Material

The film meticulously constructs two parallel worlds that constantly interact, the world of myth and imagination, and the world of material reality and routine.

The Mythical Realm: This is introduced through sound and suggestion. The film begins not with an image, but with a folk song about “the beginning of everything,” immediately grounding us in a timeless, oral tradition. Kummatty himself is first a whisper, a name children use to scare each other, a story told by the old granny. This realm is associated with nature, the vast skies, the open fields, the ancient temple pond, and the mysterious forest. It is a world where magic is possible, where songs can control the weather, and a wandering stranger can transform children into animals.

The Material Realm: This is the world of daily routine and modern education. We see Chindan brushing his teeth, his mother peeling vegetables, and the children going to school. In school, they learn about democracy, elections, and science (microbes and bacteria). This represents the structured, rational, and modern world that is slowly imposing itself on the village. Aravindan does not present these two realms as enemies. Instead, they overlap and inform each other. The lesson on bacteria connects to the shaman's exorcism and Kummatty's songs about disease spreading spirits, showing different cultural narratives explaining the same phenomena. The climax, where children are transformed into animals, is the ultimate fusion of these realms, where the mythical directly invades the material.

Classification 2: Kummatty as a Personification of Nature and Cycle

Kummatty is not a conventional villain or a saint, he is a symbolic force, closely aligned with the natural world and its cycles. **The Arrival and Departure:** His entrance into the village is like a seasonal change. He arrives with the dawn, singing an invocation to the primal forests, and his songs about the “Lord who arrives riding the elephant of dark clouds” directly reference the monsoon. His departure, walking into the darkening horizon, signifies the end of a season.

The Giver and The Taker: He brings joy, magic, and biscuits to the children, representing the abundance and creativity of nature. However, his magic also leads to Chindan's suffering, symbolizing how nature can be unpredictable and harsh. His eventual return after a year completes the cycle, bringing redemption and restoration, much like the return of spring or the rains after a long drought. The film grounds its fantasy in an agricultural society's worldview, where life is inherently cyclical. The post-harvest ritual of Kothamooriyattam that occurs in

the middle of the film reinforces this, connecting human celebration to the rhythms of the land. Kummatty is the embodiment of this cyclical rhythm, both benevolent and detached.

Classification 3: The Loss of Innocence and the Metaphor of Caging

The central narrative arc follows Chindan's journey, which serves as a metaphor for the loss of childhood innocence and the constraints of adulthood. Innocence as Freedom: The first half of the film is filled with images of freedom, children running through fields, Chindan releasing a caught fish back into the water, and the boundless sky. The children's lives, while simple, are unrestricted.

The conclusion of *Kummatty* (1979) offers a powerful and resonant resolution. When Kummatty returns, and Chindan is restored to his human form, it is not just a reversal of a spell. It is a moment of healing and reconciliation between the human and the natural, the imaginative and the real. The final act of the film is its most profound. Chindan, having experienced both the boundless freedom of childhood and the painful caging of his transformation, returns home and frees his parrot. This single action signifies a deep understanding. He has learned the value of freedom through its loss. The subsequent montage of numerous birds flying in different directions across the limitless sky is a final, poetic statement. The film argues that true maturity is not about abandoning imagination for the material world but about integrating the lessons of both. It is about understanding that life is a cycle of freedom and constraint, enchantment and disillusionment, and that the goal is to find one's own sky and soar, having known what it means to be caged. *Kummatty* (1979) remains a timeless masterpiece because it captures this universal human dilemma with unparalleled gentleness and poetic grace.

***Esthappan* (1980): Mysticism, Perception, and the Transcendence of Reality**

G. Aravindan's film *Esthappan* (1980) constructs its protagonist not through a linear plot, but through a mosaic of fragmented and often contradictory perspectives. These vignettes, presented by various members of a coastal Christian community, collectively build the enigmatic figure of Esthappan as a saint, a madman, a criminal, and a messianic figure.

The Mythic and Supernatural Figure Esthappan's mythic stature is established immediately, beginning with the almost miraculous image of him walking across the waves at twilight, described by fishermen as "the sun risen in the west". This supernatural identity is reinforced by later sightings, where he disappears after climbing a fort, only to reappear walking across the water. He is portrayed as a mystical trickster, famously fooling a policeman by transforming into a senior police officer to evade arrest, thus transcending earthly authority. Further emphasizing his divine or supernatural nature, he is depicted as a provider who conjures cookies from the emptiness of the sky for children, and he demonstrates invulnerability by drinking whiskey without becoming corrupted or drunk. The film also features a blatant allusion to Christ's resurrection when villagers find him hanging, apparently dead, only for him to resurrect, complaining that they disturbed his sleep. He ultimately serves as a guardian spirit of the sea, guiding fishermen past dangerous boundaries during storms. Challenging Societal and Economic Norms Esthappan functions as a spiritual guide, responding to inquiries with poetic, sermon-like verses, such as "He who has nothing has neither end nor beginning," echoing religious teachings. He actively rejects societal norms and institutional requirements. His idle, non-productive presence visibly irritates the factory owner, signifying his disruptive role within the modern economic structure. He also challenges conventional piety by

transgressing sacred taboos, such as when he was caught digging up a cemetery and playing with bones.

The Savior and the Transgressor Esthappan's character is defined by contradictions. He is accused by a lorry driver of being a criminal who stole bananas; however, he is also revealed to be a self-sacrificing figure who took the blame for a theft committed by a poor man, aligning him with Christ-like virtue. His acts of grace contrast sharply with community judgment, as seen when he was accused of visiting a sex worker but was actually there to heal her sick child. Other saving acts include rescuing the landlord's drowning child. Furthermore, he acts as a redistributor of wealth by giving money to the landlord's helpers, preventing a family's eviction, and demonstrating a critique of the economic system before his mysterious disappearance.

The film concludes by emphasizing its central theme, Esthappan is seen in multiple places simultaneously, an impossible phenomenon that defies rational explanation. The last shot is a panoramic view of the village that ends on Esthappan sleeping on a rock, parallel to the sea, creating the visual illusion that he is sleeping above the water, a final, serene image that encapsulates his enduring and enigmatic nature, suspended between the earthly and the divine. The narrative structure of *Esthappan* (1980) is deliberately fragmented and non-linear, reflecting the film's thematic concern with multiple perspectives and the impossibility of definitive knowledge. Rather than presenting a chronological life story, Aravindan constructs the film as a series of encounters, testimonies, and observations, approaching his protagonist from multiple angles without ever claiming complete understanding. This structural choice mirrors the film's philosophical stance: that reality, particularly the reality of exceptional individuals, cannot be reduced to a simple explanation or single perspective. These testimonies often contradict each other, some seeing him as a genuine mystic with divine powers, others as mentally disturbed, still others as a cunning charlatan. Aravindan refuses to adjudicate between these competing interpretations, instead presenting them as equally valid perspectives shaped by the observers' own beliefs, expectations, and limitations.

Cinematographer Shaji N Karun's camera work in *Esthappan* (1980) is distinctive for its observational quality and its use of natural light and settings. Many scenes are shot outdoors, in the village environments where Esthappan lived and moved. The camera maintains a respectful distance, observing rather than penetrating, acknowledging the mystery at the film's heart. Long takes allow viewers to observe Esthappan's movements and behaviours in real time, without the manipulation of editing that might suggest interpretation. This visual approach embodies the film's philosophical stance: we can observe and contemplate, but ultimate understanding may remain elusive.

Conclusion

G. Aravindan's contribution to cinema extends far beyond his relatively small filmography. In the four films examined in this study *Kanchana Sita* (1977), *Thampu* (1978), *Kummatty* (1979), and *Esthappan* (1980), we see a filmmaker who developed a distinctive cinematic language capable of addressing profound philosophical, social, and aesthetic questions while remaining accessible to audiences willing to engage with challenging material. His achievement lies not only in the individual quality of these films but in demonstrating the possibility of a cinema that is simultaneously modernist and traditional, locally rooted and universally relevant.

The unity in Aravindan's these four films stems from their profound alignment with prevailing circumstances and with nature. The essence of an Aravindan film lies in the way humans,

animals, the ocean, the forest, the sun, and all natural phenomena appear with an innate naturalness, without any theatricality or the ostentatious impression of constructing something new. Although the narrative milieu often represents a central myth, these myths are all grounded in the earth. In an era where anything and everything can become a myth, and myth itself becomes a commodity, a time when myths are exploited for political purposes. Aravindan's films reposition myth in relation to humanity and their natural environment.

Across these films, certain consistent features of Aravindan's cinematic language emerge. His commitment to minimalism in dialogue, narrative, and production design creates space for contemplation and active viewer engagement. Rather than providing elaborate exposition and explicit interpretation, his films offer images, sounds, and situations that viewers must actively interpret, constructing meaning through their own engagement with the material. This approach assumes an intelligent, patient audience willing to work with the film rather than passively consuming pre-digested content. The use of long takes and observational camera work represents another consistent feature. Aravindan's camera rarely imposes through dramatic framing, rapid editing, or manipulative camerawork. Instead, it observes patiently, allowing scenes to unfold in their own time and honoring the duration and integrity of the events being filmed. This approach has philosophical implications, suggesting a worldview that values patience, observation, and respect for the autonomous existence of things and people outside the filmmaker's control. Aravindan's use of non-professional actors constitutes another distinctive feature with both aesthetic and ethical dimensions. Non-professional actors bring authenticity and presence that trained actors might lack, resisting the artificiality and theatricality that can distance viewers from the material. This casting strategy also has democratic implications, giving voice and visibility to people who might otherwise remain invisible in mainstream cinema. It suggests that any life, any face, any story has dignity and interest worthy of cinematic attention. The relationship between myth and reality in Aravindan's work deserves particular emphasis. Rather than treating these as opposed categories, his films demonstrate how mythological and folkloric materials remain living resources for understanding contemporary experience. Whether adapting the Ramayana in *Kanchana Sita* (1977), drawing on bogeyman folklore in *Kummatty* (1979), or exploring Christian mysticism in *Esthappan* (1980), Aravindan shows how traditional cultural materials can be revitalized through cinema, offering fresh perspectives on perennial human concerns.

Nature occupies a privileged position throughout Aravindan's work. Unlike mainstream cinema that typically treats nature as mere backdrop or as resource to be exploited, Aravindan's films present nature as active presence, as living community with which humans exist in relationship. This ecological sensitivity, evident throughout the films examined in this study, has become increasingly relevant as environmental crises demand new ways of thinking about human relationships with the natural world.

Despite these achievements and continuing relevance, Aravindan's work remains relatively unknown outside Kerala and Indian art cinema circles. This limited recognition reflects broader patterns in world cinema, where non-Western art cinema often struggles for visibility and recognition in international contexts dominated by European and North American perspectives. Greater critical attention to Aravindan's work could contribute to more inclusive and diverse understandings of cinema's possibilities and histories.

Future research might explore several directions. Comparative studies examining Aravindan alongside international art cinema traditions could illuminate both his distinctive contributions and his affinities with broader movements. Systematic study of his influence on subsequent

generations of filmmakers could document his continuing impact. Technical studies examining his collaborations with cinematographers, sound designers, and composers could provide insight into the craft dimensions of his work. Theoretical analyses drawing on contemporary film theory, philosophy, and cultural studies could offer fresh perspectives on his enduring significance.

Aravindan's cinema acts as a mirror not only reflecting reality but also its illusions. He did not view cinema as a political weapon, nor did he believe that art should directly produce political awareness. Instead, his films speak of a deeper politics one rooted in human compassion and reverence for nature. "Kummatty comes like the seasons," he once said, "he represents spring." Likewise, Aravindan's films are like spring in our lives calling us back to our secrets, our irrational beliefs, and our place within the natural world. His question "Why can't we respect beauty in its purest form?" (Aravindan G., *The Ray* the came in from the south, 1985) remains a timeless invitation to see the world with wonder and humility.

In conclusion, G. Aravindan's cinema represents a significant achievement in world cinema, demonstrating the possibility of a filmmaking practice that is simultaneously traditional and modernist, local and universal, accessible and philosophically profound. The four films examined in this study *Kanchana Sita* (1977), *Thampu* (1978), *Kummatty* (1979), and *Esthappan* (1980) exemplify his mature vision and distinctive cinematic language. They remain vital works that continue to offer insights, provoke contemplation, and inspire filmmakers and audiences decades after their creation. In an era of accelerated change and increasing homogenization, Aravindan's patient, contemplative cinema offers an alternative rhythm and vision, inviting us to slow down, observe carefully, and engage deeply with the mysteries of human existence, society, and the natural world. His work stands as testament to cinema's capacity to be more than entertainment to be, instead, a form of philosophical inquiry, cultural preservation and innovation, and genuine artistic expression that honours both tradition and the possibilities of the cinematic medium.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

In the preparation of this manuscript, the author utilised DeepSeek AI-assistive technology for support in drafting, textual improvement, and proofreading. Used Google Notebook LM for reducing the words. The author assumes full responsibility for the final content, analysis, and conclusions presented.

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The Impact of Digital Marketing, Service Marketing and Service Delivery Factor Towards Consumer Buying Behavior in the Local E-commerce Industry

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Abstract

This study investigated the significant positive effects of Digital Marketing, Service Marketing, and Service Delivery on Consumer Buying Behavior in the e-commerce sector of Bangladesh. Employing a quantitative research design, data were collected via an online survey from 408 respondents. The findings from the Multiple Regression Analysis confirmed that all three factors have a statistically significant positive impact on consumer purchasing behavior ($p < 0.05$). Digital Marketing emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.534$), followed by Service Marketing ($\beta = 0.356$), and then Service Delivery ($\beta = 0.289$). The combined model explained a substantial 69.4% of the variance in consumer purchasing behavior ($R^2 = 0.694$). In conclusion, these results demonstrate that while Service Marketing and Service Delivery favorably influence online purchase decisions, Digital Marketing is the most critical factor for driving consumer purchasing behavior in Bangladesh's e-commerce industry. The study provides valuable strategic guidance for businesses operating in this market.

Keywords: digital marketing, service marketing, service delivery and consumer buying behavior

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Introduction

The Importance and Problem of the Study

Bangladesh's e-commerce industry has shown a rapid growth over the years with the introduction of internet adoption and smartphone usage. The e-commerce industry was estimated at over USD 6.9 billion in 2022, with projection indicating that it will reach USD 7.5 billion by 2024 with an annual growth of 8.33% (DataReportal, 2022). Two prolific online stores namely Daraz and Chaldaal.com has emerged as one of the leading online marketplaces in the country with Daraz focusing on variety of products and Chaldaal.com dominating the online grocery store market (DataReportal, 2022). The local e-commerce industry in Bangladesh is expected to grow more than USD 13.6 billion by 2028, representing a compound annual growth of 21.9% (Statista, 2023).

Digital marketing has changed the way companies and businesses communicate with consumers, impacting the decisions of purchasing in accordance with social media, search engine and personalized advertising (Kotler & Keller, 2016). There are numerous studies where it is mentioned how social media marketing impacts the purchasing intent of a consumer (Chaffey, 2019). Content marketing and influencer marketing has worked itself to build trust and credibility among online consumers (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Considering the local e-commerce industry, search engine optimization has played a significant role in the Bangladesh market in terms of retention of customers (Hossain & Rahman, 2020).

Service marketing mainly focuses on creating and delivering value highlighting customer relationship, brand trust and service experience (Zeithaml et al., 2018). In terms of e-commerce, elements such as customer support, individual recommendations and promotional offers transform consumer purchasing decisions (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011). Research recommends that proper tailoring of service marketing strategies empowers customer engagement and long-term retention (Gummesson, 2017). Moreover, in developing markets such as Bangladesh, trust mechanism plays a major role such as transparent and secured online transactions impacts consumer's confidence in online purchasing by making payment via the online channel (Hossain & Rahman, 2020).

Service delivery is another most important part in e-commerce businesses that refers to efficiency, reliability and quality before, during and after the service is delivered. Factors such as delivery time, return policy and customer support can significantly impacts the satisfaction of consumers and their buying behavior (Parasuraman et al., 1988). According to a study, it is mentioned that efficient delivery system is a crucial factor in retaining customers in e-commerce industry (Christopher, 2016). In the Bangladesh market, consumers often acknowledge convenient and secured online transaction with flexibility in payment options and customer support (Hossain & Rahman, 2020). Delay of shipments or delivery of wrong products often creates a barrier in the growth of e-commerce business in the emerging market (Haque & Akter, 2019).

In conclusion, Bangladesh's e-commerce industry is experiencing impressive growth, driven by increased internet adoption, smartphone usage, and the rising success of major online platforms like Daraz and Chaldaal.com. As the market continues to expand, reaching projected multibillion dollar figures in the coming years, understanding the key factors influencing consumer buying behavior becomes crucial. Digital marketing has emerged as a powerful tool in shaping purchasing decisions, with strategies like social media engagement,

content marketing, and search engine optimization playing vital roles in building consumer trust and loyalty. At the same time, service marketing enhances customer relationships through personalized offers, reliable support, and secure payment processes, especially significant in developing markets like Bangladesh. Additionally, effective service delivery, including timely shipments, flexible return policies, and responsive customer service, remains essential in ensuring customer satisfaction and repeat purchases. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how these three critical factors namely digital marketing, service marketing, and service delivery collectively impact consumer behavior in the evolving landscape of Bangladesh's e-commerce sector.

Research Problems

1. Does digital marketing factor (social media advertising, search engine optimization and content marketing) have an influence on consumer buying behavior on the local e-commerce industry of Bangladesh?
2. Does service marketing factor (customer relationship management, brand communication and promotional offers) have an influence on consumer buying behavior on the local e-commerce industry of Bangladesh?
3. Does service delivery factor (delivery time, customer support and return policy) have an influence on consumer buying behavior on the local e-commerce industry of Bangladesh?

Objectives of the Study

The main goal of this study is to explore and improve the impact of digital marketing, service marketing and service delivery on consumer buying behavior in the local e-commerce industry of Bangladesh. There are three main objectives that are outlined as:

1. To assess the impact of digital marketing factor social media advertising, search engine optimization and content marketing on consumer buying behavior.
2. To assess the impact service marketing factor customer relationship management, brand communication and promotional offers on consumer buying behavior.
3. To assess the impact of service delivery factor delivery time, customer support and return policy on consumer buying behavior.

Method of Study

This research involves quantitative research approach to examine the impact of digital marketing, service marketing and service delivery on consumer buying behavior in Bangladesh's e-commerce sector. A survey questionnaire was implemented and distributed to a sample of mostly online buyers across different demographic groups. The use of a single approach allows consistency in data collection and is more efficient in collecting insights from a large number of participants. This descriptive and statistical techniques layout measurable evidence on how digital marketing, service marketing, and service delivery experiences affect consumer buying behavior in the local e-commerce market.

Tools and Statistics Used

Survey tool: Online Google forms were distributed among participants to collect responses from the questionnaire. This particular tool helped in managing a large number of responses conveniently.

Statistical Software: The results from the survey was arranged in Excel first where it cleaned the data and created simple charts before outlining the statistical analysis.

Population and Sample

This study's demographic consists of Bangladeshi respondents who have purchased goods online using e-commerce platforms. This consists of people of all ages, genders, income levels, and geographic locations who routinely interact with digital marketing, service marketing, and service delivery methods in the local e-commerce industry.

For the sample, according to the Yamane table, with the total population size of over 100,000, a minimum of 400 samples is to be collected with a precision level of $\pm 5\%$ (Yamane, 1967). 408 respondents have been chosen utilizing an online survey using Google forms. This platform easily managed a huge sample size while ensuring reliable data collecting. Following the collection of responses, data was analyzed using statistical software. Excel was used for preliminary data cleaning and simple data visualization.

Benefits of the Research

This research will provide important benefits both academically and in workplaces specifically in the e-commerce industry in Bangladesh. At first, it will play a part in academic literature writing by providing observed evidence on the connection between digital marketing, service marketing, service delivery and consumer buying behavior in an emerging e-commerce market like Bangladesh. Secondly, the research will assist businesses especially in the e-commerce sector and digital marketers in the country by providing actionable insights. This study will help e-commerce businesses to tailor their strategies by identifying and analyzing the marketing factors that can the purchasing pattern of the consumers. Thirdly, lawmakers and regulatory bodies will benefit from this research as it will help gain a more extensive knowledge of consumer behavior in the e-commerce industry. The findings will create opportunities to develop new policies in the e-commerce business targeted to improve marketing practices and gaining trust of consumers in online shopping.

Limitations of the Research

This research has some limitations that should be noted. Firstly, the data collected from the survey is completely the respondent's own answers which may not fully show the real involvement of their buying pattern. Furthermore, it may not be possible to do large surveys and include different e-commerce platforms due to the limited time. Lastly, the research may not fully account for external factors such as changes in the economy and cultural differences which could influence customer purchasing behavior in the local market.

Literature Review

The e-commerce industry in Bangladesh has been on the rise for the past decade which is steered largely by the use of internet and the usage of smart devices (Hossain & Rahman, 2020). In accordance with a report by Statista (2023), the country's e-commerce market earnings are estimated to multiply at an annual rate of 14.2%, foregrounding its hefty upward trajectory. Additionally, initiatives from the government such as "Digital Bangladesh" have further smoothed the growth of online businesses in the country (Hossain & Rahman, 2020).

Therefore, the e-commerce industry has transformed from a niche sector to an accepted shopping channel for millions of consumers in Bangladesh (Statista, 2023).

Digital marketing is one of the key elements for the successful growth of e-commerce by assisting businesses reach more audience at an affordable cost when compared to the traditional marketing methods (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In Bangladesh, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok are widely used for promotions, with over 44 million Facebook users recorded in 2022 (DataReportal, 2022). Social Media marketing, content marketing and search engine optimization are the most essential tools for e-commerce platforms when it comes to engaging with consumers and driving online purchases (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Accordingly, businesses that can imply the digital marketing strategies effectively are most likely to experience a growth of brand awareness and customer loyalty (Hossain & Rahman, 2020).

Service Marketing is another key element of the Bangladesh e-commerce industry which highlights the marketing of abstract product and customer service experience (Payne & Frow, 2017). As there is no physical interaction during online transactions, service marketing plays a role in bridging this gap in building trust, transparency and customer support (Zeithaml et al., 2018). The effectiveness of service marketing can ensure customer retention and repeat buying behavior by enhancing customer satisfaction (Solomon, 2018).

In addition, service delivery factors such as on-time delivery, quality assurance and effective customer support can impact the customer buying behavior in the e-commerce industry of the country (Haque & Akter, 2019). Customers often demand fast delivery system and accuracy in order fulfillment when they purchase from online platforms (Ahmed & Karim, 2020). A study by Alam and Jahan (2021), it is noticed that delayed delivery time and inconsistency in description of product can lead to negative feedbacks and eventually a loss of trust from the consumers. As a result, leading e-commerce businesses in Bangladesh invest heavily on the logistics infrastructure, quality control and after sales service to keep up with the consumer trust and growth of the business in the long run (Hossain & Rahman, 2020).

Results

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Results
<i>Digital Marketing</i>	3.02	0.455	Neutral
<i>Service Marketing</i>	3.06	0.446	Neutral
<i>Service Delivery</i>	3.07	0.462	Neutral
<i>Consumer Buying Behavior</i>	3.14	0.434	Neutral

The mean of all three digital marketing factors is 3.02 (neutral) and standard deviation is 0.455. The mean of all three service marketing factors is 3.06 (neutral) and standard deviation is 0.446. The mean of all three service delivery factors is 3.07 (neutral) and standard deviation is 0.462. The mean of all three consumer buying behavior factors is 3.14 (neutral) and standard deviation is 0.434.

Hypotheses Results

There were three hypotheses proposed in this study:

Hypothesis 1: Digital marketing has a significant positive effect on consumer buying behavior. All three sub-variables—social media advertising, SEO, and content marketing were statistically significant.

Hypothesis 2: Service marketing significantly influences consumer buying behavior. CRM and promotional offers had significant impact, while brand communication did not.

Hypothesis 3: Service delivery significantly impacts consumer buying behavior. All sub-variables—delivery time, customer support, and return policy—were significant.

Discussion

Digital marketing demonstrated a statistically significant positive effect on consumer buying behavior, supported by an Adjusted R^2 value of 0.263. This indicates that approximately 26.3% of the variation in consumer buying behavior can be explained by digital marketing variables - namely social media advertising, search engine optimization (SEO), and content marketing. Among these, SEO had the strongest impact ($\beta = 0.312$), followed by content marketing ($\beta = 0.203$) and social media advertising ($\beta = 0.142$). The relatively strong contribution of SEO highlights that Bangladeshi consumers place considerable trust in search engine rankings when choosing where to shop online. This is consistent with Jansen and Spink (2006), who found that users are more likely to engage with top search results, perceiving them as more credible. Similarly, Haque and Akter (2020) reported that Bangladeshi e-commerce businesses investing in SEO enjoy greater consumer trust and higher conversion rates. While content marketing also positively influences trust and engagement—especially when it offers valuable product information or educational content—social media advertising had a weaker, though still significant, effect. Previous research confirms this trend, noting that Bangladeshi consumers often perceive targeted ads as less persuasive unless supported by relevant and authentic content (Duffett, 2015; Hossain & Rahman, 2020).

Service marketing also had a meaningful impact, with an Adjusted R^2 value of 0.260, explaining 26% of the variance in consumer buying behavior. Customer relationship management (CRM) and promotional offers were statistically significant, while brand communication was not. This finding indicates that consumers in Bangladesh value personalized service and tangible incentives over general brand messages. Studies on CRM in South Asian markets confirm that personalized offers and loyalty programs foster customer trust and repeat purchases (Payne & Frow, 2017). Promotional offers—such as discounts, coupons, and bundled deals—were especially attractive in this study, and past findings support this observation, as limited-time deals and seasonal discounts significantly increase consumer purchase frequency in Bangladesh (Alam & Jahan, 2021; Statista, 2023). However, brand communication, though important in long-term branding, may lack immediate influence on consumer behavior unless integrated with value-based service strategies. Similar conclusions were drawn by Rahman and Sultana (2019), who noted that Bangladeshi consumers respond more favorably to promotions and CRM than to generic brand campaigns.

Among the three models, service delivery had the highest explanatory power, with an Adjusted R^2 value of 0.294, meaning that 29.4% of the variation in consumer buying behavior is explained by delivery time, customer support, and return policy. This suggests that service delivery is the most dominant factor influencing consumers in the local e-commerce market. Delivery time was the most influential sub-variable ($\beta = 0.320$), reinforcing the critical role of fast and timely delivery in customer satisfaction and repeat

purchases. This is consistent with findings from Hossain and Rahman (2020), who observed that delayed deliveries are a primary source of dissatisfaction among Bangladeshi online shoppers. Return policies also had a significant influence ($\beta = 0.180$), highlighting the importance of reducing perceived risk in online transactions through clear and flexible return options. Research by Janakiraman et al. (2016) confirmed that transparent return policies encourage online shopping by minimizing uncertainty. Customer support ($\beta = 0.137$), while slightly less impactful, still plays a major role in post-purchase satisfaction and issue resolution, which are critical in retaining consumers and managing service failures (Zeithaml et al., 2018).

The Adjusted R^2 values for all three regression models fall within a moderate range, suggesting that while digital marketing, service marketing, and service delivery are significant predictors, there are likely additional variables (e.g., price sensitivity, product variety, brand trust, peer reviews, economic factors) that also contribute to consumer buying behavior but were not included in this study. Similar conclusions were drawn by Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019) and Solomon (2018), who emphasized that consumer behavior is multifactorial, often shaped by both marketing-related and contextual variables. Nevertheless, the results clearly show that operational reliability (service delivery), targeted engagement (CRM), and online visibility (SEO) are key strategic areas for e-commerce businesses seeking to influence and retain Bangladeshi consumers.

Conclusion

While this study provides significant insights into the impact of digital marketing, service marketing, and service delivery on consumer buying behavior in Bangladesh's e-commerce sector, it also opens up several avenues for future research. First, future researchers could incorporate additional variables such as pricing strategy, peer reviews, website usability, brand image, or influencer marketing to develop a more holistic understanding of the factors that affect consumer decisions in the online marketplace. These elements were outside the scope of this study but could yield valuable insights into evolving digital consumer behavior.

Second, while this research utilized a quantitative approach for broader generalizability, future studies may benefit from employing qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups. Such methods would provide a deeper understanding of the psychological motivations, emotional responses, and decision-making processes behind consumers' interactions with e-commerce platforms. Combining both qualitative and quantitative methods (a mixed-methods approach) could enhance the richness and applicability of future findings.

Moreover, this study primarily targeted a general population sample across Bangladesh. Future research could consider a comparative analysis between urban and rural consumers to determine if there are significant behavioral differences based on geography, access to infrastructure, or digital literacy levels. Similarly, researchers might explore platform-specific studies—such as comparing consumer behavior on Daraz, Chaldal, or other niche e-commerce platforms—to assess how platform design and business models influence customer decisions.

Another important area would be to assess the longitudinal impact of these factors over time. As consumer habits continue to evolve and technology advances, it would be useful to understand whether the same variables remain influential in future years. Finally, future

research could explore the post-COVID-19 shift in digital shopping behavior, analyzing whether pandemic-era habits have permanently transformed consumer expectations and preferences.

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Representation and Othering of Domestic Female Migrant Workers on Social Media: A Case Study on Taiwanese Employers' Facebook Group

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Abstract

This research delved into the current representation and othering phenomenon of domestic migrant workers (DMWs) by social media users in an open Taiwanese Facebook group – [I am an employer] Migrant Employers Exchange Forum (MEEF, [我是雇主] 移工雇主交流園地) by adopting a mixed-methods approach that combines elements of content analysis to decipher coding categories and the connotations from textual analysis to analyze the chosen texts. By also referring to the research framework of Hans J Ladegaard (2022), this research presented to the academia with a refined research framework in which both topics discussed and representation strategies used by potential or current employers of DMWs in this group were displayed. One of the most significant findings of this research can be attributed to the intersectionality between different strategies that were adopted by users in a single post or thread, which is something that past research has failed to present. The intersectional characteristic of the discourse also implied that important players such as gender, sexuality, race, and capital in the realm of DMWs were often intertwined and inseparable from each other when this kind of discourse was built.

Keywords: domestic migrant worker, employer, representation, othering, social media

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Introduction

In January 2023, there were about 621,000 migrant workers in Taiwan (National Immigration Agency, 2023). According to Cheng (2016), nearly half of the migrant workers in Taiwan are female, who mainly work at locals' homes or nursing institutions. However, the phenomenon of migrant workers' contracts often being short-term provided an opportunity for the general society to neglect the abusive situation (Piper, 2010).

Despite the abusive situation, there is very little research that delves into the representation phenomenon of migrants/migrant workers on social media compared to that on traditional media. Very little existing research is directly targeted at this area (e.g., Ho, 2020; Hans J Ladegaard, 2022), and no similar study has been conducted in a Taiwanese context.

Given the research gap and the fact that Taiwan has gradually become one of the biggest receiving countries for Southeast Asian migrant workers, it is necessary and important to explore this topic.

Literature Review

When reviewing past research, it is found that qualitative research dealing with the othering phenomenon of migrant workers barely exists, especially in a Taiwanese context. Existing literature can mainly be divided into two categories: how migrant workers were portrayed on social media during disastrous events (Sharma & Agnimitra, 2020) and how employers adopted various othering strategies to portray migrant workers' image negatively on social media (Ho, 2020; Ladegaard, 2022). Setting the research context in India during the pandemic era, Sharma and Agnimitra (2020) discovered great differences between the method adopted by traditional media to portray migrant workers and the way social media users. Since traditional media emphasized more on the migrants' victimhood and their status as migrants instead of workers, their rights as workers were neglected, and the narration also contributed to the stigmatization and othering of these workers. In contrast, social media in this case was considered more "dynamic, vibrant and discursive" in the sense that it brought a lively discussion between the citizens, employers, and the governments through its interactive and unrestrained characteristics, but because of its nature as a digital stratosphere, the effect of citizen participation was restricted. (Sharma & Agnimitra, 2020, pp. 160–161).

In contrast, Ho (2020) and Ladegaard (2022) set their research targets as the othering and representation phenomenon of migrant workers in Hong Kong on social media, but their research results differed greatly from those of Sharma and Agnimitra (2020). Migrant workers in Hong Kong are mainly from Indonesia and the Philippines, of which more than 60% are women working as domestic helpers who are allegedly suffering from inadequate payment, accommodation, and day-offs, and are also entitled to several kinds of physical and verbal abuse (Ladegaard, 2022; Lai & Fong, 2020). Although employers sometimes illustrated their helpers as positive figures providing the family with food and motherly care, more often they are described as disobedient employees unwilling to show their gratitude (Ho, 2020). By analyzing the social media posts from an open Facebook Group consisting of employers of domestic helpers, Ladegaard (2022) demonstrated that there are mainly three kinds of othering strategies that employers adopted, including shaming, referring to aspersion and personal insults through the usage of "language of disgust" (Every, 2013, p. 674), racist attacks, referring to discrepancy based on race and nationality used to defame migrant workers (Augoustinos & Every, 2007), and other forms of demeaning discourses, referring to the

assumed moral inferiority of migrant workers used by employers to justify the former's marginalized status, that is, firing them or hindering them from future employment (Ladegaard, 2022).

In his research, Ladegaard (2022) also found that a number of the posts adopting racist-attack strategies carried gendered characteristics. For example, female migrant workers were attacked particularly for assumed conduct such as dating, being pregnant, and carrying STDs, and this complexity between race and gender in the online othering strategy thus served as a research path that deserved more attention.

Research Questions

With the othering strategies commonly used by employers proposed by Ladegaard (2022) as the analytical framework, including othering and shaming, othering and racialization, and othering and morality, this research hopes to enrich the existing research on the representation phenomenon of DMWs in the Taiwanese social media sphere. Under a Taiwanese social context, this research also looks forward to solve three research questions:

- (1) What kind of othering strategies are adopted in a Taiwanese context and how are the discourses of those strategies constructed?
- (2) Compared to the three othering strategies proposed by Ladegaard (2022), are there any different strategies used by Taiwanese employers, especially when the focus is on female migrant workers?
- (3) Since gender, sexuality, race, and capital are all important concepts and intersectional in the domain of DMW's representation, how are they represented respectively in Taiwanese employers' discourse on social media then?

Research Method

To better analyze the discourse created by Taiwanese employers to represent DMWs in the open Facebook group, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach of both content analysis and textual analysis as research methods. The researcher's decision to adopt a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods stems from the characteristics of both approaches. While content analysis is useful in this research to help decipher and infer the main categories of topics discussed and strategies used by the employers from the original text, textual analysis serves as a crucial tool to explore the hidden meanings, intentions, and power relations behind the text. With the adoption of both methods, the research ensured the completeness necessary to fully analyze the chosen texts, which is not possible when only one method is used.

Data Collection

All the social media posts and threads attached to them related to female migrant workers were retrieved from the open Facebook group called [I am an employer] Migrant Employers Exchange Forum (MEEF, [我是雇主] 移工雇主交流園地).

Research timeline for the posts was set from January 7th, 2022, to July 6th, 2023, and for their threads from January 7th, 2022, to August 16th, 2023. The research collected 29 posts and their 776 threads in total by setting the searching keywords as “女” (female) or “懷孕” (pregnant) to analyze the discussion among the two main themes.

To analyze the 29 posts and their 776 threads collected, all the data underwent a systematic numbering and coding procedure, but because of space limitations, the codebook will not be included in this paper.

Findings

Topics Discussed

Topics Discussed in Posts

Among the 29 posts collected in this research, 9 out of the total 12 topic categories were found in the post discourse. In Table 1, the category of Finding a job for a helper accounted for the highest percentage among all the topics, with 34%, followed by Questions about terms of employment with 17%, Complaints about DMWs with 10%, and Sharing of current policies also with 10% (see Table 1).

Table 1

Counts and Percentages of Each Topic Discussed in Posts

Topics discussed in posts	Counts	Percentage
Complaints about current policies	2	7%
Complaints about DMWs	3	10%
Finding a job for a helper	10	34%
Questions about terms of employment	5	17%
Sharing of current policies	3	10%
Sharing of news articles	1	3%
Sharing of questionnaires	1	3%
Revealing information of unqualified DMWs	2	7%
Finding a helper for an employer	2	7%
Sum	29	100%

Topics Discussed in Threads

Among the 776 threads attached to the 29 posts analyzed in the previous section, 11 out of the total 12 topic categories were found to be discussed. In this section, the percentage of each topic discussed was calculated to the first decimal digit to prevent some of the categories from being calculated as zero. Unlike in posts, where the topic discussed the most is finding a job for a helper, still oriented toward a factual narrating style, the topic discussed the most in threads is mainly covered by Complaints about DMWs, with a percentage of 37.0% (see Table 2).

Table 2*Counts and Percentages of Each Topic Discussed in Threads*

Topics discussed in threads	Counts	Percentage
Asking people to repost	1	0.1%
Complaints about agents	66	8.6%
Complaints about current policies	126	16.2%
Complaints about DMWs	287	37.0%
Finding a helper for an employer	1	0.1%
Finding a job for a helper	12	1.5%
N/A	8	1.0%
Questions about terms of employment	235	30.3%
Revealing information of unqualified DMWs	29	3.7%
Sharing of current policies	2	0.3%
Sharing of questionnaires	8	1.0%
Sum	776	100.0%

As presented in the two tables, it can be clearly concluded that although in posts, the topics usually deal with questions and facts, there is a tendency in threads to lead the topics to have more complaining content.

Strategies Used to Represent DMWs

Strategies Used to Represent DMWs in Posts

Among all the 29 posts collected in this research, 7 out of the 10 strategy categories used to represent DMWs were found in the discourse (see Table 3). In this section, the research calculated the percentage of each category by using the counts as numerators and the number of posts, 29, as the denominator.

The reason for this research to not use the number of all strategies' total counts as the denominator is because the calculation intends to know the actual frequency of each strategy that appeared in posts, not just portion of one strategy among all the strategy categories, and the same logic is applied to the section discussing about strategies used to represent DMWs in threads as well.

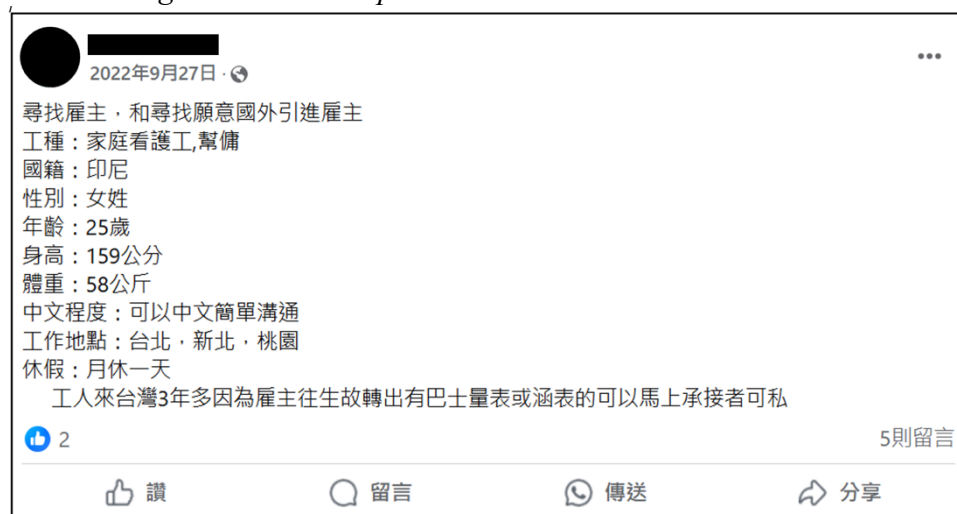
As presented in Table 3, the category with the highest counts in posts is Non-othering and neutral representation, with a percentage of 38%, followed by Othering and shaming (21%), Othering and criticizing the government (17%), Othering and genderization (14%), Othering and racialization (7%), and Non-othering and positive representation (3%).

Table 3*Counts and Percentage of Each Strategy Used to Represent DMWs in Posts*

Strategies used to represent DMWs in posts	Counts	Percentage (x/29+%)
Non-othering and positive representation	1	3%
Othering and criticizing the government	5	17%
Othering and shaming	6	21%
Othering and racialization	2	7%
Non-othering and neutral representation	11	38%
Othering and genderization	4	14%
Othering and sexual morality	1	3%

Non-othering and Neutral Representation

In the category Non-othering and neutral representation, the content of the posts usually presented DMWs as common people, with a neutral description of these workers. This kind of representation usually happened when the employers were finding a job for their helpers or when employers were looking for helpers for themselves (see Figure 1).

Figure 1*Non-othering and Neutral Representation*

Othering and Shaming

Moving on to the second largest category with a percentage of 21%, Othering and shaming, however, it usually involved direct attacks on DMWs owing to some allegedly unacceptable behavior such as not doing enough amount of the housework, quitting the job in advance, or running away (see Figure 2).

As displayed in Figure 2, the employer started her post by straightly attacking her previous DMW and referring to her as “a lousy foreign maid” (爛外傭), with perceived sufficient reasons to justify the shaming of the worker, such as not fulfilling the agreed-upon job responsibilities (講好的工作內容都沒做), speaking rudely (說話沒大沒小), loving to lie (愛

說謊), having a bad temper (脾氣不好), talking endlessly on the phone (電話講不停), and recording videos and audio to falsely accuse the employer.

In Taiwan, since the names “foreign maid” (外傭) and “foreign labor” (外勞) have long been attached with a negative and stigmatized image for DMWs, the power relation between a maid and a mistress of the house was further strengthened, justifying the action of shaming from the employer’s side.

Figure 2

Othering and Shaming



Translation:

My family previously had a lousy foreign maid; the agreed-upon job responsibilities were not done, she spoke rudely, loved to lie, had a bad temper, talked endlessly on the phone, and would even record videos and audio to falsely accuse the employer. Everyone, please be cautious. Passport number: xxxxxx, Name: xxx xxx, 27 years old, Indonesian. This domestic helper was taken on by a female employer surnamed You in central Taiwan on April 19. Please be careful.

Othering and Criticizing the Government

The category that took third place in terms of percentage is Othering and criticizing the government, with a rate of 17%.

After the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government, the current ruling party of Taiwan, took office, it implemented more migrant-worker-friendly policies. Thus, the employers attempted to portray the DMWs, along with the DPP government’s favoring of them, as the “them” group, and the employers, who had to bear the consequences they caused, as the “us” group.

In this example, the condition of DMWs' running away was linked to the non-action of the Ministry of Labor under the DPP government, with the words “doing nothing” (擺爛) and “being incapable” (失能), and the two were then otherized together (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Othering and Criticizing the Government

2022年7月27日 · 🌐

政府的管理單位到底要擺爛到何時？
 2022/4/19 移民署統計數據：
 總計失聯移工 61,435
 家庭看護失聯移工 30,132
 2022/7/20 移民署統計數據：
 總計失聯移工 70,331
 家庭看護失聯移工 31,792
 勞動部還要失能多久？

程式代號：IM03182P
統計年月：202206

內政部移民署
失聯移工按職業別統計表

製表單位：移民署移民資
製表日期：2022/07/20
頁次：1

區 籍		看護工	家庭看護	製造業	營造業	漁工	農、林、牧或 漁獵業移工	農林牧工	外派製造工	其他	總計
印尼	男	159	0	2,593	110	1,556	0	1	0	12	4,431
	女	21,545	112	409	0	3	0	1	0	11	22,081
越南	男	378	0	25,644	658	768	74	65	0	156	27,743
	女	7,789	27	4,219	3	2	17	12	0	115	12,184
菲律賓	男	34	1	348	1	179	0	0	0	4	567
	女	1,825	11	118	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,954
泰國	男	19	0	932	170	3	0	0	0	33	1,157
	女	43	0	164	0	0	2	0	0	4	213
馬來西亞	男	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	女	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
合計	男	590	1	29,518	939	2,506	74	66	0	205	33,899
	女	31,202	150	4,910	3	5	19	13	0	130	36,432
總 計		31,792	151	34,428	942	2,511	93	79	0	335	70,331

👍👎🗨️ 38

18則留言 3次分享

👍 讚 🗨️ 留言 📧 傳送 ➦ 分享

Translation:

“When will the government management agencies stop shirking their responsibilities?”

Immigration Agency Statistics as of 2022/4/19:

“Total missing migrant workers: 61,435.”

“Missing migrant caregivers: 30,132.”

Immigration Agency Statistics as of 2022/7/20:

“Total missing migrant workers: 70,331.”

“Missing migrant caregivers: 31,792.”

“How much longer will the Ministry of Labor remain ineffective??”

Strategies Used to Represent DMWs in Threads

Among all the 776 threads collected in this research, all ten categories were found in this discourse. The categories taking the first four places went to Non-othering and neutral representation with a percentage of 28%, Othering and shaming with 22%, Othering and racialization with 19%, and Othering and criticizing the government with 18%, only 1% away from the previous category (see Table 4).

Table 4

Counts and Percentages of Each Strategy Used to Represent DMWs in Threads

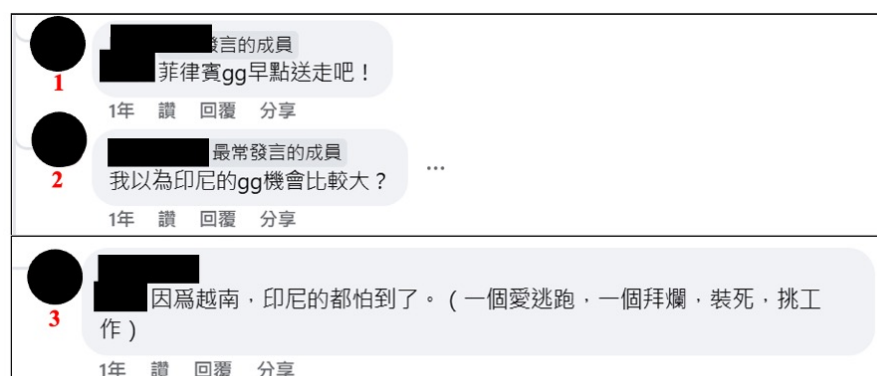
Strategies used to represent DMWs in posts	Counts	Percentage (x/776+%)
N/A	8	1%
Non-othering and neutral representation	219	28%
Non-othering and positive representation	12	2%
Othering and blaming agents	74	10%
Othering and racialization	150	19%
Othering and comforting other employers	31	4%
Othering and criticizing the government	136	18%
Othering and sexual morality	59	8%
Othering and shaming	174	22%
Othering and genderization	8	1%

Othering and Racialization

One example of Othering and racialization can be found in some of the threads from a post asking people what to do when his/her DMW argued to go back home after two days of her arrival (see Figure 4).

Even when the post did not mention the nationality of the assumed problematic DMW, the three threads directly attacked the worker's ethnicity and overgeneralized it as the main cause for the poster's problems, concluding that the employer should send the worker away.

With the oversimplified narration, workers from both countries were framed into particular stigmatized stereotypes in which their personalities and behaviors were assumed to be completely corresponding to their nationalities.

Figure 4*Othering and Racialization Case Three***Translation:**

Thread 1: “Filipino workers meant game over, send them away earlier!”

Thread 2: “I thought Indonesian workers had a bigger chance to game over?”

Thread 3: “I am scared because of both Vietnamese and Indonesian (workers); one loves to run away, the other is lazy, pretends to be dead, and picks work.”

Othering and Sexual Morality

Being the sixth largest category among the threads, Othering and sexual morality was one of the most attacking strategies among all, with employers often targeting at the sexuality of DMWs and adapting othering strategies used to assault the female gender in general to the context of DMWs.

As displayed in Figure 5, the post shared a current policy of how DMWs can apply for a suspension of being transferred out by the employers once found pregnant (see Example 5).

In the first and second threads, the opposing opinions of the employers toward DMWs’ pregnancy was first put forward with the first thread sarcastically saying “can the employer find someone else immediately then? Or he/she just has to cook sesame oil chicken (for her)” (那雇主可以馬上找人嗎！還是要煮麻油雞).

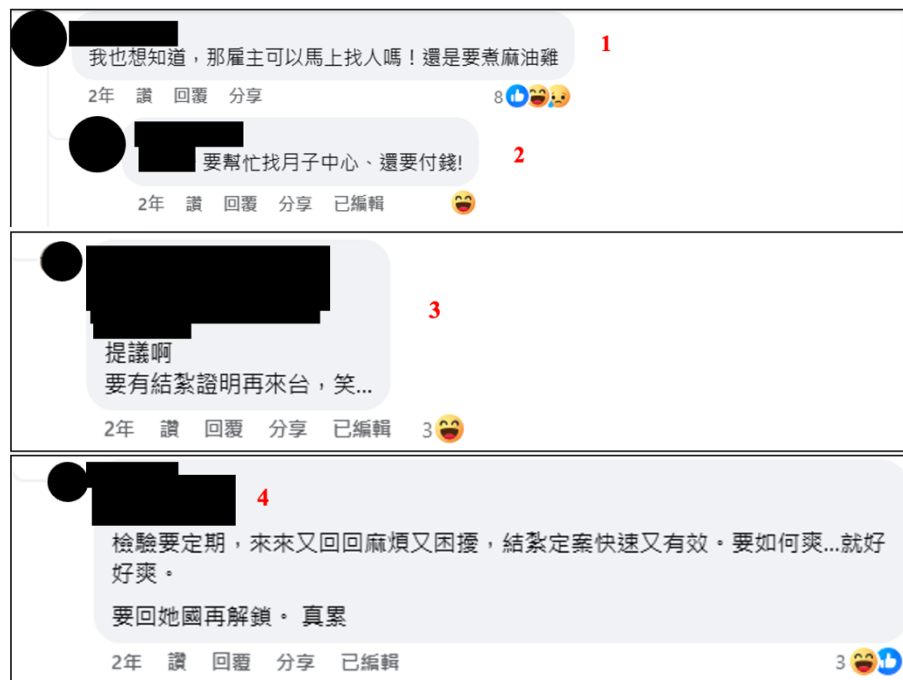
Under the Taiwanese context, sesame oil chicken is a dish in which the chicken is cooked with seasonings such as rice wine and sesame oil, and is often offered to postpartum women to help them recover. Therefore, by making a comparison between hiring someone immediately and cooking sesame oil chicken, the user implied that if the policy forbids the employer from firing the DMW once pregnant, then the employer will simply be stuck with a pregnant worker, assumed to be useless and needing extra care because of pregnancy.

In the third and fourth threads, the users brought up the topic proposing that all DMWs should be ligatured before coming to Taiwan, as Taiwanese government already abolished the regulation of testing whether DMWs carry STDs or are pregnant upon arrival.

By proposing the idea of ligaturing DMWs, the discourse again proved that to Taiwanese employers, the sexuality and lust of DMWs were undesirable and unwanted. In Taiwan, gender equality and women's body autonomy are common concepts among all other gender topics and are also considered familiar to most of the Taiwanese. However, with the way the users built their discourse, the autonomy and freedom that Taiwanese women enjoyed now did not automatically apply to migrant women, and were forbidden instead.

Figure 5

Othering and Sexual Morality



Translation:

Thread 1: “I want to know too—can the employer find someone else immediately then? Or he/she just has to cook sesame oil chicken (for her)?”

Thread 2: “We will have to help look for a postpartum center and even pay for her!”

Thread 3: “Here’s a suggestion: require proof of ligaturing before they (DMWs) are allowed to to Taiwan. lol...”

Thread 4: “Sexually transmitted disease testing has to be done regularly, and the constant back-and-forth is such a hassle and burden. Sterilization would be a quick and effective solution.”

Discussion

In this section, I wanted to respond to the main research questions proposed earlier.

Othering Strategies Adopted

For the first question, as mentioned previously, the representation strategies used the most by employers in posts are Non-othering and neutral representation (38%), Othering and shaming (21%), Othering and criticizing the government (17%), and Othering and genderization (14%). As for threads, strategies frequently used are Non-othering and neutral representation (28%), Othering and shaming (22%), Othering and racialization (19%), and Othering and criticizing the government (18%).

Judging first from a descriptive statistics point of view, it can be seen that a rather neutral representation accounted for about one-third of all the strategies used in both posts and threads, showing the neutral side in the discourse of some employers asking factual questions or making fair descriptions of DMWs.

Aside from the neutral representation, the strategies used the most in posts and threads are Othering and shaming, Othering and criticizing the government, Othering and genderization, and Othering and racialization.

The fact of both Othering and shaming and Othering and criticizing the government together taking up 38% and 40% in posts and threads, respectively, however, showcased a tendency of the othering strategies favored by most of the Taiwanese employers in the Facebook group.

New Strategies Found in This Research

For the second question, when reviewing the three othering strategies proposed by Ladegaard (2022), which are Othering and shaming, Othering and racialization, and Othering and morality, it can be found that different strategies used exclusively by Taiwanese employers did exist. These strategies included Othering and criticizing the government, Othering and genderization, Othering and comforting other employers, Othering and blaming agents, Non-othering and neutral representation, and Non-othering and positive representation.

How Gender, Sexuality, Race, and Capital Were Represented in the Chosen Discourse

To answer this question, it is important to address the question in two different aspects. The first aspect pointed to the fact that for gender, sexuality, and race, corresponding strategies for each concept were spotted in Taiwanese employers' discourse in the open Facebook group, which are Othering and genderization, Othering and sexual morality, and Othering and racialization. With different operational definitions, each strategy functioned to attack on one side of DMW's otherness at one time. Moreover, during the othering process, capital also played an important role.

Judging from a macro point of view, the differences of capital power lying in between Taiwan and those countries from which most of the DMWs came led to the first layer of othering, framing these workers as the outgroup members. Later, with DMWs' identity as workers belonging to the subordinate position in the employer-worker hierarchy, DMWs' second-class image with limited capital power and mobility was further strengthened as the second layer of othering.

Thus, when capital interacted with the other elements, such as gender, sexuality, and race in the othering process of DMWs, it is observed that this kind of process is usually complicated

with different elements intertwined with each other, making every one of them nearly inseparable from each other.

On the other hand, the other more interesting aspect, as presumed in the research question, is that the mixed and overlapping use of these strategies was commonly observed in the employers' discourse. When analyzing the relation between strategies used in posts and threads, not only a change of the strategies used can be found, but also an intersectionality of the strategies adopted in a single thread responding to the post. In many of the cases displayed, the mixed use of over one othering strategy at one time effectively increased the complexity of each discourse.

Conclusion

Significant Findings

Compared with the most recent study by Ladegaard (2022) on the representation of DMWs by employers in Hong Kong on social media, some important and new aspects observed in this research is that for Taiwanese employers, 1) different and new othering strategies were used because of different social and political context; 2) the complexity of the Taiwanese discourse seemed to be higher with the adoption of multiple strategies at one time.

As mentioned in the previous section, in this research, new strategies used to represent DMWs on social media that has never been proposed by existing research included Othering and criticizing the government, Othering and genderization, Othering and comforting other employers, Othering and blaming agents, Non-othering and neutral representation, and Non-othering and positive representation.

With the identification of these new categories, even when Taiwan and Hong Kong were both Asian countries with a similar population composition in terms of ethnicity, it can be inferred that, with a different social and political background, the representation and narrating style of DMWs can be very different in different countries.

Second, while in the research of Ladegaard (2022), DMWs were often negatively portrayed and targeted with one strategy and one aspect at one time; in this research, an intersectional characteristic can be found in the discourse built up by Taiwanese employers. Under the Taiwanese context, with the slightly higher protection for DMWs from the government compared with other countries (Rich et al., 2022) because of the more friendly attitude from the ruling party DPP, the othering strategies were not limited to individual behaviors anymore, but toward the government, the agents, and basically the society as a whole.

In the discourse built by Taiwanese employers, blame of different parties and players in the DMW domain can usually be found. As in the research of Ladegaard (2022), personal insults and blaming of DMWs themselves for various reasons were clearly presented; this research displayed a similar phenomenon, but also with the resentful narrating style specifically belonging to the Taiwanese discourse.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of this research is not being able to present a complete picture of the social media landscape regarding how DMWs were represented online in Taiwan. Although

different kinds of voices speaking for migrant workers' rights or appealing to the public's empathy for these workers do exist, they could not be included in this research because of the limitations of the research scale. While this research might be a stepping stone for future research regarding the social media representation phenomenon of Southeast Asian migrant workers, I strongly encourage future research to choose a Facebook fan page or group with a positive narrating style to explore how those accounts constructed their representation of migrant workers in contrast to the one chosen in this research.

During the analysis phase, when comparing the frequency of both topics discussed and strategies used in posts and threads, some patterns in which certain kinds of topics discussed possibly lead to certain types of strategies used were observed. However, while the nature of this research's method is a mixed one that is slightly oriented toward the qualitative path, the more advanced statistical analysis techniques could not be applied due to space limitations. Thus, if future research decides to set their scope as similar to this one, a more statistical research method can be adopted to provide readers with the correlations between topics discussed and representation strategies used by employers on social media.

The very last limitation lies in this research is the choosing of the target country in which the discourse was taking place. As the political environment in Taiwan is now considered to be rather friendly to DMWs with regulations loosening compared to the past, the policies in other countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and South Korea, dealing with this area can differ greatly, and might have a great influence on how discourse around this area is constructed. Therefore, I also encouraged future research to set their research scope across the Asian countries that are adopting or about to adopt the system of hiring DMWs in their countries, so as to see if different social and political environments can lead to a diversified representation of these workers.

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Bridging the Digital Divide: Enhancing Elderly Legal Literacy for Digital Crime Prevention in Urban Communities

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how digital legal literacy can reduce cybercrime risks among elderly individuals in urban Thailand. As technology rapidly advances, older adults face increasing risks of online fraud due to their limited digital literacy and lack of awareness about legal protection. This study examines the legal knowledge gap among elderly individuals in urban communities, focusing on their understanding of digital rights, cybersecurity laws, and fraud prevention. It draws on two key frameworks: Digital Literacy and Legal Awareness, which stresses the importance of knowing online rights, and Community Participation, which emphasizes the role of collective efforts in closing this gap. The research explores the experiences of elderly residents in Misu Wann 2 and Krang Sapan Khlong Tan communities in Watthana District, Bangkok, assessing their awareness of cyber fraud, identity theft, and scams. Surveys and interviews reveal that while many elderly individuals use digital platforms for communication and financial transactions, they lack awareness of cybersecurity laws, data protection policies, and official reporting channels. This makes them highly susceptible to scams and online exploitation. To address this issue, the study proposes a community-driven strategy combining legal education with digital skills training. Initiatives include accessible literacy programs, partnerships between public and private sectors, and community-based cybersecurity awareness campaigns. Policymakers, media professionals, and local leaders must collaborate to develop tailored educational initiatives that help elderly individuals safeguard themselves online. By fostering a strong legal-literacy network, this approach can empower older adults to navigate the digital world safely, reduce cyber risks, and ensure they can fully exercise their legal rights in an increasingly digital society.

Keywords: elderly, law, welfare, rights, quality of life

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Introduction

According to the United Nations (2023), Asia is home to over 600 million people aged 60 and above, highlighting the urgency of digital inclusion for older adults. Thailand has formally transitioned into an aging society. The elderly now comprise more than 20% of the national population, a demographic shift bringing about urgent legal and digital challenges. While digital platforms dominate communication, financial transactions, and public services, older adults often find themselves excluded from this transformation due to limited digital and legal literacy. This research addresses the vulnerability of the elderly in urban communities, particularly their exposure to digital crimes such as online fraud, scams, and identity theft.

As society becomes increasingly digitized, the capacity to critically engage with legal and technological information becomes essential. Elderly individuals are especially vulnerable, as many have had limited exposure to formal digital education. These gaps are compounded by low levels of legal awareness, particularly concerning rights in cyberspace, digital transaction safety, and avenues for legal redress. This disconnect creates fertile ground for exploitation, especially in low-income or information-deprived urban areas.

To address this concern, the study proposes a novel educational approach: the development and implementation of a legal literacy board game tailored to elderly learners. This board game is designed not merely as a recreational activity, but as a pedagogical tool grounded in the principles of community participation and experiential learning. The project is embedded within a participatory framework, ensuring that elderly voices and lived experiences shape the development and delivery of the educational content.

Theoretical Framework

This research employs two central frameworks: (1) the *Older Persons' Rights Protection Theory*, which emphasizes the right to legal recognition, healthcare, and security; and (2) *Community Participation Theory*, which posits that community-based action is essential to ensure sustainable knowledge transfer and empowerment.

The *Community Participation Theory*, as articulated by Arnstein (1969) and later adapted for grassroots legal education (Chintawee, 2018), underlines the strategic direction of this study. Participation is conceptualized not merely as consultation, but as active co-creation. The legal literacy board game exemplifies this by integrating participatory design: elderly participants are invited to contribute their experiences with fraud or legal difficulties, which are then converted into realistic scenarios in the game. This fosters a sense of agency, inclusion, and ownership over the educational process.

Board games offer a unique platform for intergenerational and peer-based learning. Informed by constructivist learning theories, this method allows elderly participants to test their knowledge, discuss consequences of choices, and learn legal vocabulary in an informal and engaging setting. The tactile and interactive elements of board games are especially suited to elderly learners who may face barriers to screen-based learning, including visual impairments or discomfort with digital interfaces.

Moreover, by structuring the game around key areas of legal concern—such as reporting scams, understanding contract clauses, or recognizing cyber threats—players are gradually exposed to rights-based thinking. This mode of learning also reduces intimidation often

associated with formal legal education, making abstract legal principles accessible through storytelling, role-play, and community dialogue.

The integration of a board game into legal literacy efforts reflects the broader theoretical commitment to democratizing knowledge and empowering marginalized populations. Through playful yet purposeful learning, elderly individuals are repositioned not as passive recipients of aid but as capable actors in safeguarding their digital and legal autonomy.

Research Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the elderly's legal and digital literacy in preventing cybercrime. The study aimed to explore not only the current level of knowledge and behavior among elderly individuals but also the contextual factors influencing their awareness and participation in digital safety.

Research Design

A descriptive and exploratory research design was adopted to examine the relationship between legal literacy, digital literacy, and vulnerability to cybercrime among older adults. The study was conducted in two urban communities in Bangkok: Misu Wann 2 and Krang Sapan Khlong Tan (Watthana District). These locations were selected because they represent distinct socioeconomic characteristics and varying levels of digital exposure.

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of elderly individuals aged 60 years and above living in the two selected communities. A total of 120 participants were included in the study, with 60 respondents from each community, selected through purposive sampling. Key informants—such as community leaders, local volunteers, and representatives from social welfare organizations—were also interviewed to gain institutional perspectives on elderly digital safety and legal support systems.

Data Collection

Data was collected using three instruments:

- 1) **Structured Questionnaire:** Designed to measure digital literacy, awareness of cyber laws (e.g., the Computer Crime Act B.E. 2550 and the Personal Data Protection Act B.E. 2562), and behaviors related to online safety.
- 2) **In-depth Interviews:** Conducted with 15 key informants to gather qualitative insights into community dynamics, challenges in digital access, and perceptions of legal protections.
- 3) **Field Observation:** Researchers observed digital usage behavior and community engagement activities related to technology training and legal awareness.
- 4) The data collection took place between May and July 2024, ensuring sufficient representation of both communities.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) to assess the levels of digital and legal literacy. Inferential statistics, including chi-square tests, were used to identify significant differences between the two communities.

Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic content analysis, categorizing responses under key themes aligned with the theoretical framework (Digital Literacy & Legal Awareness and Community Participation).

Research Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Srinakharinwirot University. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent. Data confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Conceptual Framework

The methodology was guided by an integrated conceptual model that connects Digital Literacy and Legal Awareness Theory with Community Participation Theory. This framework provided a foundation for analyzing how community engagement and access to legal knowledge influence the elderly's capacity to prevent and respond to digital crime.

Findings

The study reveals a significant gap in digital and legal literacy among elderly individuals in urban communities of Bangkok, particularly within the Misu Wann 2 and Krang Sapan Khlong Tan communities. While most participants actively use digital tools, mainly smartphones and social media, for communication, financial transactions, and entertainment, their understanding of cybersecurity laws, data protection rights, and online fraud prevention remains limited.

Survey results indicate that over two-thirds of respondents have encountered suspicious online messages or scam attempts, yet fewer than one-fourth were aware of the proper legal channels for reporting digital crimes. Interviews further reveal that although the elderly are willing to learn about digital safety, they often perceive legal language as complex and inaccessible. Many participants rely heavily on family members or neighbors for online transactions, which exposes them to additional privacy and financial risks.

Analysis through Digital Literacy and Legal Awareness Theory highlights that the lack of integrated digital-legal education leaves elderly individuals vulnerable to exploitation. Similarly, under the Community Participation Theory, it becomes evident that the absence of structured local initiatives and intergenerational learning programs contributes to this persistent knowledge gap.

Nonetheless, the study found positive indicators of potential improvement. When elderly participants engaged in community-based digital workshops or received informal guidance from youth volunteers, their confidence in recognizing and responding to online threats increased. These findings underscore the need for community-led legal-literacy initiatives that combine accessible technology training, interactive learning methods, and culturally relevant

communication strategies to protect the elderly from digital crimes and promote safer digital participation.

Table 1

Quantitative Summary of Elderly Legal and Digital Literacy in Urban Communities
(*N* = 120)

Indicators	Misu Wann 2 (n = 60)	Krang Sapan Khlong Tan (n = 60)	Total (%)	Interpretation
1. Use of digital devices (smartphones, LINE, Facebook)	93%	97%	95%	High engagement with digital tools
2. Awareness of cybercrime laws (Computer Crime Act, PDPA)	28%	42%	35%	Moderate knowledge, but still limited
3. Awareness of personal data protection and privacy	31%	48%	39%	Uneven understanding between communities
4. Ability to identify online fraud or scam messages	37%	52%	45%	Practical awareness developing but inconsistent
5. Knowledge of legal reporting mechanisms (police, hotline, online complaint)	22%	33%	27%	Very low awareness of legal recourse
6. Participation in community or training in digital safety	18%	41%	29%	Community-driven programs improve literacy
7. Confidence in using digital services securely	43%	58%	51%	Medium confidence; linked to education exposure

Statistical Summary

- Mean Awareness Score (0–100 scale):
 - *Misu Wann 2*: 39.0
 - *Krang Sapan Khlong Tan*: 53.0
 - *Overall Mean*: 46.0
- Standard Deviation (SD): 9.7 – indicating moderate variation between communities.
- Chi-square Test: $\chi^2 = 4.86$, $p < 0.05$, suggesting a significant difference in legal literacy levels between the two communities.

The quantitative findings confirm that while most elderly individuals are digitally connected, their legal awareness regarding online safety remains low. The higher literacy level in Krang Sapan Khlong Tan is attributed to greater exposure to community-based training and peer support networks. The results reinforce the theoretical assumption that community participation directly correlates with digital-legal empowerment, supporting the integrated framework of this study.

Discussion

Empirical comparisons between the Mису Wann 2 and Krang Sapan Khlong Tan communities affirm the critical role of localized structural variables. Communities with histories of civil society engagement and proactive local leadership exhibited measurably higher levels of digital competency and legal understanding. These differences underscore that community readiness and existing social capital can either accelerate or hinder the effectiveness of legal-digital literacy initiatives.

Notably, the integration of a legal literacy board game emerged as a transformative pedagogical intervention. Far from being a mere educational novelty, the game served as a strategic entry point into complex legal discourse, allowing participants to interact with substantive content in a form that was both accessible and culturally meaningful. Its effectiveness lay not only in simplifying legal concepts but in fostering collective dialogue, encouraging peer learning, and validating the real-life experiences of the elderly participants.

The theoretical framework of Community Participation, particularly as adapted to legal education, finds tangible expression in this context. By situating legal empowerment within participatory, experience-driven methods, the intervention bridged the traditional gap between normative legal frameworks and the everyday realities of elderly citizens. This approach reinforced a sense of agency, diminished the intimidation often associated with legal systems, and contributed to the construction of localized resilience against digital harms.

Recommendations

To transform these insights into practical and scalable actions, a multi-stakeholder framework is proposed for governments, academic institutions, private sectors, and community organizations to collaborate in advancing both digital and legal literacy for older adults.

Institutionalize Legal Literacy for the Elderly

Integrate legal and digital awareness into Thailand's national aging policy. Ministries and local authorities should implement ongoing community training on digital rights, data protection, and cybercrime prevention, delivered through health centers and senior clubs.

Develop and Distribute Board Game Kits Nationwide

Expand the participatory board game initiative into a nationwide learning toolkit, translated into regional languages, and disseminated through temples, schools, and local administrative offices. Collaboration with law faculties can ensure pedagogical validity and legal accuracy.

Establish Elderly Cyber Protection Units (E-CPU)

Build local volunteer groups composed of trained youth mentors, legal advisors, and community leaders to assist with cybercrime reporting, awareness workshops, and personalized guidance for older digital users.

Expand Community Media Campaigns

Utilize accessible media such as local radio, LINE groups, and community television to broadcast educational content on digital fraud prevention. Storytelling and dramatized examples should make legal information relatable and memorable for elderly audiences.

Promote Intergenerational Digital-Legal Mentorship

Pair elderly individuals with university students in law and ICT fields to foster mutual digital-legal learning. This approach promotes intergenerational solidarity and enhances both empathy and resilience against online risks.

Monitor and Evaluate Legal Literacy Impact

Implement regular impact assessments to measure improvement in legal knowledge, digital behavior, and reduction in online victimization. Feedback mechanisms should guide adaptive revisions of educational content and methodologies.

Advocate for Inclusive Policy Reform

Encourage policymakers and civil society to formally recognize the digital rights of the elderly as part of Thailand's digital transformation agenda. This includes ensuring access to online justice mechanisms, legal aid, and safe e-government services.

Conclusion

Crucially, the study's comparative fieldwork reveals that the success of such interventions is inextricably linked to localized social dynamics, especially the role of community leadership, prior exposure to civic initiatives, and the presence of trust networks. The differentiated outcomes observed between the Mису Wann 2 and Krang Sapan Khlong Tan communities affirm that effective legal empowerment strategies must be designed with sensitivity to local histories, cultural narratives, and institutional readiness.

The findings further suggest that when legal knowledge is delivered through mechanisms that integrate emotional safety, peer exchange, and community collaboration, it can serve as a foundation for sustained digital engagement. The board game's impact extended beyond information transmission; it catalyzed social bonding, reinforced shared responsibility, and cultivated a sense of digital citizenship among elderly participants.

Therefore, the promotion of legal literacy among the elderly should no longer be viewed as an ancillary element of public policy but as a central pillar in Thailand's broader agenda for digital inclusion, human security, and equitable access to justice. In empowering elderly citizens to navigate the digital world with confidence and competence, such initiatives lay the groundwork for a more resilient, rights-aware, and socially cohesive society.

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Contribution and Originality

This study contributes to the emerging discourse on digital inclusion and legal empowerment of the elderly in developing urban contexts. It is one of the first empirical studies in Thailand to integrate legal literacy education with digital safety awareness through a community-based pedagogical innovation – the legal literacy board game. The originality lies in combining Digital Literacy and Legal Awareness Theory with Community Participation Theory, producing a participatory learning model that bridges the gap between formal law and everyday digital experience. The findings provide a transferable framework for policymakers and educators across Asia to design age-friendly, culturally grounded, and technology-assisted legal education programs aimed at preventing digital victimization among older adults.

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Reconstructing Prabowo Subianto's Personal Branding for the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election: A Case Study of the "Gemoy" Campaign on TikTok

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Abstract

Prabowo Subianto was finally elected as President of the Republic of Indonesia in the 2024 General Election with the personal branding "Gemoy." This phenomenon grew rapidly on social media, especially TikTok, and affected his political image. Although previous studies have primarily examined the meaning of this branding qualitatively, this study fills the gap by quantitatively analysing the frequency, hashtag and sentiment of conversations on TikTok and their contribution to image formation. These public interactions are then analysed using Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT). This study uses a constructivist paradigm with a qualitative approach. The Netnography method is applied by utilising social media monitoring analytical tools to capture public conversations on the TikTok platform between 1 September 2023 and 14 February 2024. The results show that the "Gemoy" narrative is a fantasy theme constructed by Prabowo and his campaign team in a communicative drama with elements of characters, actions, and settings that form a collective imagination among the public. This study contributes to strengthening the understanding that social media can be strategically orchestrated to build personal branding of political figures, providing new insights for the study of political communication in the digital era.

Keyword: Prabowo Gemoy, personal branding, symbolic convergence theory

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Introduction

Prabowo Subianto was finally elected as the President of Indonesia in the 2024 General Election, following two previous electoral defeats to his rival, Joko Widodo. In the 2024 election, Prabowo has a notable divergence in personal branding compared to his previous campaigns in 2014 and 2019. In 2014, Prabowo presented himself as a presidential candidate with an assertive character and somewhat authoritarian image (Bollier, 2014). Even more, during the 2019 election, Prabowo adopted a more assertive persona, as a strongman nationalist populist, and utilizing the narrative “make Indonesia great again,” like a main theme in Donald Trump's successful 2016 US presidential campaign (Massola, 2018). Conversely, in 2024, Prabowo cultivated a novel public image, especially on social media by adopting “Gemoy” as the personal branding, which describes being chubby, humorous, and cute (Tan & Husada, 2024). This “Gemoy” branding is posited as one of the substantial factors to his electoral success.

In communication theory, the strategies employed by Prabowo and his campaign team can be analyzed through the lens of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT). The theory can elaborate how Prabowo strategically constructed and disseminated symbols, narratives, and shared stories to promote a sense of collective identity among his supporters and potential constituents. The personal branding as “Gemoy” during the 2024 General Election describes a fantasy theme, strategically framed in a communicative drama. This drama consists of distinct characters, actions, settings, and subsequently pushed into widespread fantasy chains across various social media platforms, especially on TikTok.

Most of the studies investigating the phenomenon of Prabowo Gemoy are primarily with linguistic theories such as semiotics (Prasetyawan et al., 2025) and textual analysis approach (Gauri, 2024). While the existing study with communication theory approach is restricted to personal branding theory only. Methodologically, other previous studies have mostly adopted qualitative methods, focusing on content analysis of the campaign. While this research addresses a notable gap in the literature by adopting a communication theory framework, namely Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) (Bormann et al., 2001). Furthermore, the research utilizes a mixed-methods approach, by integrating qualitative data with quantitative data obtained from a social media listening tool which has been built with Indonesian Natural Language Processing (NLP). This approach is expected to significantly contribute to a more comprehensive and in-depth academic discourse on the Prabowo Gemoy political campaign phenomenon.

Literature Review

Personal Branding Within the Political Sphere

Personal branding represents a strategic approach focused on the establishment of a particular image and identity that differentiates an individual from others. Hill and Sen (Hill & Sen, 2013) in their book “The Internet in Indonesia's New Democracy,” define that in the digital age, personal branding stands beyond personality; but also related to an individual's capacity to cultivate intense emotional connections with their audience via digital platforms. In Indonesia, the phenomenon of personal branding has run into substantial transformation, especially with the advance of social media features which enables public figures and politicians to forge closer relationships with their constituents (Putri et al., 2022).

Referring to Kotler (Kotler & Keller, 2025), personal branding covers several key dimensions that a political candidate must strategically manage. These dimensions start with Attributes, which related to the candidate's capacity to highlight their distinctive excellences, exceptional qualities, or unique strengths. The next dimension is Benefits that involve the translation of their distinctive excellences, qualities and strengths into some tangible emotional and functional advantages perceived by the constituents.

Another dimension is Values (Kotler & Keller, 2025), which related to the core principles of the political candidate. Values brings up an emotional connection between the candidate and voters who share similar perspectives and belief. Next, Culture is the dimension that emphasize the significance of local values that represent cultural perspectives relevant to the target audience. Personality also constitutes as a substantial dimension as candidates must show a positive, charismatic, and relatable attitude and behavior, thereby enhancing their attractiveness to the public. At last, the User dimension requires that candidates thoroughly comprehend their constituents, understand their expectations, needs, and preferences.

These dimensions reflect that personal branding covers not only a candidate's desired public perception, but also their self-understanding and what they aim to represent in the society. Primarily, personal branding related to two main indicators: “how you see yourself” and “how others see you” (Gorbatov et al., 2018).

TikTok for Political Campaigns

TikTok is initially known as a social media platform for sharing entertainment content like dances, lip-sync videos, and fashion recommendations (Koç, 2023). Over time, it has transformed into a complex social media platform with a variety of features, such as a source of recommendations, a marketplace to buy and sell, and a reference for information, particularly for Generation Z. According to a 2025 Pew Research Center survey (Methods et al., 2025), approximately 52% of TikTok users report using the platform as a primary source for news. Since 2020, TikTok has become a significant tool for disseminating political information and campaigns. Politicians and political parties from around the world are increasingly using the platform as one of the key strategies to raise public support (Ali et al., 2022).

The platform's algorithm customizes content for each user through its “For You” page, which provides content recommendations based on their in-app activities. This feature showcases a diverse range of content, including videos that are already viral or even with fewer views that still align with users' preferences. This strategy allows any TikTok user to get the opportunity to go viral (Cervi, 2021). This could be an advantage for politicians, enabling them to reach their audience and maintain engagement to get support and votes.

Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT)

Theoretically, personal branding can be effectively analyzed through the lens of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT). Introduced by Ernest Bormann, this theory explains how symbols, narratives, and stories create a sense of solidarity within a group (Bormann, 1985). In the context of political communications or political campaign, this theory explains how a particular narrative can influence people's perspectives and establish unity among supporters (Bjola, 2021). For example, the use of “Gemoy” as a narrative in Prabowo's political campaign illustrates how this theory is applied in a real-world context.

In his 1985 work, Bormann identified three key aspects that form the basis of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT). The first is the identification and arrangement of recurring communication patterns, which signals the emergence of a collective consciousness within a group. These patterns evolve over time as a result of ongoing interactions. The second is the description of dynamic tendencies within a communication system, which explains why group consciousness surfaces, persists, diminishes, and eventually disappears. The third aspect consists of the factors that explain why individuals within a group engage in sharing certain narratives or fantasies (Bormann, 1985).

In addition, Bormann also proposed two main assumptions that underpin this theory. First, reality is constructed through communication, which creates reality by connecting words used to share life experiences or internal knowledge. Second, an individual's meaning of a symbol can converge, so that the meaning is transformed into a shared reality. According to this theory, reality is considered a series of narratives that explain how something can be believed by the people involved.

The narratives within symbolic convergence theory (SCT) typically begin in small groups and then spread to a wider audience or the general public. This aligns with Bormann's six epistemological assumptions of SCT (Suryadi, 2010). First, the meaning, emotion, and motivation for an action are found in the manifest content of a message. Second, reality is symbolically constructed. Third, fantasy chains create symbolic convergence in a dramatic form. Fourth, fantasy theme analysis is the primary method for capturing symbolic reality. Fifth, fantasy themes can emerge in various evolving discourses. Sixth, there are three primary visions in the grand analogy: moral, social, and pragmatic.

In the public perspective, the “Gemoy” image reflected Prabowo's effort to build a more informal and familiar relationship with his constituents. By leveraging this symbol, Prabowo's campaign successfully cultivated an impression of him as a humorous, interesting, and populist figure. This narrative not only consolidated his supporters but also strengthened the public's perception of him as a leader who is close to the people. This process illustrates how an initially minor narrative can evolve into a major trend, driven by massive dissemination on social media platforms like TikTok.

The identification of fantasy themes, a central concept within Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) (Zanin et al., 2016), is critical for analyzing this phenomenon. Themes like “Gemoy” establish a collective reality that gains public acceptance and is constantly reinforced by consistent communication across diverse digital platforms. Furthermore, the fantasy chain reveals how this narrative can evolve into a broader social movement, showcasing its influence in shaping collective consciousness.

As explained by Bormann's (1985), symbolic convergence occurs when shared narratives create an emotional bond among group members. This phenomenon was evident in the Prabowo campaign, where a sense of solidarity formed among his supporters. The high volume of conversations about “Gemoy” on social media demonstrates how this narrative effectively unified supporters and built a solid support base. However, it remains to be evaluated whether this narrative produced only symbolic unity or also contributed to concrete collective action.

Therefore, the success of the “Gemoy” narrative proves that political communication in the digital era requires not only technical strategies but also an approach that can evoke an emotional response and foster a sense of collective awareness among the public.

Research Questions

- How was the “Prabowo Gemoy” narrative constructed and spread through TikTok during the 2024 Presidential Election campaign?
- How did the fantasy themes in the “Prabowo Gemoy” narrative create symbolic convergence and form the political image of Prabowo Subianto among TikTok users?

Methodology

Paradigma & Metode Penelitian

This research is grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as the outcome of a collective construction of meaning. From this perspective, the personal branding of “Gemoy” associated with Prabowo Subianto is not seen as a fixed entity, but rather as the result of a process of symbolic interaction within the digital sphere. The study employs a qualitative approach using Netnography to systematically and contextually observe, collect, and analyze public interaction data regarding “Prabowo Gemoy” on social media platforms.

Data Collection

Data was gathered by monitoring content and conversation on social media using the social listening tool, Socindex. This tool facilitates data crawling with a Natural Language Processing (NLP) system, which has an 83% accuracy rate for Indonesian content. The collected data consists of text, image, and video conversations about Prabowo Gemoy on TikTok. The data was collected between September 1, 2023, and February 14, 2024, a period that encompasses the campaign season of the Indonesia General Election 2024.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out using a qualitative thematic approach, and then the researchers elaborated the image of “Gemoy” Prabowo Subianto through the lens of Ernest Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT). This analysis proceeded in three stages: 1) Identifying dominant themes in the content and comments; 2) Symbolically interpreting the narratives and imaginaries that emerged; 3) Mapping the symbolic convergence that ultimately created a collective image of Prabowo as a “Gemoy” figure.

Results

This section presents the main findings regarding the “Prabowo Gemoy” phenomenon on social media, including analyses of Share of Voice, sentiment analysis, hashtag usage, word clouds, and the top liked and commented content across all social media platforms.

Share of Voice Social Media

Table 1

Share of Voice Based on Social Media Platforms

Platform	Jumlah Percakapan	Persentase (%)
Twitter	31.663	16.07%
Facebook	3.210	1.63%
Instagram	8.974	4.55%
TikTok	122.459	62.14%
Youtube	30.753	15.61%
Total	197.059	100.00%

The data gathered by Socindex tool, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, revealed that a total of 197,059 conversations discussing the topic “Prabowo Gemoy.” Among these platforms, TikTok was the most dominant channel, accounting for 122,459 conversations, or 62.14% of the total. This data indicates that TikTok served as the primary space for disseminating the narrative and was the most active public forum for discussing Prabowo's image within the “Gemoy” branding framework. Twitter followed with 31,663 conversations (16.07%), and YouTube was close behind with 30,753 conversations (15.61%). In contrast, conversation volumes on Instagram and Facebook were significantly lower, at 8,974 (4.55%) and 3,210 (1.63%), respectively.

TikTok Share of Voice Based on Sentiment

Table 2

Sentiment Analysis on the TikTok Platform

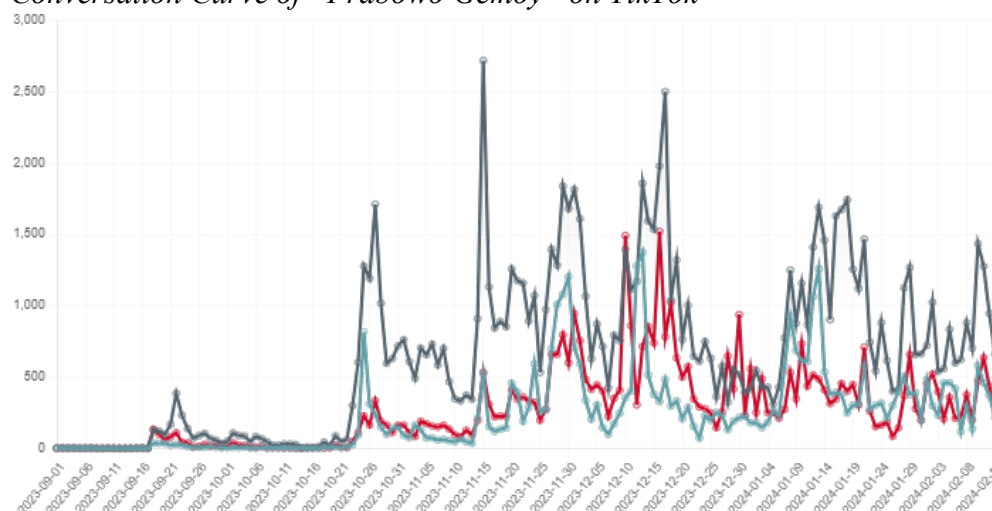
Sentimen	Jumlah Percakapan	Persentase (%)
Positif	11.398	9.31%
Netral	85.489	69.81%
Negatif	25.572	20.88%
Total	122.459	100%

Based on data from the Socindex tool, there were 122,459 conversations regarding the topic of “Prabowo Gemoy” on the TikTok platform. From this total, neutral sentiment was dominant with 85,489 conversations, or 69.81%. This indicates that most users conveyed narratives without a clear emotional and sentimental tone. Positive sentiment was present in 11,398 conversations, or 9.31%, reflecting public support, interest, or a favorable response to the “Gemoy” personal brand. In contrast, negative sentiment, which totaled 25,572 conversations or 20.88%, shows the presence of criticism, mockery, or rejection of the narrative. The combined high proportion of neutral and positive sentiment collectively suggests that the “Gemoy” campaign was inclusively received by the public, despite also attracting a significant amount of contradiction.

Dynamics of Conversation on TikTok

Figure 1

Conversation Curve of “Prabowo Gemoy” on TikTok



Based on Figure 1, it is seen that the conversation related to the “Prabowo Gemoy” topic on the TikTok platform fluctuated. At the beginning of September 2023, the volume of the conversation was still relatively low. This indicates that the “Gemoy” narrative had started to appear on social media, however, it had not yet become a dominant topic discussed by the public.

A primary surge in the conversation was noted around the candidate registration period from late September to October 2023. This moment became a starting point for Prabowo to increase his exposure through the “Gemoy” personal branding approach. After the candidates were registered, the “Gemoy” narrative began to be discussed consistently and showed characteristics of a structured political communication strategy.

The highest peak in conversation was noted on November 15, 2023, relating to the moment when Prabowo danced during the official drawing of presidential election ballot numbers. This dancing act became closely connected with the “Prabowo Gemoy” or “Joget Gemoy ala Prabowo” narrative that went viral on social media, which reinforced the symbolic association between Prabowo’s casual communication style and the intentionally constructed “Gemoy” image.

The next significant spike in conversation occurred in December 2023, which coincided with the first nationally broadcast presidential debate. This debate was a key trigger for the increased intensity of the discussion, as it placed Prabowo under a broad public spotlight. In turn, this prompted the “Gemoy” narrative to resurface in various forms of content, generating a mix of supportive, critical, and entertainment-focused responses from the public.

Overall, the fluctuating curve indicates the dynamic nature of public attention towards the “Gemoy” personal brand attached to the figure of Prabowo Subianto during the campaign period. Prabowo actively capitalized on strategic moments such as the official candidate announcement, the ballot number selection, and public debates to project his “Gemoy” characteristics. This approach successfully triggered a high public response and solidified the “Gemoy” symbol as a political image that was widely accepted, discussed, and interpreted.

Hashtags

Tabel 3

Most Popular Hashtags in the “Prabowo Gemoy” Conversation

No	Hashtag	Jumlah
1	gemoy	825
2	Prabowo	744
3	prabowogibran	557
4	prabowosubianto	536
5	Gibran	348
6	prabowogibran2024	198
7	gibranrakabuming	192
8	prabowogemoy	187
9	gibranrakabumingraka	183
10	prabowopresiden2024	158
11	Akhirnyapilihprabowo	157
12	allinprabowo	126

There were twelve main hashtags most often used in the discourse concerning “Prabowo Gemoy” on TikTok. Among these, the hashtag #gemoy was predominant, appearing in 825 mentions, which signifies that the term “gemoy” has emerged as a key feature of the digital narrative being built. This tag has a symbolic meaning, representing a form of political communication that is more light-hearted, emotional, and relatable for the youth audience on social media.

The hashtag #Prabowo appeared 744 times, indicating that the figure of Prabowo Subianto is central to the construction of the “Gemoy” image. The presence of the #prabowogibran (557 times) and #prabowogibran2024 (198 times) hashtags shows that the “Gemoy” narrative was actively integrated into the campaign strategy of the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential candidate pair. Other hashtags such as #gibran, #gibranrakabuming, and #gibranrakabumingraka also appeared in the top 10 list, affirming that the “Gemoy” personal branding narrative does not stand alone. Rather, it was strategically paired with Gibran Rakabuming as the vice-presidential candidate.

In conclusion, the utilization of this hashtag indicates that the “Gemoy” branding is a significant component in forming the public's perception of and engagement with Prabowo, employing a style of language that is emotional, popular, and easily accessible to social media users.

Word Cloud

Figure 2

Word Cloud of the “Prabowo Gemoy” Conversation on TikTok



The word cloud above illustrates the most frequently occurring words in conversations regarding “Prabowo Gemoy” on TikTok. Visually, the two most dominant words are “Prabowo” and “Gemoy,” indicating that these terms form the core of the narrative developing on the social media platform.

Several other terms also emerged quite prominently, such as “Prabowosubianto,” “Gibran,” “Prabowogemoy,” “Joget,” “Jogetgemoy,” and “Allinprabowo.” The presence of the term “Gibran” with high frequency indicates that the “Gemoy” narrative was not only attached to Prabowo on a personal level, but was also integrated into the context of the candidate pair, i.e., Prabowo-Gibran. Furthermore, the words “joget” and “jogetgemoy” reflect the expressive and entertaining image of Prabowo, and this was strategically utilized to gain sympathy from the younger generation on social media.

Top Like & Comment Content

Table 4

Content With the Highest Likes and Comments for “Prabowo Gemoy”

Content	Characters	Actions	Settings
	The principal actor, Prabowo, highlights his humanistic and endearing side across various moments.	Inquires to journalists about the meaning of “gemoy” and performs the “gemoy dance” with his entourage.	Campaign period moment for the presidential candidate; Prabowo is labeled “gemoy” by a journalist, prompting his inquiry into the term's meaning.

	Prabowo Subianto as the main protagonist/subject.	Prabowo uses a plow while running, narrated with the caption “Pak Prabowo is so Adorable” (Gemesis Banget)	The video is recorded against the backdrop of a plowed rice field.
	Prabowo Subianto as the main actor/subject. ONIC Nita Vior, a Gamer and Brand Ambassador (also referred to as a youth influencer), acts as an actor in the video.	Vior responds to a question, stating she would support Prabowo Subianto in the election because he is “Gemoy,” and she imitates the “Gemoy dance” style.	The video is set in a dining venue.
	A T-shirt printing business/printer.	The narrative questions why only Prabowo's T-shirts are selling well, while printing numerous shirts depicting “Prabowo Gemoy” with the assistance of AI.	During the campaign period, T-shirts are often utilized as campaign merchandise/tools.
	Prabowo Subianto and Raffi Ahmad (Actors/Subjects).	A Joint TikTok Live Session with artists; Prabowo & Raffi host a live session, inviting other influencers and artists (e.g., Aurel, Atta Halilintar, Gading Marten, Kiky Saputri, Ivan Gunawan) to perform the “Gemoy Dance.”	During the presidential campaign, Indonesian influencers and artists actively participated in promoting support and the “Prabowo-style Gemoy Dance.”

Analysis of the prevailing content indicates that the “Gemoy” representation is enacted through diverse modalities, such as comedic interactions, choreographic routines, campaign merchandise (T-shirts), and strategic collaborations with prominent public figures. This multimodal variation serves to solidify the symbolic construction of the “Gemoy” persona as one that is engaging, affable, and relatable to a mass audience.

Discussion

Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) emphasizes the importance of fantasy themes for shaping a shared social reality by means of group communication. In the context of political campaigns, SCT is useful to explain how a specific narrative, for instance, “Prabowo Gemoy,” is able to unify the public into a collective imagination, which in turn forms the social and political identity of the candidate.

Fantasy Theme “Gemoy” as An Emotional Symbol

In Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), a fantasy theme is a narrative or symbol that becomes a center of people’s conversation and imagination (Bormann, 2001). The term “Gemoy” has transformed itself from a popular slang into a unique symbol in the political branding of Prabowo Subianto. Based on word cloud and hashtag analysis, the word “gemoy” is not only massive quantitatively, but it also carries specific emotional meanings, such as funny, entertaining, and non-threatening. This “Gemoy” creates a symbolic convergence, particularly through TikTok, as the public forms a shared imagination of Prabowo's figure as a leader that is humanist, cheerful, and close to the people; an image which is a contrast to the masculine-militaristic representation that was previously attached to him.

Fantasy Chain Reaction of the Viral Gemoy Dancing

According to Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), the phenomenon is where a fantasy theme spreads widely as a fantasy chain reaction (Raj Kafle, 2014). In this case, the “Gemoy” dance performed by Prabowo during important moments, for instance the candidate debates and campaigns, was then amplified on social media by his team and this created an escalating reaction on TikTok. The evidence from the Share of Voice data which reached 62% on the TikTok platform compared to other social media platforms. The contents that acquired the highest engagement such as likes, comments, and shares were those that showed Prabowo dancing, interacting with youths, or utilizing visual symbols such as the AI t-shirt with a gemoy theme.

This chain reaction is an indication that the audience was engaged in the “role-playing” inside a symbolic world that they perceived to be entertaining and enjoyable. It also has the effect of positioning “Gemoy” as an alternative political identity that is easier to accept, particularly by the younger generation.

Rhetorical Vision of Prabowo's Image as a Humanist Leader

Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) culminates in the formation of a rhetorical vision, which is a grand narrative combining various fantasy themes into a single collective perception (Bormann, 2001). In this case, the “Prabowo Gemoy” narrative has produced a rhetorical vision that positions Prabowo as a friendly and entertaining leader (through dance content and memes), close to the younger generation (through collaborations with young influencers and gamers),

and not stiff or formal (through his style of language and gestures during the campaign). All of these structured and massive activities have successfully changed the image of Prabowo from a candidate who was previously considered a masculine-militaristic figure. This can be seen in the sentiment data, where a high proportion of positive conversations illustrates that the public enjoyed this representation as both entertainment and a political campaign.

Sharing of Social Reality and the Effectiveness of Political Communication

The effectiveness of this strategy lies in its success at creating a shared social reality through a symbol that is easily understood and reproduced. “Gemoy” is not a directly political term, but its strength is in its ability to bridge the world of politics with pop culture. In this case, SCT explains how political communication can be more accepted if it is packaged in a light and symbolic narrative form. In other words, this narrative bridges politics through pleasant entertainment, which lets the public indirectly form an emotional attachment with the candidate through a pleasant symbolic form.

Using the Symbolic Convergence Theory approach, it can be concluded that the “Prabowo Gemoy” narrative succeeded in forming a symbolic convergence through a shared fantasy theme that was pleasant, viral, and built a new, more inclusive image. This strategy becomes a new form of digital political communication, where symbols, emotions, and popular culture merge in shaping the rhetorical vision of a presidential candidate.

Conclusion

This research concludes that the “Gemoy” campaign of Prabowo Subianto is a form of strategic reconstruction of personal branding in the digital era, successfully transforming his image from a firm and militaristic figure to an entertaining, more down-to-earth, and approachable figure. By applying Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), the “Gemoy” narrative is understood as a fantasy theme that unites the public into a shared symbolic world through collective imagination and emotional resonance. The phenomenon of a fantasy chain reaction, which appeared through viral content on TikTok, further strengthened the spread of this narrative.

The findings of this research indicate that social media not only serve as a channel for political communication but also as a performative space to construct a shared symbolic reality. The emotional dimension within the “Gemoy” narrative makes political communication more inclusive, while also bridging politics with the dancing culture, particularly among young voters. Thus, this study offers a theoretical contribution to the field of political communication by demonstrating that symbolic convergence can be formed through narratives that are light, entertaining, and emotionally-oriented, not merely through ideological messaging.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The analysis was confined to the TikTok platform and the 2023–2024 campaign period. Therefore, it is suggested for future research to broaden the analysis to the period following Prabowo's election and his leadership as president. In conclusion, the reconstruction of Prabowo Subianto's personal branding through the “Gemoy” narrative signifies a paradigm shift in Indonesia's political communication, moving from conventional image-making towards a digitally-based form of political communication. This research expands the academic discourse regarding political communication in the digital era by asserting that digital activities can also successfully shape a strong rhetorical vision, capable of influencing public perception and contributing to electoral success.

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Communication Strategies for Promoting Silver Tourism on Thai Travel Agency Websites

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Abstract

As the global population ages, silver tourism has emerged as a significant market segment, particularly in destinations like Thailand, which is increasingly catering to senior travelers. This study explores the communication strategies employed by Thai travel agencies in promoting silver tourism through their websites. By analyzing the visual and textual marketing messages on five Thai travel agency websites in March, 2025, the research identifies how these agencies target senior consumers, the language and imagery they use, and how they address the needs and preferences of older travelers. The study examines the balance between portraying seniors as active, independent travelers while also acknowledging the comfort and accessibility needs associated with aging. The findings suggest that while some agencies employ empowering language and age-inclusive marketing techniques, others rely on traditional representations that may unintentionally reinforce negative perceptions of aging. This research provides insights into effective communication practices that can help travel agencies better serve the silver tourism market, while also increasing awareness of ageist representations of older adults in silver tourism marketing in Thailand.

Keywords: silver tourism, marketing strategies, marketing communication, websites, Thailand

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Introduction

Ageing Population Trends and Silver Tourism in Thailand

Thailand is rapidly transitioning into an aging society. In 2021, 18.8% of its 66.7 million people were aged 60 and above, and by 2031, the country is expected to become a super-aged society, with over 20% of its population in this age group (Department of Older Persons, Thailand, 2021). This demographic shift brings both challenges and economic opportunities, particularly in tourism.

To capitalize on the growing silver tourism market, the Thai government has launched initiatives aimed at making travel more accessible for older adults. The National Tourism Development Strategy focuses on universal design principles, improved transportation, and enhanced medical support. Investments in wellness tourism, health retreats, and cultural experiences further cater to senior travelers' preferences (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2025).

Wellness and medical tourism are particularly attractive to elderly tourists seeking destinations that support their health. Though national revenue data for senior tourism is limited, case studies highlight its growing impact. For example, Khao Yai National Park saw elderly visitor numbers rise from 9,347 in 2014 to 51,081 in 2017 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2025).

As Thailand prepares for an aging future, effective marketing strategies will be crucial in ensuring that silver tourism continues to thrive.

Distinct Characteristics of Older Tourists

Older tourists differ from general travelers by prioritizing health, well-being, and cultural enrichment in their journeys. Their travel preferences reflect a strong inclination toward health tourism, cultural heritage experiences, and festival tourism. In Thailand, elderly tourists are particularly drawn to destinations that offer both relaxation and opportunities for cultural immersion, demonstrating a preference for World Heritage Sites like Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya and wellness tourism attractions, such as traditional medicinal baths (Phuanpoh & Ketsomboon, 2023; Suphan et al., 2022).

Health tourism programs tailored to their specific needs, including wellness retreats and spa treatments, appeal to their focus on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Additionally, itineraries incorporating traditional festivals provide both entertainment and meaningful cultural engagement, as observed in regions like Loei Province. Their motivations can be categorized into push factors—such as the desire for better health, cultural exploration, and lifestyle enhancement—and pull factors, including high-quality services, authentic cultural experiences, and tranquil travel environments.

Furthermore, older tourists exhibit distinct behaviors, favoring group travel with family or peers and engaging in activities that emphasize cultural preservation. Their decision-making process is meticulous, with an emphasis on safety, service quality, and authenticity (Phuanpoh & Ketsomboon, 2023; Suphan et al., 2022).

Literature Review

Marketing Principles for Promoting Silver Tourism

Silver tourism is a rapidly expanding sector in both global and Thai travel markets, driven by the country's transition into an aging society (Veeraporn & Koontiya, 2023). Older tourists differ from other segments as they generally have greater financial stability, more leisure time, and a heightened focus on safety, comfort, and service quality (Smith & Puczkó, 2019). To effectively attract and serve this demographic, businesses can apply established marketing principles such as the 7Ps Marketing Mix and the SILVER D Model to develop tailored strategies.

The 7Ps Marketing Mix (Kotler & Keller, 2022) provides a structured framework for addressing senior travelers' needs by ensuring that tourism products offer diverse and engaging experiences, such as wellness retreats and cultural immersion. Pricing strategies should reflect the value that senior travelers seek, balancing affordability with high-quality services, including senior discounts and group packages. Accessibility plays a key role in travel planning for older tourists, making it essential to maintain both online platforms and offline consultation services. Marketing efforts should align with the behavior of elderly tourists by leveraging web marketing, wellness seminars, and promotional travel deals. In addition, well-trained staff, senior-friendly facilities, and seamless service processes contribute to a comfortable and secure travel experience.

The SILVER D Model (Phuanpoh & Ketsomboon, 2023) further enhances marketing effectiveness by emphasizing high service standards, integrated stakeholder collaboration, and lifestyle-driven travel experiences. It highlights the importance of value-based tourism, entrepreneurial adaptability, responsible tourism practices, and digital engagement to reach older travelers. Integrating these principles ensures that Thailand's silver tourism sector continues to grow sustainably while meeting the expectations of senior travelers.

Language Design in Silver Tourism Marketing

Different from marketing researchers' focus on marketing efficiency, sociolinguistic scholars instead address the social impact of language designs for silver tourism promotion. The linguistic design of silver tourism marketing plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of aging and travel. Early research by Ylänne-McEwen (2000) examined UK-based holiday brochures targeting older travelers, revealing how language and imagery constructed particular ideologies of aging. Branding strategies, such as names like Golden Years or Young at Heart, aimed to counteract negative stereotypes by associating senior tourism with vitality and activity. These marketing choices resonated with older individuals who perceived themselves as younger than their chronological age, aligning with the "Golden Ager" stereotype (Hummer et al., 1994). Additionally, the brochures emphasized communal experiences, promoting travel as an opportunity for social bonding, new friendships, and even romantic possibilities. The framing of silver tourism as an exclusive club reinforced a sense of belonging and privilege among senior travelers.

Despite these positive representations, Ylänne-McEwen (2000) also identified underlying ageist assumptions. The discourse often implied insecurity and dependence, with brochures emphasizing the role of hosts and hostesses in assisting older travelers. This reinforced the notion of older tourists requiring reassurance and familiarity, with holidays framed as an

extension of home life—“home from home.” Similarly, travel was depicted as a means of escaping winter-induced gloom, yet this intertextual connection unintentionally evoked stereotypes of older individuals as vulnerable.

More recently, Blichfeldt and Smed (2019) examined silver tourism marketing in Denmark, focusing on representations of older adults’ sexualities. A Danish travel agency’s promotional video positioned lifelong sexual activity as part of a successful aging lifestyle, portraying older tourists as perpetually youthful and sexually active. While this reframing challenged traditional notions of aging, it also enforced an “ageless” ideal, reinforcing gendered expectations. These studies highlight how language in silver tourism marketing both challenges and perpetuates age-related stereotypes, influencing how older travelers perceive themselves and their experiences.

Given the rather lack of academic attention given to language and communication designs for silver tourism marketing, this study aims to fulfill this gap.

Methodology

Travel Agencies of Silver Tourism in Thailand

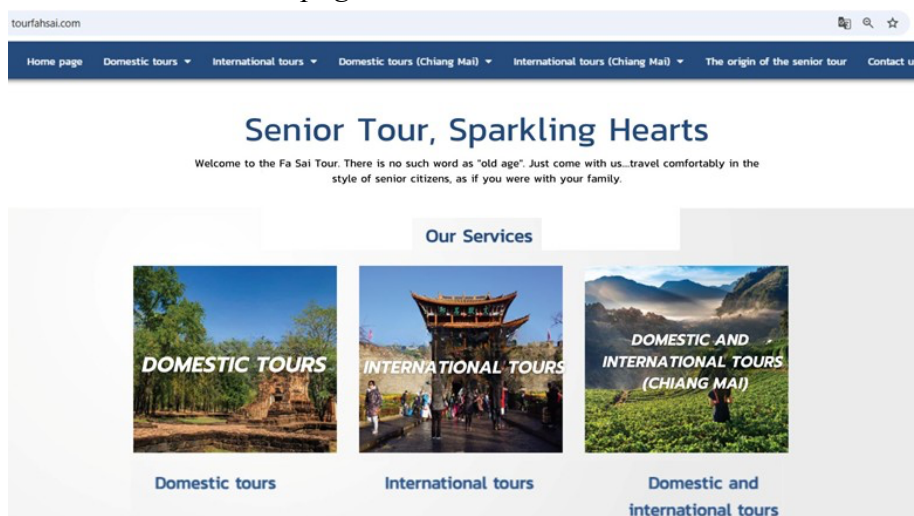
Silver tourism in Thailand is growing, driven by rich culture, hospitality, and advanced healthcare. Thai travel agencies now offer senior-friendly experiences emphasizing accessibility, comfort, and wellness, enhancing Thailand’s reputation as an age-friendly destination (Smith & Puczkó, 2018). Data from five websites—*Tour Fahsai*, *50 Plus Holiday*, *Wonderful Package*, *Phutthapratip Tour*, and *Happy Living*—were collected on 21 March 2025.

Tour Fahsai (ทัวร์ฟ้าใส)

Tour Fahsai (ทัวร์ฟ้าใส) also known as the “ทัวร์สูงวัย หัวใจฟรุ้งฟริ้ง” or in English is “Sky clear Tour” and “Senior Tour Sparkling Heart” is a tour service designed for seniors, with the mission of “caring for every traveler as if they were family.”

Figure 1

Tour Fahsai Main Webpage



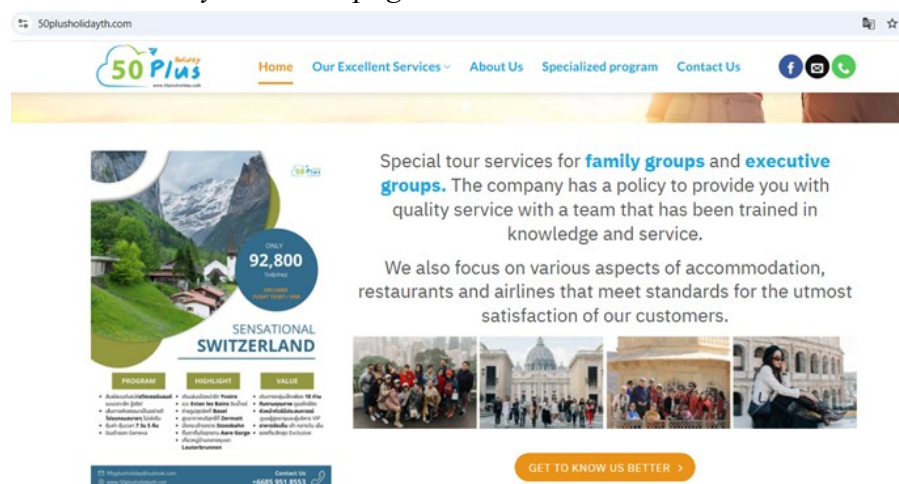
Source: <https://www.tourfahsai.com/>

50 Plus Holiday

This company is a travel agency that provides special tour services for families and executives. The services of this tour company focus on the quality of all types of services through a team that has been trained in knowledge and service. Its name justifies its possible dedication to the silver tourism market.

Figure 2

50 Plus Holiday Main Webpage



Source: <https://www.50plusholidayth.com/>

Wonderful Package

A tour company established to organize group tours and private tours, aiming to be the number one choice in customers' hearts by offering travel packages and services that provide the best value, meet customer needs, and ensure the highest level of satisfaction. The company emphasizes its strength as a leader in excellent service, with a team of professionals dedicated to delivering the best service for the happiness of its customers.

Figure 3

Wonderful Package Main Website Page



Source: <https://www.wonderfulpackage.com/>

Phutthapratip Tour (บริษัท พุทธประทีปทัวร์ จำกัด)

Phutthapratip Tour (บริษัท พุทธประทีปทัวร์ จำกัด) is the Buddhist heritage preservation Tours: Offering guided tours and organizing group tours to India, Myanmar, Nepal, and many other countries.

Figure 4

Phutthapratip Tour Co., Ltd. Main Website Page



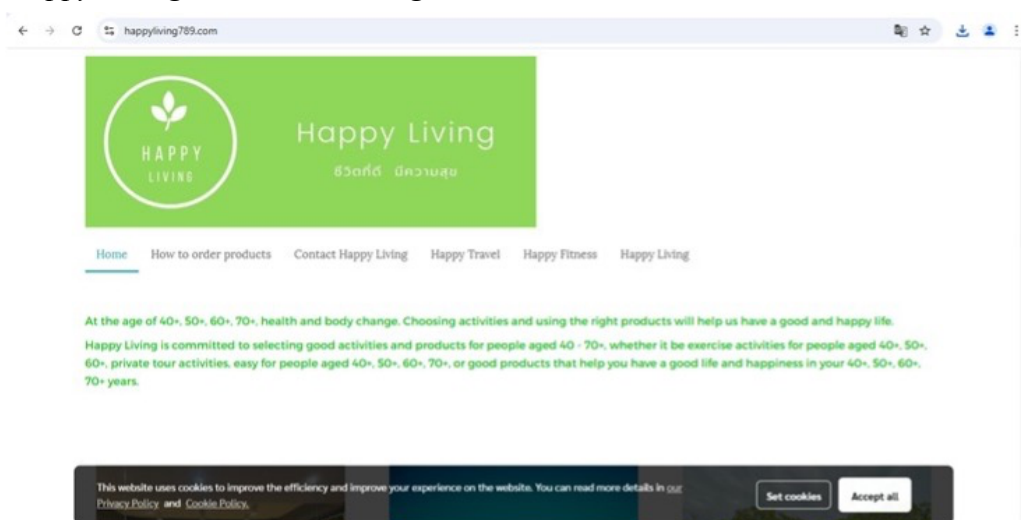
Source: ทัวร์แสวงบุญ สังฆะนียสถาน อินเดีย เนปาล พุทธประทีปทัวร์

Happy Living (ชีวิตที่ดี มีความสุข)

Happy Living (ชีวิตที่ดี มีความสุข) is another travel agency which carefully selects high-quality activities and products for individuals aged 40 to 70+. The offerings include tailored fitness programs for those in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, as well as comfortable private tours designed for travelers aged 40, 50, 60, and 70+. Additionally, it provides premium products that support a happy and fulfilling lifestyle for this age group.

Figure 5

Happy Living Main Website Page



Source: happyliving789

Data Analysis

This study examines the marketing messages used in silver tourism websites in Thailand, focusing on naming strategies, visual content, written textual messages, and references to older consumers. The analysis aims to uncover potential ageist implications, stereotypes, and cultural representations of older adults in travel marketing.

The first stage involves recording the names of the travel agencies and their tourist packages. This analysis explores whether the naming strategies explicitly reference older age and aging, and whether they contain any ageist or stereotypical implications. The study examines whether the names reinforce positive or negative perceptions of aging, contributing to broader discourses on older tourism.

The second stage documents the visual content displayed on the front pages of the websites, which are captured in digital form for analysis. The study investigates the types of images presented, including whether older people are depicted and how they are socially positioned. The analysis draws upon Hummer et al.'s (1994) stereotype framework, categorizing portrayals of older individuals as either positive (e.g., Golden Ager, Perfect Grandparent, John Wayne Conservative) or negative (e.g., Severely Impaired, Despondent, Shrew/Curmudgeon, Recluse). Additionally, the study examines background imagery to determine whether it conveys specific cultural meanings related to aging and senior tourism.

The third stage involves textual analysis of marketing messages, including slogans and descriptions of older tourists. The study assesses the presence of promotional slogans, descriptions of older people, and their alignment with visual portrayals. Particular attention is given to whether the textual content reinforces positive or negative stereotypes of aging, as identified in Hummer et al.'s (1994) framework. The study also examines how cultural meanings of aging are embedded in the marketing discourse, exploring whether textual messages emphasize active, independent lifestyles or portray older travelers as dependent and in need of special accommodations.

Finally, the study analyzes how older consumers are referenced in the examined websites. Thai terms used to refer to older tourists are translated into English, with discussions on their cultural implications. The analysis explores whether references to older adults reflect politeness, respect, or hierarchical social values in Thai culture. Additionally, it examines the variety of terms used, such as “older tourists,” “retirees,” or “golden agers,” and evaluates whether these references align with positive or negative stereotypes.

By integrating these four analytical dimensions, this study aims to reveal how silver tourism is marketed in Thailand and whether the representations of older travelers contribute to ageist ideologies or reflect evolving perceptions of aging in Thai society.

Findings

Tour Fahsai (ทัวร์ฟาไฮ)

“*Tour Fahsai*” (ทัวร์ฟาไฮ) also known as “*Senior Tour Sparkling Hearts*” (ทัวร์สูงวัย, หัวใจฟรุ้งฟริ้ง) is a tour company designed specifically for seniors who want to travel and explore new places and have fun without worrying about anything, whether it's

accommodation, transportation, or food, because this tour provides close care and attention from a dedicated team, making tourists feel as if they are traveling with family.

Figure 6

The Name of the Travel Agency Senior Tour Sparking Hearts

ทัวร์สูงวัย หัวใจฟรุ้งฟรุ้ง

Source: <https://www.tourfahsai.com/>

The tour names clearly reflect their purpose, with “Senior Tour” (ทัวร์สูงวัย) emphasizing that it is designed specifically for seniors, while “Sparkling Hearts” (หัวใจฟรุ้งฟรุ้ง) conveys the idea that despite age, the heart remains young, cheerful and open to new experiences.

On the website’s homepage, you can find information about the company name, the tour packages the company offers, along with a slogan that reflects the company’s philosophy and identity, as well as customer reviews. There is also a promotional poster designed to attract attention and provide an overview of the company’s services.

Figure 7

Tour Fahsai Poster on the Website (English Version)



Source: <https://www.tourfahsai.com/>

From this poster, you can see that the man and woman in the picture are elderly people, dressed in modern clothes, with bright and cheerful expressions, reflecting their happiness and readiness to travel. This emphasizes that this tour is specially designed for elderly people. In addition, there are also “review photos” from real customers who have used this tour, all of whom are senior people.

Figure 8*Tour Fahsai Reviewer*

Source: <https://www.tourfahsai.com/images/content/original-1716542499683.png>

From the activity photos, it is evident that the elderly participants are happy and actively engaged in various activities, whether it be visiting tourist attractions, dining together, or taking group photos with their fellow travelers. These moments highlight the importance of social interaction and an improved quality of life for seniors through well-designed travel experiences.

The following stereotypes can be analyzed from the images:

- Golden Ager – Seniors are friendly, socially interactive, enjoy traveling, and are always ready for new adventures.
- Perfect Grandparent – Seniors are caring, warm, and embody the ideal image of a loving and supportive grandparent.

The slogan (another name for the tour) used to promote this travel experience is “*Senior Tour: Sparkling Hearts*” (ทัวร์สูงวัยหัวใจฟรุ้งฟริ้ง), which conveys the idea of travel for seniors that is vibrant, fun, and not confined to the traditional image of elderly individuals as serious or reserved.

Additionally, there are supporting messages that reinforce this concept, such as:

Figure 9*Slogan of Fahsai Tour on Website*

ยินดีต้อนรับสู่ทัวร์ฟ้าใส ไม่มีคำว่า “แก่” แต่มาอยู่กับเรา....เที่ยวสบายๆตามสไตล์สูงวัย เสมือนไปกับคนในครอบครัวค่ะ

Source: <https://www.tourfahsai.com/images/content/original-1716542499683.png>

The messages “*Welcome to Fahsai Tour; There’s no such thing as ‘old’—just travel with us and enjoy a relaxing trip, senior style, as if you were part of the family*” (ยินดีต้อนรับสู่ทัวร์ฟ้าใส ไม่มีคำว่า “แก่” แต่มาอยู่กับเรา....เที่ยวสบายๆตามสไตล์สูงวัย เสมือนไปกับคนในครอบครัวค่ะ) highlights the company’s effort to create a warm and friendly atmosphere, fostering connections among travelers. The tour is carefully designed to cater to the needs of seniors who seek comfortable and hassle-free travel experience.

The phrase “*Senior style*” (สูงวัยสไตล์) reflects a travel style designed to suit the lifestyle and needs of retired travelers, which is different from traveling for teenagers or working people.

The program is designed to meet their needs and especially, limitations. The activities are appropriate, not too strenuous but still fun, with an emphasis on comfort and attention to every detail, including food and accommodation. It is a warm, safe trip, and full of meaningful experiences, even though negative stereotype of older age, realizing impaired image, must be assumed to be true and reinforced in the process of marketing.

The phrase “*as if you were part of the family*” (เสมือนไปกับคนในครอบครัว) gives the seniors a feeling of warmth, friendliness, and safety, which is suitable for the elderly who may be anxious about traveling. Using this phrase helps create a relaxed atmosphere, feeling like having children or grandchildren to take care of you, or like traveling with familiar people, not a stressful or too formal tour. However, the triggered ideology about older age is that older people seem to have fear towards leaving their comfort zone, namely, home and therefore reinforce the stereotype of recluse.

It is also noticeable that the company strategically uses the words “*senior*” (ผู้สูงอายุ) and “*old*” (แก่) to clearly emphasize that this tour is specifically designed for elderly travelers. The marketing messages successfully categorize target marketing segment in terms of the two words.

50 Plus Holiday

Figure 10

50 Plus Holiday Logo



Source: <https://www.50plusholidayth.com/>

The original branding of “*50 Plus Holiday*” was aimed at older adults, focusing on comfort, relaxation, and high-quality services. The name itself targeted people aged 50 and above, breaking the idea that older people aren’t as interested in travel. However, the marketing messages on the websites do not reflect its naming strategy to target older customers.

Exclusion of older age salient messages seems to be the marketing strategy in the case of *50 Plus Holiday* given that the visual image as highlighted on the front page of the website include a young couple with their children, reinforcing a family image, rather than anything related to older age. Other pictures only illustrate travel destinations.

Figure 11
50 Plus Holiday Homepage



Source: <https://www.50plusholidayth.com/>

Looking at the marketing of *50 Plus Holiday* shows how the company has changed its approach. The homepage no longer focuses on older adults but uses images of mixed-age groups, families, and luxurious destinations. This sends the message that their tours are for a wider audience, not just seniors. The focus on Switzerland and high-end travel suggests the company still values exclusivity and premium services, appealing to wealthy travelers, perhaps also including older adults who prefer comfort and have more disposable income.

The slogans and promotional texts on the website of *50 Plus Holiday* show how 50 Plus Holiday has adjusted. For example, phrases like “full-service luxury tour for elderly people but for all ages” keep their senior focus while appealing to a wider audience.

Figure 12
50 Plus Holiday Slogan and Description



Source: <https://www.50plusholidayth.com/>

The Thai text highlights relaxed schedules, premium stays, and customizable meals, catering to older travelers but also welcoming younger ones. For example, the above Thai slogans and descriptions seem to suggest an intentional balance between exclusivity and inclusivity. Terms like “โปรแกรมสบายๆ ไม่เร่งรีบ” (relaxed programs, no rush) and “เน้นโปรแกรมที่คุ้มค่า” (programs that maximize value) subtly cater to senior needs without explicitly labeling them as such. By doing so, *50 Plus Holiday* avoids the risk of making older travelers feel singled out or different from other tourists.

Wonderful Package

Figure 13

Wonderful Package Logo

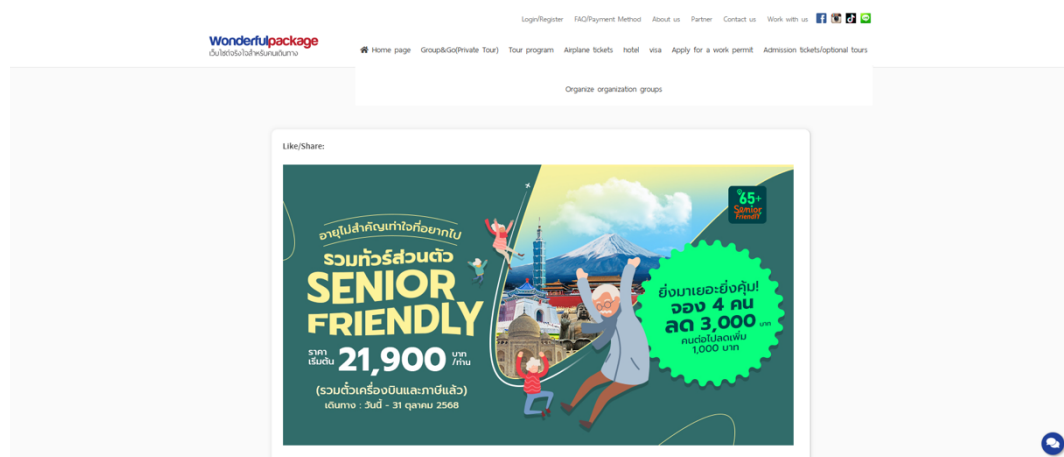


Source: <https://www.wonderfulpackage.com>

Travel agency's name, *Wonderful Package*, immediately conveys a positive, and uplifting feeling. This choice helps build a cheerful, inclusive brand image that does not single out any specific age group. Because the name itself does not mention seniors or any demographic, it is neutral and avoids any age-based stereotypes, thereby remaining appealing to a broad audience.

Figure 14

Senior Friendly Logo (Thai Version)



Source: <https://www.wonderfulpackage.com/p/รวมแพ็คเกจ%20SENIOR%20FRIENDLY/>

This poster promotes a “Private Tour Senior Friendly” package starting at 23,900 Baht per person (including airfare and taxes), valid until December 2024. It offers a group discount: “ยิ่งมาเยอะยิ่งคุ้ม! จอง 4 คน ลด 3,000 บาท คนต่อไป ลดเพิ่ม 1,000 บาท” (The more people, the cheaper it gets: book 4 people and get 3,000 Baht off, plus an additional 1,000 Baht discount per extra traveler). This suggests that seniors not only have the time and resources to travel but also value shared experiences with family or friends. By positioning the package as senior-friendly, the ad promotes the idea of active aging and portrays retirement as a time for new adventures, emphasizing social connection, affordability, and comfortable travel.

While the starting price of 23,900 Baht is appealing, it may imply that older adults have tighter budgets or need financial incentives, potentially reinforcing a stereotype of limited spending power. The focus on group travel implies that seniors prefer companionship, while the discount structure targets retirees with disposable income but who remain budget-conscious. The visual of active, social retirees supports this image, yet the emphasis on pricing and group deals could subtly suggest that seniors need financial assistance to afford full price, despite their energetic portrayal as golden agers.

In marketing contexts, the use of English terms such as “65 plus” or “senior” instead of direct Thai words for older adults reflects an effort to avoid potentially negative or stigmatizing connotations. By adopting more neutral or universally recognizable language, brands can position their offerings in a way that appeals to older consumers without triggering age-related sensitivities. This approach underscores the importance of linguistic choices in effectively targeting and engaging an aging demographic.

Phutthapratip Tour (พุทธประทีปทัวร์)

Figure 15

Phutthapratip Tour Logo

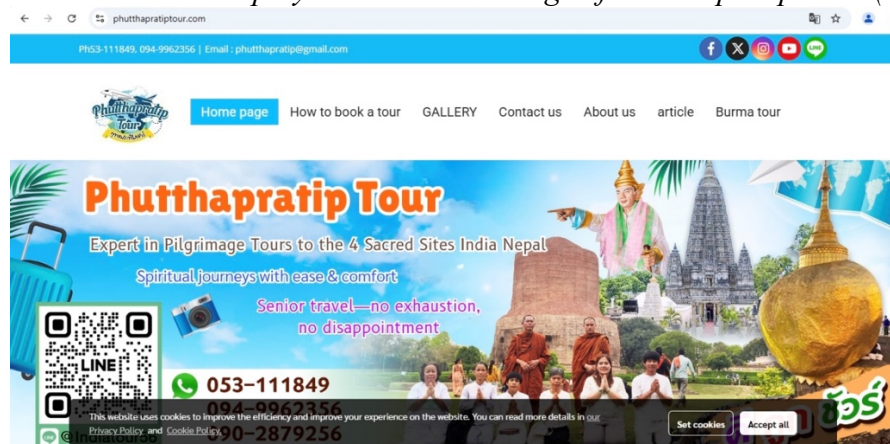


Source: <https://www.phutthapratiptour.com>

The name *Phutthapratip Tour* is a transliteration of the Thai term *พุทธประทีป* (*Phutthapratip*), which combines “พุทธ, พุทธะ” (Buddha) and “ประทีป” (lamp or light), translating to “Lamp of the Buddha” or “Buddha’s Lamp” (The Royal Society of Thailand, 2011). This term is commonly associated with Thai Buddhist temples, such as Wat Buddhapadipa in London (Cate, 2003).

Phutthapratip Tour is a travel agency specializing in pilgrimage tours. While its name does not carry any age-related implications, its reference to Buddhist travelers suggests a focus on religious or pilgrimage tourism. As Collins-Kreiner (2010) describes, pilgrimage is a religious and cultural phenomenon unique to human society, driven by spiritual needs and often involving visits to sacred sites. It also fulfills an internal desire for spiritual growth and self-discovery, which is particularly common among senior travelers.

Given its name, *Phutthapratip Tour* is likely to attract Thai senior travelers seeking meaningful spiritual journeys. From a cultural and theoretical perspective, and based on Hummer et al. (1994), the name could be classified within the *John Wayne Conservative* category, reflecting a positive religious connotation.

Figure 16*Visual Content Displayed on the Main Page of Phutthapratip Tour (English Version)*

Source: <https://www.phutthapratiptour.com>

Senior tourists sitting in a meditative position with their hands in prayer can be seen in Figures 15 and 16, which are part of *Phutthapratip Tour*'s main website page. Buddhist monks are also present, serving as Buddhist ambassadors. The website portrays a social connection in which elder travelers engage in the journey with dedication and learning, while monks are revered as spiritual leaders who guide and instruct them. According to the website, this interaction blends cultural exchange and religious reverence seamlessly.

Additionally, following Hummer et al. (1994), we classify the visual content as a positive stereotype, using appropriate adjectives to identify it within the *John Wayne Conservative* category, where Buddhism serves as a religious reference. The background also features the Golden Rock Pagoda, Mahabodhi Temple, and Dhamek Stupa (from right to left)—all revered sites symbolizing tranquility, spiritual practice, and the tour itinerary. This layout helps elderly travelers easily envision and anticipate the locations they will visit. More importantly, the visual content conveys themes of spiritual devotion and religious pilgrimage as a significant journey for older adults. Consistent with Buddhist beliefs on karma and rebirth, the imagery aligns with Thai societal views on aging as a life stage dedicated to religious practice and merit accumulation (Ratanakul, 2013).

The slogans “Pilgrimage Tour India Tour (ทัวร์แสวงบุญ ทัวร์อินเดีย) Organized & Managed by Us – No Third Parties Involved (จัดเอง ดูแลเอง ไม่ส่งต่อ)” promote silver vacation packages on the homepage, emphasizing exclusivity, trust, and direct management—qualities that appeal to senior travelers who value authenticity and reliability. The term *Pilgrimage Tour* implies a spiritual or religious journey, aligning with the John Wayne Conservative stereotype, as described by Hummer et al. (1994). While reassuring potential travelers of direct service and eliminating concerns about middlemen or hidden fees, the emphasis on *No Third Parties Involved* may also subtly reinforce the perception of senior travelers as reclusive or overly cautious, suggesting a lack of trust in intermediaries. Despite the positive portrayal of direct service, the underlying subtext implies that seniors may be susceptible to deception. This dual representation, while intended to emphasize reliability, unintentionally reinforces perceptions of vulnerability, leading to more subtle, negative assumptions about senior travelers.

Additional slogans can be found on the website, including the phrases: “Spiritual journeys with ease & comfort” (เน้นการปฏิบัติธรรม เดินทางสะดวกสบาย) and “Senior travel—no exhaustion, no disappointment” (ผู้สูงวัยไม่เหนื่อย ไม่ผิดหวัง). These messages carry both positive and

negative implications. While they emphasize convenience and well-being, they also portray older travelers as requiring ease, comfort, and a lack of exertion. This reinforces the Recluse stereotype (Hummert et al., 1994) by suggesting frailty and limited energy, implying that aging inherently leads to exhaustion and dissatisfaction—an assumption that does not reflect the diverse realities of senior travelers.

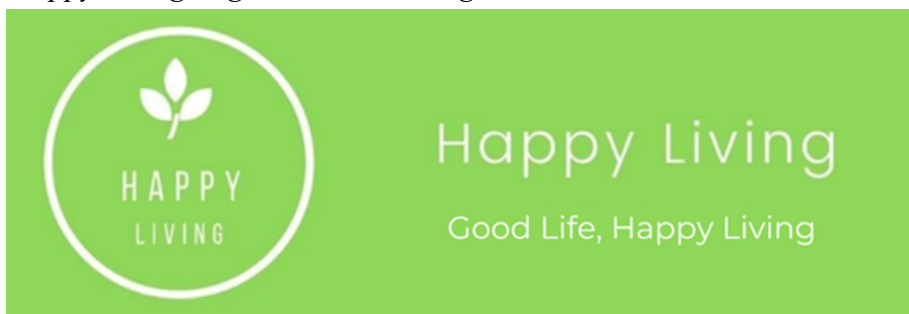
Thai advertising strategies often present senior citizens as valued tourists deserving of high-quality care. This aligns with cultural principles that respect elders and acknowledge their strong purchasing power (Travel and Tour World, 2023). Studies indicate that senior travelers prioritize safety and premium services, leading to offerings tailored to their preferences (Euraseans Journal, 2022).

However, the emphasis on spiritual journeys aligns with the John Wayne Conservative stereotype (Hummert et al., 1994), suggesting sentimentality and a religious inclination. This is consistent with images of travelers sitting in a meditative posture with their hands in prayer, accompanied by Buddhist monks acting as religious ambassadors. Yet, the individuals in these images contrast with the intended theme of senior travel, as they depict a form of travel that does not necessarily align with the broader concept of silver tourism.

Happy Living

Figure 17

Happy Living Logo in Thai and English



Source: <https://www.happyliving789.com/>

The travel agency name *Happy Living*, as seen in Figure 17, was chosen to reflect positivity, inclusivity, and well-being, aligning with the slogan “*Good Life, Happy Living.*” *Happy Living* presents aging as a stage of life filled with joy, activity, and new experiences, avoiding any ageist connotations.

By emphasizing happiness and quality of life rather than age itself, the brand sends a strong message that travel is for everyone, regardless of age. This approach encourages older adults to view themselves as active participants in life and travel, rather than as individuals constrained by age. The absence of age-specific language also helps prevent stereotypes that suggest older travelers require specialized experiences due to frailty or dependency.

The homepage of *Happy Living* (Figure 18) depicts older adults as active, healthy, and socially engaged, reinforcing travel as a means of adventure, connection, and self-improvement. The dominant theme in its visual marketing challenges traditional aging narratives by portraying older adults as happy, independent, and adventurous.

Many images showcase nature, reflecting Thai older adults' preference for natural tourism. Research by Naksanee (2018) highlights their strong interest in health and nature-based travel, while Watcharatorn, et al. (2017) emphasizes the benefits of engaging with natural environments for well-being and personal growth. These visuals support the idea that travel enhances quality of life and align with *Happy Living's* commitment to a fulfilling lifestyle.

Figure 18

Visual Content Displayed on the Website of Happy Living in English



Source: <https://www.happyliving789.com/>

The visual content (Figure 18) features older adults engaging in light exercise, yoga, wellness retreats, and exploring cultural and historical sites, emphasizing curiosity and adventure. Many images depict social engagement, showing older adults traveling in small groups, fostering friendship and shared experiences. These representations align with stereotypes such as the *Golden Ager*, where older adults are portrayed as adventurous, well-traveled, sociable, and independent, as well as the *Perfect Grandparent*, highlighting their roles as family-oriented, kind, and wise individuals (Hummer et al., 1994). These visuals promote a dynamic and positive image of aging, shifting the focus from decline to continued growth and engagement through travel.

The website also features slogans that shape perceptions of older customers. For example, the slogan “ชีวิตที่ดี มีความสุข” (*Good Life, Happy Living*) conveys a holistic sense of well-being, suggesting that older adults can continue to lead full and meaningful lives through travel and leisure. This phrase reinforces the idea that happiness is not solely defined by youth but can be cultivated at any stage of life. It encourages seniors to embrace travel as a way to enhance their physical, emotional, and mental well-being, supporting *Happy Living's* philosophy of promoting an active and fulfilling lifestyle for older travelers.

Another slogan, “เที่ยวสบายๆ ไปได้ทุกคน” (*Easy Travel for All*), emphasizes inclusivity, particularly for travelers with mobility challenges, reassuring them that *Happy Living's* services are designed to be accessible and stress-free. The imagery reinforces this message, such as depictions of older adults in wheelchairs appearing joyful and engaged, conveying that physical limitations do not have to be barriers to travel.

However, these images present an idealized version of aging, contrasting with the reality that physical decline is an inevitable part of growing older. Research by Gilleard & Higgs (2011) on the *Third Age* suggests that contemporary marketing often portrays seniors as perpetually

active and youthful, masking the physical challenges they may face. The marketing strategy avoids directly mentioning disabilities or impairments, instead highlighting the positive aspects of travel experiences. This approach serves as a mitigating strategy, reducing the negative impact of stereotypes surrounding severe mobility impairments by integrating the positive *Golden Ager* stereotype. While this strategy fosters an empowering image, it also creates a paradox in which aging is celebrated while its more challenging aspects are subtly erased from the narrative, reinforcing an unrealistic expectation of aging.

The language used in the marketing materials aligns with the imagery, reinforcing the brand's portrayal of active and happy older adults. The written content avoids words that suggest frailty or limitations, ensuring that the messaging remains positive and empowering. The focus is on adventure, exploration, and well-being, rather than the need for assistance or special accommodations due to aging.

Figure 19

Description of Happy Living in Thai and English

ในวัย 40+ 50+ 60+ 70+ สุขภาพและร่างกายมีการเปลี่ยนแปลง การเลือกทำกิจกรรมและใช้ผลิตภัณฑ์ที่เหมาะสมจะช่วยให้เรามีชีวิตที่ดี มีความสุข

Happy Living ตั้งใจคัดสรรกิจกรรมและผลิตภัณฑ์ที่ดี สำหรับผู้ที่อยู่ในวัย 40 - 70+ ไม่ว่าจะเป็น กิจกรรมออกกำลังกาย สำหรับวัย 40+ 50+ 60+ กิจกรรมท่องเที่ยวแบบทัวร์ส่วนตัว สมาชิก สำหรับวัย 40+ 50+ 60+ 70+ หรือ ผลิตภัณฑ์ดีๆ ที่ช่วยให้มีชีวิตที่ดี มีความสุข ในวัย 40+ 50+ 60+ 70+

At the age of 40+, 50+, 60+, 70+ health and body change. Choosing activities and using the right products will help us have a good and happy life.

Happy Living is committed to selecting the best activities and products for people aged 40 - 70+, whether it be exercise activities for people aged 40+, 50+, 60+, private tour activities for people aged 40+, 50+, 60+, 70+, or good products that help you have a good and happy life at the age of 40+, 50+, 60+, 70+.

Source: <https://www.happyliving789.com/>

The target tourists are categorized as “วัย 40+ 50+ 60+ 70+” (ages 40+, 50+, 60+, 70+). Labeling individuals in their 40s as “older adults” reflects an expanded definition of aging that may not align with societal norms. Many people in their 40s and 50s do not yet identify as seniors, making this categorization somewhat controversial. While this broad age segmentation extends the marketing reach, it also raises questions about how aging is framed in promotional messaging. By using these age groups, *Happy Living* reinforces the idea that travel and adventure are lifelong pursuits. However, this approach also blurs traditional boundaries of what is considered “old” across different cultural contexts.

Discussion and Conclusion

The representations of older people and aging in the promotional messages of Thailand's silver tourism industry reflect a blend of progressive and traditional narratives, strategically balancing inclusivity with age-specific marketing.

A key inference is that while agencies increasingly portray older travelers as active, adventurous, and independent, they simultaneously reinforce subtle stereotypes about aging. For instance, *Tour Fah Sai* and *Wonderful Package* encourage active aging but maintain familiar tropes—such as the need for comfort, family-like support, and budget-consciousness—which may unintentionally limit perceptions of older travelers. Similarly, *Phutthapratip Tour* reinforces the view of aging as a time for spiritual devotion, aligning with conservative cultural expectations of later life in Thailand.

Conversely, *50 Plus Holiday* and *Happy Living* demonstrate a shift toward age inclusive marketing by downplaying explicit references to older age. Their strategies suggest an

awareness of potential stigma associated with “senior” labels, using subtle linguistic choices and imagery to attract older tourists without making them feel categorized by age. This reflects a broader trend in silver tourism marketing, where older travelers are positioned as experience-seekers rather than a distinct consumer group with special needs.

However, a critical issue emerges: the tension between age-conscious and age-neutral marketing. While removing explicit age references helps combat stigma, it may also overlook the diverse needs of older travelers, particularly those requiring specific accommodations during the process of travel. The success of these strategies depends on whether older tourists prefer subtle messaging or appreciate clear recognition of their needs.

Ultimately, these findings suggest that Thailand’s silver tourism marketing is evolving toward a more empowered, aspirational representation of aging. However, traces of traditional age-related stereotypes persist, indicating an ongoing negotiation between cultural expectations and modern consumer trends.

The research limitation is that the findings can only be applied in Thailand, a specifically cultural context. Future research can extend similar research inquiries in other cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the identified communication messages may not be appreciated by the addressed target customers. Future research can focus on how the identified marketing messages are perceived by older tourists.

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How Is Cinematherapy Possible? An Existential-Phenomenological Perspective

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Abstract

This study reconsiders the concept of cinematherapy, arguing that it should not be simplified as a clinical psychological technique. Instead, it is reframed as a philosophical and experiential form of film engagement rooted in existential phenomenology. Unlike conventional models that rely on therapist-led interpretation and standardized emotional responses, this research emphasizes how viewers generate meaning through personal, embodied encounters with film. By drawing on Merleau-Ponty's theory of embodiment and Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world, the paper proposes a three-part experiential framework: image guidance, which initiates symbolic identification and imaginative immersion; bodily resonance, which evokes sensory awareness and affective responses; and narrative reflection, which enables the viewer to reconfigure their interpretive frame and deepen their self-understanding. The paper analyzes *Incantation* (2022), a contemporary Taiwanese horror film that combines mockumentary style, occult rituals, and the threat of invisible curses. Through subjective camerawork, chaotic bodily expressions, and interactive narrative elements, the film provokes a visceral response to themes of belief, guilt, and existential instability. Rather than offering symbolic resolution or therapeutic release, the horror aesthetic functions as a destabilizing space where viewers confront fractured subjectivity and existential anxiety. This study contributes to the theoretical expansion of cinematherapy by presenting it as a dynamic process of embodied meaning-making. It invites interdisciplinary dialogue across film theory, media philosophy, and affect studies, and repositions the viewer as an active participant in their own emotional and existential interpretation of cinema.

Keywords: cinematherapy, embodiment, image guidance, narrative reflection, existential phenomenology

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Introduction

Cinema has often been described as a man-made dream. Since the Lumière brothers released the widely regarded first film, *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1896), “shock” has become the basic principle by which films are perceived (Benjamin, 1939, 2010). Shock refers to acquiring novel experience through dreams or films, achieving a purifying effect consistent with Aristotle’s view of catharsis via pity and fear (Wells, 2000).

Berg-Cross et al. (1990) formally introduced cinematherapy to academic discourse, outlining its history, theoretical foundations, clinical procedures, case studies, and film lists. They situated cinematherapy in relation to bibliotherapy, tracing it to earlier therapeutic uses of reading, including what they described as Sir Walter Galt’s nineteenth-century survey of hospital reading practices. They further observed that bibliotherapy had been associated with enhanced self-awareness, motivation for change, and emotional expression, often through the generation of new insights. These narrative values, they argued, extend to cinematherapy and confer several advantages: watching films is generally more accessible than assigned reading; cinema operates as a publicly shared cultural form; and films prompt reflection on inner conflict and personal values.

From a psychoanalytic view, Ingmar Bergman noted that no art resembles dreams as closely as cinema; films evoke unconscious emotions and can induce a trance-like state (Hu & Zhu, 2015). Kozubek (2016) likewise places cinematherapy in the lineage of bibliotherapy but centers projection/identification: patients “see themselves” on the screen, merging with characters’ circumstances, symbols, thoughts, and emotions. Kracauer (1997) invokes the Medusa myth: the screen’s image, like a mirror, lets us confront the petrifying unconscious; Perseus’s feat is to overcome fear and face the reflected monster.

Cinema and psychoanalysis emerged almost simultaneously. Film studies moved from semiotic psychoanalysis to phenomenology; cinematherapy theory, however, often remains at bibliotherapy/psychoanalysis. Although clinicians report positive cases and stages, a full-fledged theory is lacking (Kozubek, 2016). This study therefore asks: Can we build an interdisciplinary methodology by integrating film studies (communication) with cinematherapy (psychology)?

Early cases (Breuer’s Anna O.; Freud’s “Mrs. N”) reflect a Cartesian mind—an inner container separable from the world. Pathology is labeled, and free association or hypnosis aims to expel repressed causes. This yields two problems: stigmatizing isolation and a dangerous inner/outer split (Stolorow et al., 2002/2021). Gendlin (1966) instead grounds inquiry in relational existence: lived experience is a felt process that models and concepts should point to, not ossify.

Li (2016) notes that natural science presumes a world independent of the self; even post-positivism’s “ultimate reality” remains inaccessible, thus hypothesis-testing. Phenomenology treats factual existence as an “unknown mystery” and turns to ontological reflection on human existence. Natural science grasps the state of fact; phenomenology the state of existence. Phenomenological work is tested heuristically—by its power to disclose meaning in multidimensional phenomena.

For schizophrenia, the disclosure of meaning is blocked, experience collapses inward as primordial images/voices, severing life-world ties (Gendlin, 1966). Relational therapy advocates emotional dwelling—entering the other’s broken world so that fragments flash with

shared understanding and care, allowing trauma to be borne and transformed (Stolorow & Atwood, 2019/2023). Phenomenology, with intentionality (noesis/noema), opens existence outward; concepts serve as pointers to felt experience (Gendlin, 1966).

Technological change (streaming, mobile media, gaming, VR) has pushed cinema toward immersive, interactive experience; marketing extends emotion from screen to environment, blurring film/reality and building intertextual networks (Wu, 2024). Text-centered psychoanalysis and semiotics no longer suffice. Today film studies attend to the pre-reflective convergence of sensation and materiality (MacDougall, 2005); phenomenology's maxim—experience is meaning—suggests a bridge between film studies and cinematherapy.

Cinematherapy inherits self-help practices from bibliotherapy. Although cinematherapy entered psychotherapy with Berg-Cross et al., much popular work centers on self-help manuals (*poradników do autoterapii*) (Kozubek, 2016), reflecting resistance to medicalization; cinematherapy avoids pharmacological risks and is efficient.

At psychoanalysis's outset, Freud and Jung analyzed themselves and required therapists to undergo analysis (Stolorow & Atwood, 2019/2023). Foucault's technologies of the self identify practices—such as confession—through which individuals transform themselves under the imperative to “know thyself” (Wang, 2015). Contemporary engagement includes trailers, exhibits, merchandise, cross-platform releases, Q&As, reviews, rewatches, and fan communities. Traditional cinematherapy positioned film as auxiliary to therapist dialogue (Tylikowska, 2015; Tylikowska & Tucholska, 2017). Thus a second research question arises: As film studies pivots to affective experience and psychotherapy to emotional resonance, can cinema itself replace the therapist—enabling viewers to adopt a therapeutic attitude autonomously?

This study's aims: (1) build a methodology of cinematherapy by integrating communication and psychology; (2) bring phenomenological analysis and existential psychotherapy into cinematherapy to explore broader viewing and the possibility of self-directed cinematherapy.

Literature Review

Myth, the Sacred, and the Cinematic Sanctuary

Cinema can function as a modern locus of the sacred. Following Kawai (2016/2018), awe before the sun is not worship of an external object but veneration of an inner, numinous experience—what myth renders into narrative. Entering a theater resembles stepping into a temple or clinic: a threshold to altered consciousness. Bazin (1967) casts cinema as a modern myth whose sound, light, color, and immediacy install a sense of real presence. When the house lights dim, spectators are inducted into this ritual space and its trance-like receptivity.

Cinema, the Unconscious, and the Mirror

Benjamin (1936/1999) argues that the optical unconscious names what slow motion, magnification, and special effects disclose beyond ordinary perception. Metz (1977/2006) replies that film is not a literal mirror—our bodies are absent—yet it organizes a world we can inhabit imaginatively. Meunier (1969) warns against reducing the spectator to a hypnotized regressive; the viewing subject remains active and discerning. Together these positions recast

cinema as a crafted passage between consciousness and unconscious life, not a one-way slide into infantile trance.

Immersion and Identification: From Falling-Out to Entering

For Metz (1977/2006), cinematic practice becomes effective only through a passion of perception. Kozubek (2016) makes this the clinical starting point: identification with a role and the feelings it evokes sustains the therapeutic process. Filmmakers minimize cues that trigger “falling out” (awareness of the apparatus) and cultivate “entering” (affective identification), so that viewers move with the film rather than standing over it.

Aura, the Three Looks, and Affective Engineering

Benjamin (1936/1998, 1936/1999, 1955/2012) describes aura as the felt reciprocity whereby the object seems to “look back.” Over-rapid cutting can dissipate this reciprocity. Spectators know films are fictions yet oscillate between investment and distance (Metz, 1977/2006). Screenwriting techniques scaffold this oscillation: empathy and credibility (McKee, 1997/2014) bring us near; Mulvey’s (1989) “three looks” reminds us fiction suppresses camera-awareness to keep us from sliding too far away.

Catharsis and Therapeutic Layers

Read against Aristotle, catharsis is a disciplined emotional discharge; projection/identification remains a pathway to deeper release (Kozubek, 2016). Kuriansky et al. (2010) synthesize practice into layers: films that open emotion (cathartic), release repression (popcorn), and—most centrally—prompt self-understanding through the character’s journey (evocative). These layers will later map onto this study’s triadic model.

Myth, Symbol, and a Psychopathology of the Text

Myths convert fear and desire into shareable plots, easing complexes and feeding meaning (Kozubek, 2016). When ritual channels fail, images erupt in dreams or highly stylized narratives (Campbell, 2008/2020). Within this frame, screen images become a “presence of absence” (Metz, 1977/2006). Bleuler’s naming of schizophrenia highlighted subjective images as symptomatic; phenomenological clinicians re-read such images as reparative efforts situated in life histories and relationships (Stolorow & Atwood, 2019/2023).

Level One—Evoking Emotion Beyond a Cartesian Transfer

The traditional projection model pictures a mental content transferred one-way into another psyche—a last bastion of Cartesianism. Infant research and intersubjective psychoanalysis instead show human beings natively participate in nonverbal affect (Stolorow et al., 2002/2021). Li (2006) conceptualizes experience as the construction of coupling relations: viewers interact with filmic worlds and characters directly, yielding affective synchronization rather than mere projection.

Level Two—Discharging Repression as Response and Suture

Within an intersubjective frame, symptoms are not simply drive-based repressions but experiences that received no adequate response. Film viewing then functions as a field for new

responses that draw what was concealed to the center (Stolorow et al., 2002/2021). Oudart's (1997) suture clarifies how shot/reverse-shot alternation patches the gap between imaginary immersion and symbolic awareness: identification shifts across positions, maintaining continuity without ejecting the viewer.

Level Three—Understanding the Self: Personal Myths, Collective Patterns

Kozubek (2016) urges a turn from generic psychological models to humanities-based attention to singularity and meaning. May (1991) adds that personal myths are variants of collective patterns. Thus the viewer's self-understanding need not contradict broader cultural archetypes; it refashions them.

Metaphor, Lived Interaction, and Phenomenological Reorientation

Cinematherapy works by mobilizing metaphors that move feelings into language and action (Heston & Kottman, 1997). Interactional life is easily objectified as “content” (Jiang, 2001). A phenomenological attitude restores priority to lived process: rather than dissecting film as text alone, we examine what experiences unfold in viewing and how they revise our stance toward the world. This reorientation anchors the methodological bridge to be articulated in §3.

Methodology: An Existential-Phenomenological Approach

Methodologically, I therefore analyze viewing through the three-stage frame outlined above.

Dreaming a Hero

Cinema as prescription: by material, fiction vs documentary; by form, classic (art) vs genre. Clinicians select commercial genre films (Berg-Cross et al., 1990). Art films prize aesthetic autonomy/defamiliarization (Braudy, 2002); genre films help audiences understand self and society. Liu (2012) contrasts them (Table 1).

Table 1

A Comparison of Genre Films and Classic (Art) Films

Aspect	Classic (Art) Films	Genre Films
Effect	Stir emotions	Promote understanding
Feature	Tell a complete story	Depict human nature; visual style
Problem	Solve a single core problem	Explore multiple problems of life
Method	Follow production norms	Rely on intuition and inspiration
Stance	Use old forms for new issues	Reject old forms; pursue new forms

Note. Adapted from Liu, 2012; compiled in this study.

Genre storytelling centers a **controlling idea** that tracks how/why a character transforms (McKee, 1997/2014). To prime empathy, Snyder (2014) advises “**save the cat.**” Mythic archetypes undergird the **hero's journey** widely adapted across genres (Campbell, 2008/2020, 2020) (Table 2).

Table 2*Narrative Structure of the Hero's Journey*

1. Call to Adventure	2. Refusal of the Call	3. Supernatural Aid	4. Crossing First Threshold	5. Belly of the Whale	6. Road of Trials
7. Meeting with the Goddess	8. Woman as Temptress	9. Atonement with the Father	10. Apotheosis	11. The Ultimate Boon	12. Refusal of the Return
13. Magic Flight	14. Rescue from Without	15. Crossing Return Threshold	16. Master of Two Worlds	17. Freedom to Live	

Note. Adapted from Campbell, 2020; compiled in this study.

Li (2022), drawing on Ericksonian hypnosis as articulated in earlier clinical literature, describes the co-writing of a hypnotic script with a client, through which semantic, bodily, and imagistic awareness emerges. Analogously, this study analyzes three facets: image guidance, evoking bodily sensation, narrative reflection.

Image Guidance

Imagistic awareness is central to healing, but phenomenology reads images through acts of seeing rather than projection (Li, 2022). Jung's (1960/2014) active imagination aims at a transcendent function; von Franz (2001/2011) details steps (empty self-consciousness; let images arise; question them; integrate in life). Cinematherapy values films that evoke imagination and feeling (Kozubek, 2016). Recurring motifs intensify metaphoric interaction.

Evoking Bodily Sensation

Viewing in clinical contexts externalizes problems and reduces resistance (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000). Cinematherapy affords stress release, enhanced well-being, and insight (Kozubek, 2016). Film and viewer form a visuotactile unity (Barker, 2009); vision is haptic (Marks, 2000). Focusing operationalizes felt sense in six steps (Gendlin, 2012), enabling stuck emotions to flow again. Film parallels focusing's rise-and-fall of affect but accelerates conflicts toward post-viewing release. Metaphoric discussion afterward is indispensable (Berg-Cross et al., 1990; Gregerson, 2010; Li, 2022).

Narrative Reflection

Stories structure life (White, 1993). Cinematherapy extends bibliotherapy by using film metaphorically to foster exploration and change (Berg-Cross et al., 1990). A triadic relation (client–therapist–film) creates a common vocabulary (Sacilotto et al., 2022); clients adopt a third-person stance (Sharp et al., 2002). Montage imposes new meanings (Bazin, 2009), yet meanings are ultimately conferred by viewers (Kozubek, 2016). Narrative therapy reframes unstored events (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

The Structure of Cinematherapy

Cinematherapy typically involves a therapist-selected commercial film. Emotions arise unbidden even when fictionality is known—a natural result of understanding the character's situation (Kozubek, 2016). Strong films portray character arcs—growth or inner

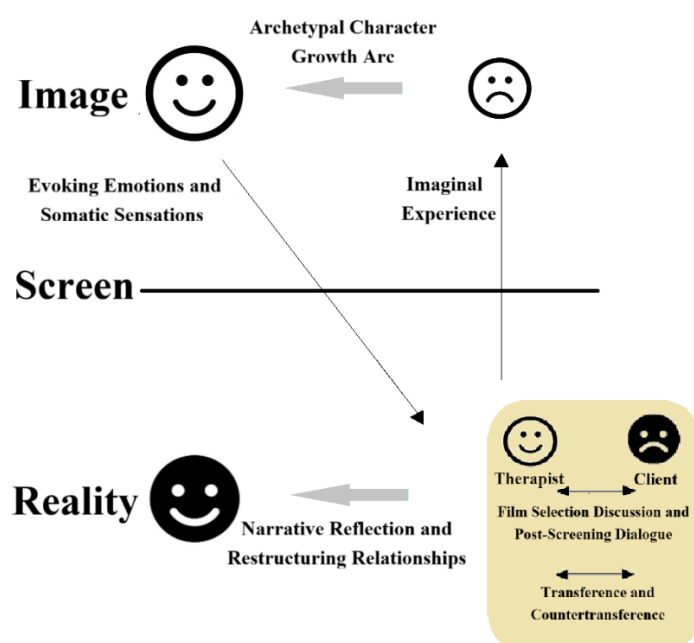
transformation—with believable motives (McKee, 1997/2014). Misuse can backfire (defensiveness, misreading, over-interpretation). Cinematherapy is intentional (Tylikowska, 2016): viewers remain simultaneously inside and outside the story, half-awake/half-dreaming with therapeutic purpose.

Alliance-Based Cinematherapy

Existential-phenomenological therapy emphasizes intersubjectivity and affect (Stolorow et al., 2002/2021). Experiential therapy entails encounter, including the clinician's vulnerability (Gendlin, 1966). Trauma stems from malattunement; a relational home buffers anxiety (Stolorow & Atwood, 2019/2023). Watching the same film supplies a shared “magnifying glass” of reality (Sacilotto et al., 2022). Film is supportive—not standalone—thus dialogue remains essential (Kozubek, 2016).

Figure 1

Alliance-Based Cinematherapy Structure

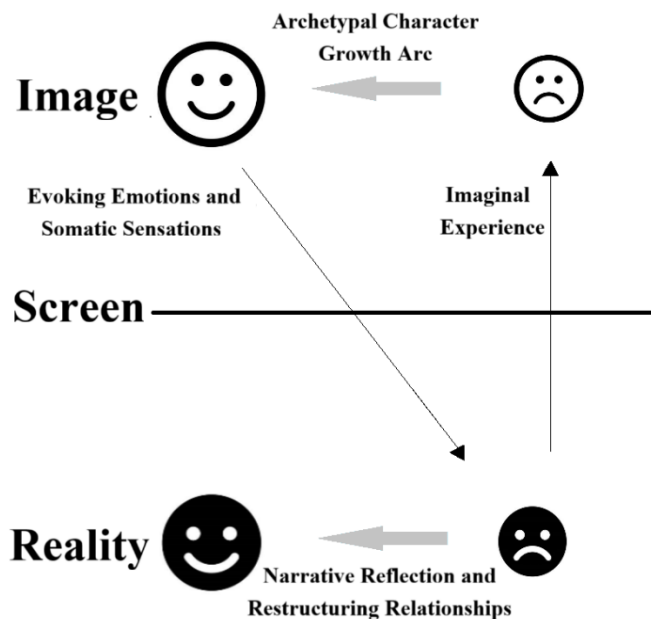


Source: This study.

Autonomous Cinematherapy

Self-directed practice is historically grounded in Foucault's notion of technologies of the self (Wang, 2015). Drawing on earlier discussions by Raczek (2014) and Wolz (2005), Tylikowska and Tucholska (2017) identify several risks associated with the autotherapeutic use of film, including difficulty distinguishing fiction from reality, mismatches between preferences and comprehension, missing narrative essentials, weak linkage to lived experience, lack of support, and emotional overload. Popular self-cure guides often lack a definition of “health” and evidence (Gregerson, 2010).

Figure 2
Autonomous Cinematherapy Structure



Source: This study.

Experience defines concepts, not vice versa (Gendlin, 1966). The film–viewer relation is a stimulus–response arc, modulated by broader texts (Kozubek, 2016). Meanings continue to unfold and be reinterpreted after the credits. Suitability—alliance or autonomy—returns to the initial condition: immersion (affective resonance). If a film elicits genuine emotion, the viewer recognizes its reality and adopts a direct stance toward the world (Kozubek, 2016).

Case Study: *Incantation* (2022)

Applying the three-stage frame to *Incantation* (Ko, 2022) makes visible how horror becomes a vehicle for existential work. The film employs a mock-documentary mode intertwined with folk religion, cult ritual, and curse transmission. Subjective shots, fragmentation, and interactive cues draw spectators into the text; its open ending extends horror into everyday life, supporting the premise that horror functions as a phenomenology of existential anxiety rather than mere emotional consumption.

A Three-Layer Process of Horror Viewing

Image Guidance: Generating Fear Through Absence

“Do you believe in blessings?”—the opening voiceover leads into an interactive Ferris-wheel/train demo that confuses whether intention steers the image or the image steers perception. Constrained vision, dropped/unpowered cameras, and omitted moments bind viewers to incomplete images. Duo-duo sees a “bad thing” and asks her mother to lead it away (Ruo-nan guides empty air); after the refrain “And then?”, Duo-duo jumps. Absence forces spectators to complete terror for themselves.

Evoking Bodily Sensation: Embodied Horror

Extreme bodily displays—ulcerated skin, tooth loss/growth, swallowing red-hot glass, head-banging, suicide—provoke mimetic reactions. The closing close-up of the Black Madonna (a faceless, hollowed head packed with granules) compels viewers to endure somatic shock between refusal and fixation; flashing curse wheels and harsh noise leave sensory residues that carry beyond the screen.

Narrative Reflection: Extending the Curse into Everyday Life

To save Duo-duo, Ruo-nan shares the curse with viewers, unveiling the Black Madonna to the camera. Whether Duo-duo survives remains blank. The opening question and final gaze implicate spectators as accomplices. Streaming popularity and merchandise extend efficacy into daily life, prompting the post-screening question: *Am I now in the chain of the curse?*

Horror as an Opportunity for Existential Healing

At image guidance, absence surfaces unconscious anxiety; at bodily sensation, somatic shock becomes existential tremor; at narrative reflection, open-ended extension sustains meaning-making. Thus *Incantation* exemplifies how contemporary horror can practice cinematherapy, guiding viewers to reinterpret existence and begin self-reconstruction.

Conclusion

Post-screening life is not a coda to cinema but the field where cinematic experience completes its work. Drawing on Kitaoka's (1998/2001) interpretation of Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, markets, concerts, and cinemas can be understood as spaces of co-presence where a sense of self is mirrored in resonance with others—an encounter-relation rather than mere projection.

For Gendlin (1966), existence is felt, stuff of the body; for Heidegger, openness to being affected; for Sartre, a field of possibilities—unfolding after the film.

Living Out New Roles

Story structure mirrors client–environment relations; symbols mirror affective ties. Pathologizing resonant images as “symptom projection” negates efforts to re-link meaning and world; the conscious/unconscious boundary is an affective focal length (Stolorow & Atwood, 2019/2023). What matters is to feel and then reflect on one's situation (Kozubek, 2016). Live the role off-screen so the story's meaning speaks (McKee, 1997, 2014). Beyond self-narration, new stories must be realized outside the clinic (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Myths' value is their openness (May, 1991); film theory is likewise ongoing re-interpretation (Konigsberg, 2007).

Reviews and Rewatches

The same film yields diverse reviews; the same reviewer finds new meanings on rewatch. Reading stories mobilizes the whole person; what matters is one's own interpretation for life reflection (Kawai, 2016/2018). The self is an absent–present, a dynamic process where insight is pivotal (Gendlin, 1966). The therapist's task is not to change beliefs but to permit clients to

use their own thought and feeling in ways fitting their life's structure (Erickson, 1965). Empathy and emotional dwelling link spectators to characters and to one another (Konigsberg, 2007; Stolorow & Atwood, 2019, 2023), situating a group-therapy-like context.

Fan Therapy Sessions

Different archetypes draw different attachments. Ideal screenplays let characters mutually disclose facets, forming a constellation (McKee, 1997/2014). Living out meaning radiates resonance to other characters and their admirers; films can surface unspeakable family issues (Berg-Cross et al., 1990). Entering stories with therapeutic attitude via imaginative variation forms an imagined community of co-subjects, akin to existential-phenomenological family-constellation work. Compared with bibliotherapy, film adds a public layer; drawing on earlier discussions by Eisenberg (1986), Harry (1983), and Adams and McGuire (1986), Berg-Cross et al. (1990) argue that films can shift a region's social consciousness. Being seen, felt, and connected restores orientation (Gendlin, 1966) and yields a new moment beyond the known (Moustakas, 1966). Cinematherapy does not end with credits; the filmic situation reverberates and fuses with life (Gregerson, 2010).

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used to assist in proofreading and formatting in accordance with APA 7th edition. The usage was limited to checking grammar, style, and citation consistency. No AI tools were used to generate original ideas, analysis, or discussion content.

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Collaborative Leadership in Disaster Communication Management at Yogyakarta International Airport

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Abstract

Disaster communication management requires cross-stakeholder collaboration to ensure effective mitigation processes that can save many lives. However, cases of mitigation failures in Indonesia highlight insufficient collaboration and communication, resulting in a lack of essential information among communities during evacuation scenarios. This situation underscores that effective communication is a crucial prerequisite for any managerial activity, as disaster mitigation decisions only become meaningful when clearly communicated to all relevant stakeholders. This research aims to explore collaborative leadership practices in disaster communication management at Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA). YIA was chosen due to its position as a national strategic infrastructure vulnerable to natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis, thus necessitating reliable and collaborative communication management. Employing a qualitative approach and data triangulation through documentation studies, in-depth interviews, and direct observations of stakeholder agencies at YIA, this study reveals effective collaboration among leaders throughout all stages of disaster communication management, from pre-disaster to recovery. These findings contribute as a reference model to strengthen collaborative disaster mitigation communication management and enhance preparedness among other airports in Indonesia.

Keywords: communication management, leadership, collaborative, disaster mitigation, Yogyakarta International Airport

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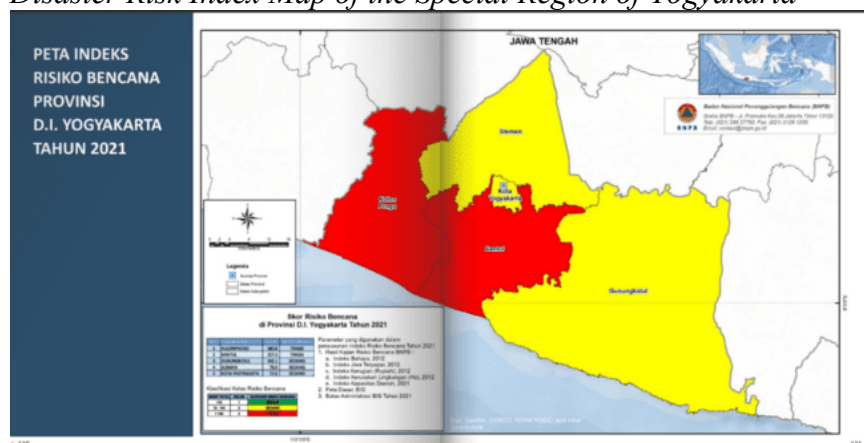
Introduction

Communication management is the process of exchanging signals reciprocally to share information, persuade, or give instructions based on a shared understanding of meaning relevant to the relationship between the communicator and their social environment (Cutlip et al., 2000). Meanwhile, disaster communication management is a series of processes involving preparation or planning, formulation, implementation, and evaluation of various messages related to disasters, both during the message creation, delivery, reception, and response or feedback stages, carried out in the pre-disaster, during disaster, and post-disaster phases, to develop resilient individuals against disasters (Lestari et al., 2014). Emergency conditions amidst disaster situations require effective communication management to ensure all parties understand mitigation, evacuation, and recovery messages quickly and accurately as part of efforts to enhance safety.

In disaster communication management, ensuring safety is not the responsibility of a single party, but involves multiple actors. The collaborative aspect of cooperation is essential in disaster management because it enables various organisations with multidisciplinary expertise to carry out their functions and roles effectively during crises. At every stage of disaster management, well-coordinated collaborative communication among stakeholders is crucial to ensure that the processes from mitigation to recovery can run effectively. Collaborative communication management can address the information gaps that often occur in emergencies and ensure that all parties play a role in rescue efforts.

One of the basic principles in understanding disaster risk is the recognition by everyone that they have a responsibility to ensure their own safety through preventive actions against potential hazards (Donahue et al., 2014). Several previous scholars, such as Coombs (1998), Ryan (2017), and Sommerfeldt (2015), have contributed to research on the role of public relations in conveying information about emergency contexts, responsibilities, the nature of crises, and actions that are crucial to how a community prepares for, understands, anticipates, and responds to natural hazards. The communities that need to understand disaster risk and evacuation procedures are those located in disaster-prone areas, one of which is the airport community situated in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, DIY). DIY is a region in Indonesia with diverse natural disaster potential, particularly earthquakes and tsunamis.

Based on data from the National Earthquake Study Center, the DIY area is traversed by the Opak fault, which is suspected to be the source of the major earthquake that struck Yogyakarta in 2006 (Pusat Studi Gempa Nasional, 2017). In addition, according to data from the Center for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation of the Geological Agency of Indonesia, Yogyakarta is also at high risk of volcanic eruptions due to the presence of Mount Merapi, which remains active (Sayudi et al., 2010). According to the Indonesian Disaster Risk Index, the DIY Province has a risk index score of 126.34, which falls into the “moderate” category (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana, 2023).

Figure 1*Disaster Risk Index Map of the Special Region of Yogyakarta*

Source: Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana, 2023

The mismanagement of natural disasters inevitably leads to cascading failures beyond initial physical damage. Without precise management strategies, natural disasters evolve into social disasters and more severe secondary disasters, significantly prolonging the recovery process. This discrepancy between bureaucratic procedures and on-the-ground reality was clearly demonstrated during the earthquake that struck the Special Region of Yogyakarta on May 27, 2006. The catastrophe resulted in 6,234 fatalities, approximately 38,568 to 137,883 injuries, and the destruction of over 12,000 houses, alongside damage to historical sites like Prambanan and Borobudur. Although the government, led by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, allocated significant funds—IDR 100 billion for emergency response and IDR 1.1 trillion for reconstruction (Tempo.co, 2024)—fundamental issues in disaster communication management persisted. Kusumasari and Alam (2012) found that the local government's response was slow and insufficiently integrated with community efforts, failing to match the rapid speed of the disaster. To address such systemic delays and minimize future losses, Haddow and Haddow (2014) assert that a robust disaster communication strategy is essential to bridge the gap between government agencies and the affected community.

Given this history of vulnerability, readiness to face emergencies is critical for all sectors in Yogyakarta, particularly for high-stakes infrastructure like the Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA). Operating in Temon, Kulon Progo, YIA serves as a vital economic node operated by PT Angkasa Pura Indonesia. With a passenger capacity of up to 20 million people per year, it functions not only as a gateway for travelers but also as a hub for domestic trade and export–import cargo. As noted by Edwards and Goodrich (2014), the complexity of modern airport operations requires a highly coordinated emergency response strategy.

Despite the high stakes, mitigation efforts in Indonesia frequently fail due to a lack of collaborative communication. This results in unclear evacuation protocols and communication conflicts that span from the grassroots level to the central government. As noted by Lestari et al. (2014), these conflicts stem from issues regarding aid distribution, reconstruction processes, and interpersonal or intergroup tensions. Furthermore, academic research on collaborative communication management for disaster mitigation remains limited. While Rejeki and Negoro (2022) analyzed communication strategies for building partnerships between private institutions and the government through local culture, their work reveals a gap: there is little understanding of how collaborative communication management operates specifically within airport disaster mitigation.

To address this gap, this study examines how collaborative communication is organized during pre-disaster preparedness at Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA). This research is significant for improving preparedness in disaster-prone Yogyakarta and enriching communication studies in Indonesia. Ultimately, the findings are expected to guide stakeholders at YIA in designing disaster communication policies that are more collaborative, responsive, and effective.

Conceptual Framework

Collaborative Disaster Communication Management

A disaster refers to an event or a series of events that can threaten and disrupt the lives and livelihoods of communities, caused by natural, non-natural, or human factors. These events may result in loss of life, environmental damage, material losses, as well as psychological impacts. Meanwhile, a disaster threat is an occurrence or event that has the potential to cause a disaster (Government of the Republic of Indonesia, 2007). Kjell Brataas (2018) conceives disaster communication as a process involving the exchange of information among various parties, including government, organizations, and communities, throughout the entire disaster cycle, from prevention, preparedness, and response to recovery. Disaster communication must take place through dialogue between decision-makers and the public, and not merely as one-way information dissemination.

Brataas (2018) emphasizes that effective disaster communication management can improve preparedness and accelerate post-disaster recovery, and therefore proposes the four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Mitigation focuses on preventing future emergencies or minimizing their impact by identifying and reducing risks and implementing preventive measures. Preparedness involves planning and organizing resources, as well as training communities and relevant personnel through emergency plans, drills, and public education so they are ready to face disasters and save lives. Response refers to the immediate actions taken once a disaster occurs—such as rescue, evacuation, and the delivery of aid—as the concrete implementation of preparedness plans. Finally, recovery centers on post-disaster rehabilitation, including restoring communities to normal conditions, repairing infrastructure, and mobilizing financial assistance to support long-term recovery.

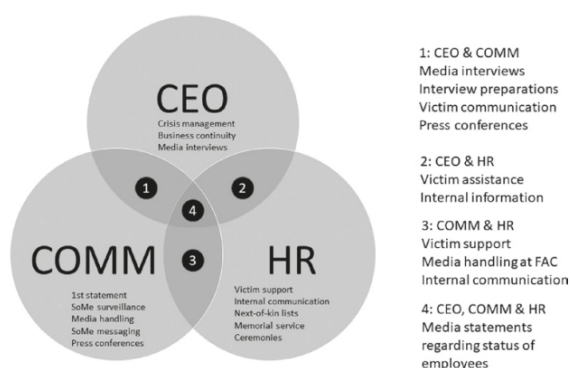
This model provides a structured framework for emergency and disaster management, and helps various actors plan and implement effective actions. Lestari et al. (2014) adds that the pre-disaster or non-disaster phase in the process preceding the implementation of mitigation is also very important to be properly managed. This phase focuses on strengthening the knowledge base of communities regarding the potential occurrence of disasters in each area, including communication and education with community groups. These aspects of disaster communication management become systemic and integrated components of YIA's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), involving various stakeholders and supported by both national and international regulations.

In collaborative communication management, Brataas (2018) explains the concept of the Circles of Crisis Communication Collaboration, commonly referred to as the 4C Model, which describes how organizational leaders, the communication or public relations team, and the human resources team need to cooperate in crises. In the first stage, leaders and the communication team need to prepare strategies for interviews and for delivering information to the public and to the families of victims. Next, leaders and the human resources team need

to provide support to the families of victims and inform internal members of the organization that a crisis is underway. The following stage is collaboration between the communication team and the human resources team in the form of providing support to victims and their families, as well as handling mass media. The final stage is collaboration among all three parties to convey messages through media statements related to the employment status of personnel in the organization.

Figure 2

The Circles of Crisis Communication Collaboration (4C) Model



Source: Kjell Brataas, 2018

The 4C Model highlights the critical importance of an organization's initial message during a crisis, especially to victims' families. The first communication must clearly acknowledge the incident with genuine empathy and outline the concrete steps being taken to manage the situation. Organizations should also offer clear channels—such as hotlines or web links—for people seeking further details. At the same time, they must be ready to actively collaborate with the news media by supplying timely updates on the disaster's status, responding to calls, issuing press releases, organizing press conferences when necessary, giving interviews, and preparing a library of photos and videos for media use. In addition, social media requires strategic attention. The speed at which information spreads must be matched by the organization's visible presence on official platforms, including the use of live updates or live streaming to share verified, up-to-date information that the public can easily access.

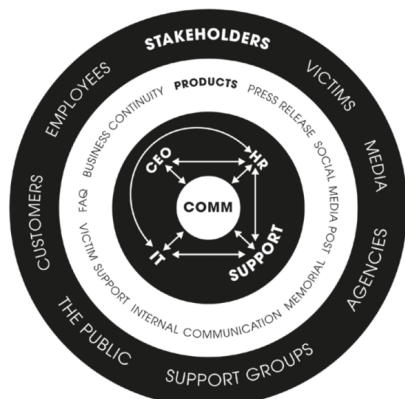
Stakeholder Collaboration in Disaster Mitigation at YIA

Airport operations, including those at YIA, involve a multitude of stakeholders, each possessing distinct expertise, duties, and responsibilities. The earthquake and tsunami mitigation system at YIA can function effectively only if each stakeholder involved fulfils their responsibilities in accordance with their respective Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Therefore, disaster communication management at YIA necessitates effective collaboration, as well as a clear understanding of and accountability for respective roles and functions.

Contextually, YIA stakeholders refer to the individuals, groups, and institutions involved, either directly or indirectly, in the airport's operations. In the context of collaborative communication management for YIA's disaster mitigation, these stakeholders comprise government bodies, humanitarian organizations, the community, the private sector, and the media. All these entities play roles in planning, response, and post-disaster recovery. Their involvement is crucial, as the decisions and actions taken within disaster management will impact multiple aspects of life, including safety, health, and economic recovery.

Figure 3

The Communication Product Loop Can Be Adjusted Based on the Type of Organization, the Kind of Disaster, and So On



Source: Kjell Brataas, 2018

This research will focus on three main parties (leading sectors) in the collaborative natural disaster communication management at YIA. The first party is the Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysics Agency (BMKG), which holds the primary duty of conducting earthquake monitoring and detection, as well as issuing tsunami early warnings following an earthquake. The second party is PT Angkasa Pura Indonesia (API), which serves as the airport operator and manager at YIA. The third party is the Indonesian Air Navigation Service Provider (Perum LPPNI), or AirNav Indonesia, which communicates directly with pilots, both in-flight and on the airport's airside, to assist in monitoring the emergency and to coordinate evacuation decisions.

Research Methods

The approach used in this research is descriptive qualitative, utilizing a case study method. The case study method will be supported by primary data obtained through a documentation study. This research utilizes data sources in the form of official Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) documents for earthquake and tsunami mitigation at YIA, which have been agreed upon by Angkasa Pura Indonesia, AirNav Indonesia, and BMKG. Furthermore, the data will be supplemented with other official documents related to YIA's disaster mitigation from these three institutions. As secondary data, direct observation will be conducted to observe collaborative communication efforts at YIA, along with interviews with officers from relevant units working at YIA. These official documents are used to enhance the credibility of the qualitative research findings.

Interviews will be conducted with a Junior Meteorology and Geophysics Observer from the BMKG Yogyakarta Meteorological Station assigned to YIA. The focus of the questions will relate to communication strategies and processes during a disaster, using an open-ended question structure where subsequent questions are adapted based on the responses given. Observation will be carried out by visiting the YIA location directly and observing facilities related to disaster mitigation. The research process is conducted by formulating the problem, followed by collecting qualitative data. Afterwards, the data will be analysed and validated using theory triangulation, which involves comparing existing theories with the collected data.

Results and Discussion

The findings utilized in this research include the “YIA Emergency Response and Evacuation Routes” document, the “Application of Modern Construction Methods in the Development of the Yogyakarta International Airport Strategic Project,” and the “Compilation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for the YIA Earthquake and Tsunami.” These documents are the result of joint planning and have been agreed upon by PT API, BMKG, and AirNav. In the implementation of natural disaster mitigation, the involvement and cooperation of other agencies—such as local government, the National Search and Rescue Agency (Basarnas), the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), and various other institutions—are possible, adapting to the conditions and needs on the ground. Secondary data findings from observation include: the presence of disaster evacuation signs at various points within YIA; the existence of a Crisis Center and an airport call center; the presence of official social media accounts belonging to the leading sectors; and an infrastructure design prepared to withstand potential earthquakes, tsunamis, liquefaction, and floods. The next data finding is an interview with the public relations and airport operation staff of Angkasa Pura Indonesia assigned to YIA and the BMKG officer.

The collected findings are discussed and analyzed below, based on a comparison with the theory of collaborative communication management in disaster mitigation at YIA.

Mitigation

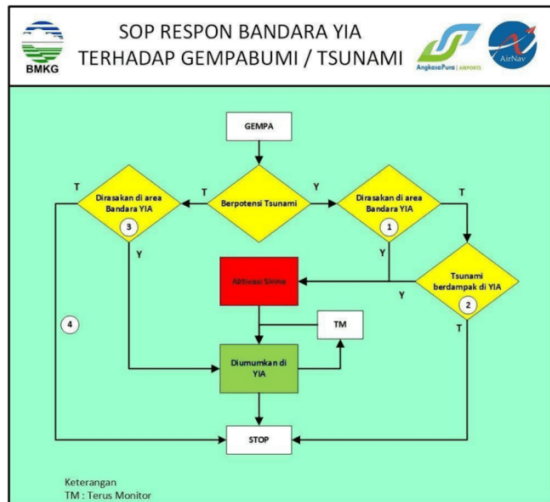
Angkasa Pura Indonesia (API) has conducted studies on mitigation measures for earthquakes, liquefaction, tsunamis, floods, and volcanic ash. Subsequently, they planned the basic design and construction design of YIA to ensure that the airport’s buildings and facilities possess disaster resilience. Before commencing the development design process, API organized a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with earthquake and tsunami experts from four Indonesian universities, also involving seismology experts from Japan, to map the necessary disaster mitigation strategies for YIA. Furthermore, API’s expert team conducted a comparative study (benchmarking) at Sendai Airport and Kochi Airport in Japan, which are renowned for their excellent earthquake and tsunami mitigation systems.

In the “YIA Emergency Response and Evacuation Routes” document, mitigation steps within the development planning and disaster evacuation at YIA have been executed collaboratively among the leading sectors, namely API, BMKG, and AirNav. API designed YIA to withstand tsunamis and resist earthquakes up to 8.8 Magnitude, with a maximum elevation of 12.8 meters above mean sea level. If an earthquake occurs with an epicentre 400 meters from the shoreline, it would take 35 minutes for a tsunami to reach the terminal building. This 35-minute duration constitutes the available time window for the evacuation process. API is responsible for determining evacuation routes and implementing evacuation scenarios for passengers, landside operations, and airside operations.

Furthermore, in the context of earthquake and tsunami mitigation at YIA, BMKG holds the primary duty as the party conducting earthquake monitoring and detection, as well as issuing tsunami early warnings after an earthquake occurs. The BMKG response SOP for earthquakes and tsunamis at YIA can be seen in Figure 4. Meanwhile, AirNav is responsible for managing aircraft traffic movements in the air, including communicating critical information to pilots regarding the evacuation process. AirNav possesses an Emergency Response Team (ERT), a specialized team activated only during emergencies.

Figure 4

BMKG's Response SOP for the Earthquake and Tsunami at YIA, Approved by PT API and AirNav



Source: BMKG

Preparedness

The preparedness phase at YIA includes the Emergency Response Exercise (PKD), which aims to enhance the skills and capabilities of airport personnel in addressing various risks, threats, and disruptions to aviation safety and security. Airport personnel are expected to aid and evacuate victims during emergencies. The YIA PKD exercise featured three collaborative response simulations: an aircraft accident exercise, a simulation for bomb handling and aviation security threats (security exercise), and a natural disaster emergency response simulation (airport disaster exercise) (Antara News, 2023). This PKD involved the collaboration of all leading sectors, along with support from other relevant agencies, including security forces (police and military), the fire department, and the mass media, which were invited to provide direct coverage. The collaboration with the media during the PKD also served to disseminate information regarding reporting procedures for when an actual disaster occurs, and to communicate safety and security regulations pertinent to emergencies.

Figure 5

Documentation of Media Monitoring of the YIA PKD News Coverage

Daerah > Yogyakarta > Detail Berita

Simulasi Kecelakaan Pesawat di Bandara YIA Mencekam, Dibuat Mirip Kejadian Sebenarnya

Kamis, 03 Agustus 2023 - 18:11:00 WIB

 Kuntad

Share

Selepas itu dilanjutkan simulasi penanganan teror bom. Dalam simulasi ini tim Gegana Polda DIY dilibatkan untuk meledakkan sebuah koper menggunakan bom berdaya ledak sedang di area parkir YIA sisi barat.



Salah satu penerapan hukum ini terdapat dalam pasal 10 ayat 1 huruf a Undang-Undang No. 12 Tahun 2011, yang berbunyi sebagai berikut:

KULONPROGO, iNews.id - PT Angkasa Pura I menggelar Latihan Penanggulangan Keadaan Darurat (PKD) Dirgantara Raharja ke-110 di Bandara Internasional Yogyakarta (YIA), Kamis (3/8/2023). **Simulasi** kecelakaan pesawat cukup mengejutkan, mirip dengan kejadian sebenarnya.



Simulasi bencana di Bandara YIA Kulon Progo, Kamis (3/8/2023) Foto: Jalu Rahma Dewantara/detikJogja

Selain itu juga digelar simulasi penanganan demonstran di depan pintu masuk YIA, dan terakhir yakni simulasi manajemen bencana yang difokuskan di area terminal bandara.

Source: iNews.id and Detik Jogja

Response

Emergency response is a matter that has been prepared by the leading sectors, even though a disaster event has not yet occurred. API, BMKG, AirNav, and the entire YIA community possess Emergency Situation SOPs tailored to the duties, responsibilities, and expertise of each respective institution. YIA has a Crisis Center building designed to be operated as an emergency airport operational control center (Airport Operation Control Center/AOCC) when the primary AOCC, located in the terminal building, becomes unusable or paralyzed due to the disaster's impact.

This Crisis Center building also functions as a Temporary Evacuation Site (TES) for the community residing around YIA. If an evacuation order is announced, the API team will open perimeter fence access and direct surrounding residents to immediately enter the Crisis Center building. The building is also equipped with access ramps usable by persons with special needs. To respond to victim needs, API has prepared ambulances, medical teams from the Ministry of Health's Port Health Office (KKP), and other emergency aid equipment in the arrivals area, all capable of rapid deployment in an emergency.

The leadership of API, BMKG, AirNav, and other institutions operating at YIA have received leadership training, which includes leadership in emergency and crisis situations. Leadership collaboration during emergencies is crucial in the YIA disaster communication management process, as these leaders will face the public and mass media when a disaster strikes. The way a leader or institutional spokesperson responds to a disaster event and communicates during an emergency must be carefully considered and delivered optimally. This is to ensure the leader's statements do not become a blunder, thereby creating a worse derivative disaster or secondary crisis.

In addition to the leadership factor, social media and instant messaging applications—which enable real-time communication via text, voice, and video—also play a critical role in the emergency response phase of disaster communication management. API has an official contact center division known as Angkasa Pura 172, often abbreviated as CC172. The CC172 service is available 24 hours a day via telephone (172), email (cc172@ap1.co.id), Facebook (Contact Center Angkasa Pura 172), Twitter ([@angkasapura172](https://twitter.com/angkasapura172)), and Instagram ([@angkasapura_172](https://www.instagram.com/angkasapura_172)). During an emergency, CC172, together with airline contact centers, serves as the frontline for responding to all inquiries and information needs from airport service users and the general public.

Recovery

The recovery phase after an emergency at YIA is a collaborative undertaking that encompasses the restoration of airport operations, the repair of infrastructure and facilities impacted by the disaster, as well as financial planning and distribution, including compensation for victims or affected airport employees. A critical aspect of this phase is the communication challenge that institutions or organizations will face when dealing with the mass media and victims' families, especially in cases involving fatalities. According to Brataas (2018), organizational leadership must prioritize the victim's dimension or perspective in both communication and management policymaking.

Figure 6*Media Monitoring of PT API Statements in Responding Disasters or Crises*

Source: WartaEkonomiID and iNews social media

In the figure above, an example is provided of how API leadership handles the recovery phase. API President Director Faik Fahmi explains the efforts undertaken by API to restore public confidence, ensuring the public does not fear air travel. The subsequent image shows the General Manager of API's Adisutjipto Airport making a statement at a press conference, affirming that passengers of the Garuda airline flight that skidded at Adisutjipto Airport will receive compensation. This message certainly has the same objective as Faik Fahmi's statement: to restore public trust while simultaneously demonstrating corporate empathy and responsibility.

In this phase, the mass media plays a crucial role in supporting recovery efforts. Nazaruddin (2007) states that the essential principles of disaster journalism include accuracy, humanism, a commitment to rehabilitation, and control and advocacy. In disaster communication management at YIA, all institutions possess public relations (PR) teams that understand their respective institutional authorities. These PR teams will serve inquiries and requests for information clarification from mass media journalists to ensure that the news subsequently disseminated is thoroughly accurate. In addition, the press conference was attended by leaders from other organizations, ensuring that information transparency could be delivered in an integrated manner.

The public relations teams, together with institutional leaders from BMKG, API, and AirNav, will use journalists as key channels to convey their commitment to restoring airport facilities and services. Media and airport-related institutions are also expected to jointly monitor the distribution of disaster assistance. In this context, journalists must apply humanistic principles in disaster coverage, ensuring fair representation for all parties and adhering to access regulations set by authorized agencies. After the disaster, the airport operations team will quickly prepare an Incident/Accident Report, based on flight schedule monitoring and inspections of affected airside and landside facilities. This report becomes the basis for management to prioritize recovery actions and coordinate with API Head Office, AirNav, and BMKG on short-, medium-, and long-term decisions, including financial allocations that exceed the branch's authority.

These processes underline that effective disaster mitigation relies on strong stakeholder collaboration. The initial requirement is to build trust and shared understanding among government bodies, humanitarian organizations, the private sector, and local communities, supported by clear role definitions and joint planning across all phases from mitigation to recovery. Post-event evaluation, feedback, and regular joint drills or simulations are also

essential to refine strategies and ensure stakeholders are increasingly prepared for future emergencies.

Conclusion

This study examines collaborative communication management in natural disaster mitigation from a communication studies perspective, addressing a gap in previous work that has largely focused on public administration, engineering, or the natural sciences. Drawing on Kjell Brataas's disaster communication management model, it offers a structured framework for reducing disaster impacts through the coordinated involvement of multi-sector stakeholders.

At Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA), effective disaster communication requires rapid, accurate responses to public information needs, supported by strong inter-stakeholder coordination, clear leadership, and strategic use of communication technologies. Preparedness and response therefore depend not only on physical infrastructure, but also on an integrated communication system and active community engagement. The study is limited by its single-case, qualitative design, which restricts the generalizability of its findings beyond YIA. Future research could include comparative case studies in other regions, assess the influence of digital tools on collaborative communication, or further explore stakeholder dynamics in disaster contexts.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that ChatGPT and Gemini AI were used in the preparation of this manuscript solely for minor linguistic refinement, including grammar correction, small sentence-level adjustments to improve clarity, and translation. The software was not used to conduct analysis, create substantive content or draw conclusions. The intellectual content, interpretations and conclusions presented in this manuscript are entirely the author's own.

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The Chinese American Daughter Figure in Contemporary American Films: Searching for Belongingness in Liminal Space

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Abstract

This paper examines the Chinese American daughter figure in contemporary American films through the concepts of “model minority” and “liminality”. Particularly, this paper focuses on the two recent independent films, *The Farewell* (2018) and *The Half of It* (2019), and their daughter characters, Billi Wang and Ellie Chu. The Chinese American daughter characters will be investigated through critical textual analysis. Drawing on the key concepts of “model minority” and “third space”/“liminal space”, the paper examines how the daughters are positioned and position themselves as 1.5-generation Chinese American women caught between the host country (America) and the motherland (China), especially, through the stereotype of successful and high-achieving racial minority. This paper aims to look into the dynamics of navigating a hyphenated identity and the “in-between” intercultural spaces as they are represented onscreen. As the films’ directors are Chinese American and the films are loosely based on their experiences as daughters of Chinese immigrant families, the findings of this research aim to explore and propose new perspectives on narratives that are told from the standpoint of both the invisible and hypervisible double minority, which can subvert and challenge white masculine dominant identity narratives.

Keywords: Chinese American, daughter figure, model minority, liminal space

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Introduction

Since the mid-2010s, social and political movements have created awareness of systemic racism and sexism, prompting the American film industry to become more accepting of racial and gender diversity and equity. In 2015, the hashtag #OscarSoWhite became popular across social media platforms after the Academy of Motion Picture Arts announced an all-white nominees list for the Oscar Awards ceremony, with no actor of colour being nominated and all the films featuring male-centric plots (Fritz, 2015). This viral hashtag, started by the social activist April Reign, emerged as a transformative movement that criticised the American film industry's systemic racism, homogeneity and lack of recognition of colour minorities. In 2017, the #MeToo movement, emerging from Tarana Burke's 2006 program, became a phenomenon that fought against sexual harassment and abuse, mostly of women. According to major American outlets such as *U.S. News*, *Forbes* and *The Washington Post*, the campaign has not only given visibility to sexual crimes and gender equality-related issues but empowered some survivors of sexual violence and assault, especially vulnerable women of colour (Corbett, 2023; Radu, 2017; Wang et al., 2020). In 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic fuelled an anti-Asian racism and discrimination wave in the United States that led to violence and hate crimes against Asian American communities (Kandil, 2020; Reny & Barreto, 2020; Wu, 2020). On 20 May 2021, the US Congress passed the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act to fight this escalated bigotry and hatred and raise awareness of, as well as condemn, xenophobia in America (COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, 2021).

The emergence of movements that highlight and protest against the oppression of women of colour in white American society has coincided with a shift in both the quality and quantity of the cinematic representation of Asian women. As Li (2021) noted, recent American films contain fewer stereotypes of Asian women, such as the "Lotus Blossom" and the "Dragon Lady", and more Asian female characters on screen than in the past. With films such as *Crazy Rich Asians* (Chu, 2018), *The Farewell* (Wang, 2019), *Always Be My Maybe* (Khan, 2019), *The Half of It* (Wu, 2020) and *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022), whose casts are Asian dominated and main characters are Asian women, the American film industry has reason to believe it is approaching inclusivity, at least in matters of race and gender.

Despite these "progressive" changes in American cinema, Asians generally, and Asian women specifically, still seem to live in an economy of narrative scarcity and desire for narrative plenitude. Narrative scarcity, defined by Nguyen (2016), is when a minority group and their experiences are distorted or absent in stories produced by the dominant group's mainstream culture. Narrative scarcity in media and literature, Nguyen (2016) emphasised, is when audiences of minorities cannot find characters that look like them because there are "[few] stories about them, at least ones that leave their enclaves" (p. 230). Narrative plenitude, on the other hand, is when audiences of an ethnic group can take it for granted that some parts of them are being shown to them in "a surfeit of stories" (Nguyen, 2016, p. 230). For minorities, narrative plenitude requires not only more characters of colour and fewer caricatures or stereotypes but representations that show and embrace their diverse experiences. Commenting on *Crazy Rich Asians* becoming a breakthrough for Asians and Asian Americans, Nguyen (2018) pointed out that the film indeed shows that America's perception of Asians has improved, departing from the old stereotypes, but then it raises the problem of being exceptional to be seen by white Americans. The story of wealthy and successful Asians was welcomed by American audiences, but what happens to the representation of "sane" and/or "poor" Asians, the ones who are not privileged, affluent and elite?

This focus on idealised Asian characters leaves the everyday experiences and struggles of Asian Americans largely invisible, foregrounding what is known as the model minority stereotype. The model minority stereotype suggests that Asians and Asian Americans “[achieve] enormous economic and academic success by working hard and following Asian cultural norms” (Lee et al., 2009, p. 69). In *Crazy Rich Asians*, this stereotype is embodied in the main characters, Rachel Chu, a respected New York University economics professor, and Nick Young, the sole heir to one of the wealthiest families in Singapore. This trope of successful Asians shapes the way non-Asians view Asians and Asian Americans while obscuring racial disparities and systemic barriers that persist within a predominantly white society like America. Moreover, the film title indicates “rich Asians” without specifically acknowledging the characters’ ethnic and class background. For instance, while Rachel Chu is a Chinese American woman growing up in a middle-class family in America, Nick Young is a Singaporean native from an elite, upper-class background who was educated in London and later moved to America. Under the model minority trope, these individual ethnic and class identities become subsumed under a singular category of “Asian”—one that is synonymous with success and achievement. While such portrayals may appear to move away from earlier dehumanising stereotypes, they ultimately reduce and essentialise the vast differences among Asian and Asian American communities to a homogenised racial identity defined primarily by affluence and exceptionalism.

Thus, to counter the model minority stereotype’s racial reductionism, this paper examines Asian women characters in contemporary American films when departing from discussions of pan-ethnic Asians and the generally defined term “Asian Americans”. This paper draws specifically on the representation of Chinese American women framed within domestic and familial narratives, providing a lens through which to expose the complex and diverse experiences of negotiating race, ethnicity, gender and class. The focus on the Chinese American identity, rather than the umbrella term “Asian American”, enables this study to foreground what Feng (1996) described as the fluidity and the continuous process of negotiating between cultures of the individual carrying a hyphenated identity. While the Asian American label emerged to replace the derogatory Oriental Other term and articulate a shared history of oppression, Feng argued that it fails to address the heterogeneity of Asian communities in America and risks defining individuals of Asian heritage as a monolithic group primarily in opposition to white Americans. The Chinese American label, instead of merely introducing the Asian themes into American forms, emphasises the process of “becoming” rather than “being” and “[preserves] a sense of contingency” (Feng, 1996, p. 192). The contingency of Chinese American identity emphasises the impossibility of Chinese Americans existing in a fixed space to fulfil a fixed role, thereby rejecting the racial reductionism that sustains the stereotype.

This paper examined the Chinese American daughter figures in two contemporary American films: *The Farewell* (Wang, 2019) and *The Half of It* (Wu, 2020). Through close textual analysis, I analysed the representations of the daughter characters—Billi Wang in *The Farewell* and Ellie Chu in *The Half of It*. This research explored how these daughters’ Chinese American identity is continuously negotiated within an “in-between” space and how such negotiations work to subvert, complicate or reframe the model minority stereotype. Specifically, I sought to answer two questions:

- How do the daughters see themselves as a model minority through the perspective of their Chinese family members and white Americans?
- How do the daughters’ double consciousnesses shape their self-perceptions and feelings of belongingness to America, to their Chinese roots, or to both at once?

To answer these questions, in addition to the model minority, I drew on the concepts of third space/liminal space and hybridity to unpack the contingency, fluidity and in-betweenness of Chinese American identity. The model minority stereotype functions as a success frame, defined by noble characteristics such as being hard-working, naturally intelligent, obedient, academically high-achieving, and economically prosperous. This success frame operates both externally—posing the conditions needed to assimilate into the white American society while obscuring the realities of systemic racism, sexism and class disparities—and internally, as expressions of filial piety and necessary strategies for Chinese immigrant families' survival in a racially stratified American society. When the daughter either conforms or fails to conform to this frame, it affects her double consciousness. On the one hand, when fitting into the frame, being a model minority means being closer to becoming a white American, yet still a perpetual foreigner. On the other hand, failing to fit into the narrowly defined success frame can lead to feelings of alienation from the Chinese identity, because she is the underachieving anomaly or the atypical Chinese. She may not only fail her parents' expectations and the filial duties of a good daughter, but also fail to proclaim her belongingness to the Chinese community.

Literature Review

Liminal Space: Negotiating the Chinese American Identity

The Farewell presents Billi Wang (Awkwafina), a Chinese American writer, who returns to China to visit her paternal grandmother, Nai Nai (Zhao Shu-zhen). Nai Nai is diagnosed with stage four lung cancer (but not informed of it), so Billi's parents, Lu Jian (Diana Lin) and Haiyan Wang (Tzi Ma), and their extended family arrange a rushed wedding in China to gather all the family members under the guise of celebration while secretly giving them a chance to bid farewell to Nai Nai. Returning to China, Billi expresses conflicted thoughts with her family members over their dishonesty towards Nai Nai. While Billi believes Nai Nai deserves to know about her terminal illness, her parents and the rest of the extended family refuse to disclose the cancer diagnosis for Nai Nai's own sake. This moral tension leads to Billi's journey of navigating the cultural antagonism between American individualism and Chinese collectivism.

The Half of It centres on Ellie Chu (Leah Lewis), a straight-A Chinese American teenager who lives with her widowed father, Edwind Chu (Collin Chou), in Squahamish, a fictional conservative and majority-white town. At school, she helps Paul Munsky (Daniel Diemer), a white jock classmate, write love letters to Aster Flores (Alexxis Lemire), on whom she secretly has a crush. At home, she helps her father, who still grieves the loss of his wife and struggles with linguistic and racial marginalisation in America. Torn between staying in Squahamish to care for her father and pursuing her dream of attending university in another state, Ellie faces the hard decision to prioritise either filial responsibility or her own dream.

Across the two films, Billi and Ellie embody the struggles of being a Chinese American daughter. Both the daughter characters, born in China but moving to America in their early years, are the 1.5-generation immigrants who are neither fully connected to their parents' homeland nor entirely at ease within American society. Together, their struggles reveal the challenges of carrying a hyphenated identity and navigating and negotiating their sense of belonging to America and/or their Chinese roots. Being members of Chinese immigrant families, they maintain cultural connections to their Chinese parents' heritage. However, their identities are not fixed solely within this sense of belonging. The metaphorical hyphen in their Chinese American identity marks an unfixed liminal position and a continuous negotiation

between the two worlds, producing the unstable sense of belonging of Chinese Americans as diasporic subjects.

The unstable sense of belonging of Chinese Americans as diasporic subjects is articulated through their hyphenated identity. This hyphenated identity represents both the connection and the gap between the “host” (American society) and “home” (their Chinese root). Their “home” and their “host” are separated, yet simultaneously connected by the hyphen. The hyphen, noted by Naficy (2001) when discussing exilic and diasporic cinema, can be understood as both resistance to the homogeneity and hegemony of American political power and subordination of hyphenated people to unhyphenated people. The hyphen “provides vertical links that emphasize descent relations” but, at the same time, suggests a divided mind, an irrevocably split identity, or a type of paralysis between two cultures or nations” (Naficy, 2001, p. 16). It can signal a claim of roots and refusal to be assimilated into the American melting pot, a monocultural ideology that suggests diverse cultures are “melted” together to form a single, homogeneous society. At the same time, it asserts the idea of being “equal but not quite”. In this sense, the hyphen works as a symbolic mark that identifies one as ethnic and as “not a full, ‘natural’, national subject” (Khoo, 2007, p. 123). Hyphenated people will never be wholly accepted and trusted as full citizens. Billi and Ellie’s hyphenated identities, then, suggest that they are still Chinese, the Other, who have always been considered different and separated from white Americans even if the bond between them and their roots is strong, weak, or broken. This Oriental Other can either resist assimilation into American culture or become Americanised and adopt American ideals, but will never be considered equally ethnic to either an unhyphenated American or an unhyphenated Chinese. This can perpetuate Otherness and induce a weak sense of belonging and inclusion.

Oscillating between the host country’s culture and their Chinese cultural roots, Chinese Americans’ diasporic status and hyphenated identity enable the emergence of a third space, a space of in-between. The concept of third space, according to Bhabha (1994), exceeds the binaries of insider/outsider, us/them, oppressed/oppressor, and dominant/marginalised cultures. It is a space, though it can be momentary, that allows the meeting and mingling of different cultures, where cultural amalgamation occurs and new cultures are created. Unlike assimilation, in which a minority group adapts and conforms to the dominant culture, amalgamation is the process of multiple cultures coming together without dominating or marginalising each other. Instead of a mixture of discrete cultural subjects, it results in the formation of a new culture and a hybrid identity out of differences (Shurmer-Smith & Hannam, 1994). Hall (1990), when discussing diasporic experiences, echoed this idea about cultures and hybridity by pointing out that the identities of diaspora communities are produced and reproduced through transformation and difference. Hybridity, in Bhabha’s (1994) words, is the third space that “puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses” and “gives rise to something different, something new and recognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (p. 215). Ang (2003) echoed this idea of hybridity:

It destabilises established cultural power relations between white and black, coloniser and colonised, centre and periphery, the ‘West’ and the ‘rest’, not through a mere inversion of these hierarchical dualisms, but by throwing into question these very binaries through a process of boundary-blurring transculturation. (p. 9)

By blurring the boundaries between the binaries, the concept of hybridity resists fixing meanings and representations of the Chinese American identity within any rigid or oppositional framework. This capacity for negotiation and reinterpretation is connected to the practice of

transcoding that complicates and reappropriates the model minority stereotype placed upon the daughter characters in my selected films, producing alternative meanings.

The Model Minority Stereotype

The concept of model minority, coined by Petersen (1996), refers to Asian American immigrants, mostly Japanese American and Chinese American, being recognised as socially, academically and economically successful owing to their hard work, intelligence and obedience despite omission and marginalisation by their host country, America. Thus, the term tacitly suggests that no or little assistance or action against oppression and discrimination is needed for minority groups as long as they are the “ideal immigrants” who have the requisite characteristics and the willingness to assimilate into American society (Ramirez, 2020; Wu, 2014). This overlooks the systemic and structural racism experienced by Asian Americans, ignores the diversity within Asian Americans themselves, and creates rivalry between Asian Americans and other communities of colour in America. The model minority myth continues to place white Americans at the top of the hierarchy while people of colour strive for “closeness to proximity” in a white supremacist system (Vinney, 2022). Rather than being authentically seen, Asian Americans, according to Wu (2014), are selectively used as tokens to affirm the possibility of the American dream’s meritocracy for minority groups. This model minority stereotype, with its tokenistic approach, not only disregards the vast richness of Asian American realities but also asserts that strong values of being a “good immigrant” and becoming successful are the solutions to American structural racism and inequality.

The model minority myth transforms “racist hate” into “racist love” while still considering Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners. As Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan (1972) argued, racist love coats white racism with acceptance. Carrying dual identity with the hyphen that makes them subordinate to white Americans, Asian Americans, as a minority group, “live in a state of euphemized self-contempt” (Chin & Chan, 1972, p. 67). Self-contempt is the minority subject’s perception of how they can never fully reach the white standard because they are not white. Thus, the minority myth appears as an “acceptance” for the minority subjects being included in the majority. Conforming to white acceptance by being a model minority, the minority subject accepts their low status in America created by white supremacist standards. Considering it an “acceptable” stereotype, according to Chin and Chan (1972), means accepting selling out and humiliation. Acceptance by white Americans does not equal inclusion; rather, it implies that Asian Americans are now the assimilable aliens whose social status depends on their ability, obedience, ethics and values, which are, to some extent, looked at from the Western view of Asianness. One example is the American perception of Asians, usually East Asians like Chinese, as law-abiding and disciplined people. White Americans believe the juvenile delinquency rate in Chinatown, compared to majority black areas, is low owing to Confucian Chinese culture that influences Chinese children to be more docile than kids from other racial groups. However, Chin and Chan (1972) asserted that a low juvenile delinquency rate among mid-century Chinese Americans was the result of American laws against the birth of Chinese children as part of the Chinese Exclusion Act (Chinese Exclusion Act, 1882); in other words, there were relatively few Chinese adolescents available to commit crimes. This example of Chinese American juvenile “decency” exposes the structural and systemic racial discrimination against Chinese Americans, which has been obscured by the model minority myth. The myth encapsulates a paradox: Chinese Americans are categorised as both assimilable aliens and perpetual foreigners. In other words, they are conditionally accepted yet never fully welcomed to claim belonging to America.

The notion of the model minority performs as a stereotype that signifies Chinese Americans' difference from dominant white Americans. The concept of stereotyping, which Stuart Hall (1997) described as a set of representational practices of the dominant culture when constructing the images of the Other according to race, ethnicity, and gender, focuses on three main points:

So the first point is—*stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes, and fixes 'difference'*. Secondly, *stereotyping deploys a strategy of 'splitting'*. It divides the normal acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable. It then *excludes or expels* everything which does not fit in, which is different. ... So, *another feature of stereotyping is its practices of 'closure' and exclusion*. ... Stereotyping, in other words, is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order. ... The third point is *that stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power*. (p. 258)

Regarding the connection between cultural identity and cinematic representation, this concept of stereotype has crucial implications for film studies, particularly when it comes to “character analysis” and “criticism of negative characterization of marginalized groups of society” (Prythor, 2016, p. 80). By tracing the traits of the model minority stereotype as it finds expression in the Chinese American daughter characters in *The Farewell* and *The Half of It*, this paper explores whether the Chinese American daughter characters are marginalised and their representations are used to maintain the social hierarchy of white Americans and communities of colour owing to Americans' exercise of symbolic power through representational practices.

Being subjected to the model minority stereotype, Chinese American daughters experience a form of double consciousness that complicates their sense of belonging. On the one hand, they cannot claim an unhyphenated American identity because they cannot physically escape their ethnoracial identity. On the other hand, they reject their Chinese identity when they fail to conform to the model minority vision of success. The model minority stereotype defines Chinese Americans using a success frame defined narrowly by a set of noble characteristics and achievements. As a result, Lee and Zhou (2015) noted, this creates a “self-selection process” in which those who fit into this success frame get to claim the Chinese part of their Chinese American identity and a sense of belonging to the Chinese American community. They are proud of their ethnic identity because “they saw their ‘ethnic values’ as the fulcrum of their model minority success” (Lee, 2006, p. 333). In contrast, those who fall short of the success frame, embarrassed by their failure, choose to dissociate themselves from other Chinese Americans because “they feel like underachieving anomalies who do not belong in the ethnic community” (Lee & Zhou, 2015, p. 151). Perceiving themselves as atypical Chinese, ethnic outliers and/or anomalies, they opt out of ethnoracial identity and identify themselves with the white Americans whose individuality and freedom they think are free from any pressure to be successful.

Method of Analysis

This study employed qualitative textual analytic methods. I analysed the films' formal elements (cinematography, editing, sound and mise-en-scène) and narrative elements. The film analysis focused on the films' plots, audio-visual elements, dialogue, character development, cultural context and any other aspects that highlight the Chinese American daughter characters, their identity and their struggles as women navigating between two cultures. The analysis of these film texts also employed Stuart Hall's (1997) practice of transcoding to examine how the model

minority stereotype is problematised and challenged or reinforced in the three films. The practice of transcoding involved taking the existing meaning of the stereotype, in this case, the model minority, and re-appropriating it for new meanings that reveal the complexity of the Chinese American identity and experience.

Findings and Discussion

In *The Farewell*, the depiction of Chinese immigrant families marked by generational conflicts and a dysfunctional (mother-daughter) relationship challenges the myth that the Chinese American daughter's model qualities, successes and achievements derive from a close-knit family structure grounded in Chinese cultural traditions that value hierarchy, obedience and filial piety.

In *The Farewell*, Billi is considered to be falling out of her mother's success frame. She lies to her parents about her financial struggles and her scholarship rejection. On the one hand, as pointed out previously, she lies to her family so she can carry her own burden and protect her American independence. On the other hand, she lies because she wants to avoid conflict with her parents deriving from failing to meet her mother's expectations. Sometimes, the pressure on Asian immigrant children to fit the success frame which, Lee and Zhou (2015) argued, "is so great that they lie about their accomplishments in order to 'save face'" (Lee & Zhou, 2015, p. 142). In the scene in which Billi's extended family have dinner at a restaurant, we can observe that Billi feels pressured and uncomfortable when her aunts ask whether she earns a lot of money in America and when her mother calls her "a losing stock". She says "Life is not all about money. Money can't buy everything" (Wang, 2019, 00:39:40), even though she is upset about her fellowship grant rejection and she struggles to pay her rent in New York. In saying so, she distances herself from the success frame upheld by her mother and aunts, who equate success primarily with getting a high-paid job and how much their children can earn in America. This success frame reflects a shared belief among Chinese parents, particularly mothers. These shared expectations intensify tensions between parents and children, while simultaneously internalising the model minority stereotype. This shared belief suggests that success can be achieved through a stable income, high-status and high-paid jobs, and upward mobility. To some extent, this success frame reinforces and perpetuates the model minority stereotype within the Chinese American community itself.

In narratives of generational and cultural divides within Chinese immigrant families, the parental pressures and communal expectations on the daughter to fit the success frame also lend credibility to the process of othering through double consciousness. When the daughter is expected to fit into the success frame, her double consciousness, the dual self-perception and internal conflict she experiences, not only distances her from her ethnic family but alienates her ethnic family from the dominant society with which she identifies. In other words, when the daughter fails to meet expectations of success, she perceives herself as an Other, an atypical and underachieving Chinese, to her Chinese family. Yet, simultaneously, by attributing her Chinese parents' strict authority and high expectations to the oppressive Chinese culture, she sees herself as one who belongs to the dominant white American society, casting her parents as the cultural Other. The intergenerational conflict narrative is rendered a reproduction of Orientalist binaries:

The notion of cultural conflict between immigrant and American-born generations—the enlightened, freedom-loving son or daughter struggling to escape the clutches of

backward, tyrannical parents—is one of the most powerful ‘movies’ ever created to serve hegemonic American ideology. (Wong, 1993, p. 41)

In *The Half of It*, while Ellie first appears to fit into the success frame, the film subverts the model minority stereotype by exposing the structural barriers that constrain Ellie and her father’s lives in a racially stratified American society. Ellie’s hard work, intelligence and academic achievements do not shield her from microaggressions and the racial slurs. Instead, they highlight her state of being trapped between invisibility and hypervisibility, being seen by white people but at the cost of being seen through the lens of racial othering.

At the beginning of the film, Ellie seems to embody the model minority stereotype. At school, Ellie is a straight-A student, shy, quiet, hard-working and self-reliant. Her teacher praises her high academic achievement. At home, she is a dutiful daughter who takes good care of her father, who is still grieving Ellie’s late mother, helps him with his job at the train station, and works as a ghostwriter to make extra money for her family. Reflecting the model minority myth of a stereotypical Asian kid, Ellie is not only smart but so good at playing the piano that she becomes the church pastor’s favourite accompanist. Yet, she still struggles with discrimination and oppression. This can be observed through what Motta (2018) described as the paradox of living between hypervisibility and invisibility. Ellie is invisible to almost everyone in Squahamish in the way that Asian characters have been portrayed in several American films: as an extra in a white protagonist’s story.

In the opening sequences of *The Half of It*, we might assume that Ellie is just another Asian sidekick because she appears nearly invisible. Ellie is introduced to us through macro shots that fragment her presence, showing only parts of her body—her feet, elbow and chin. When we finally get to see her face, it is just a reflection in the mirror in which all her daily duties are written in checkboxes. In another scene, while the wide shot clearly shows the congregation singing in the church, Ellie appears blurrily in the far corner playing the piano as if she is just existing on the periphery of others’ lives. At school, when Aster, one of the few people who see her, notices Ellie, the camera adopts Aster’s perspective and captures Ellie’s reflection in a mirror, which is once again blurred and indirect.

When Ellie becomes visible to others, it is not on her own terms, but through the lens of hypervisibility, a spotlight that exposes her to ridicule and othering. She is not recognised as a full, complex individual, but rather seen through the reductive stereotypes and caricatures imposed on her Chinese identity. Her schoolmates perceive her as the stereotypical socially awkward Asian nerd—distant, friendless and academically overachieving. Being a high academic achiever does not protect her from these prejudices—it only helps her earn extra money to pay the bills when she sells her ghostwritten essays to her classmates. Ironically, ghostwriting is the only way Ellie becomes visible to her schoolmates. In the music class, the connection between students is expressed through the ambient sounds of whispering and texting. Ellie, by contrast, sits in silence. The only messages she receives are payment notifications for her ghostwritten essays. Her presence in the classroom is acknowledged not through friendship but through the writing service she provides; this meagre visibility depends on her invisibility as a ghostwriter.

The cost of being visible for the model minorities, as Hong (2020) argued, is having the model minority qualifications that helped you in the past used against you. Becoming visible and assimilable does not mean acquiring or sharing power with white people; it means being absorbed by the whites’ power and being “stooges to a white ideology that exploited our

ancestors” (Hong, 2020, p. 34). Ellie is visible to white people owing to her being a smart and hard-working straight-A student. She is also good at the piano, which, according to Aster, makes her the deacon’s “favourite heathen” in Squahamish, an overwhelmingly white Christian town, because he cannot tolerate the mediocre accompanists even if they are saved by God. However, this kind of visibility does not mean she is seen as equal to white people. Ellie’s qualities confirm her model minority status, but they do not shield her from racism. She is still subject to racial slurs, such as “chugga chugga Chu Chu”, and microaggressions, such as when Paul’s mother refers to her as “Paul’s Chinese friend”, a label that reduces her identity to ethnicity alone.

Conclusion

The analysis of the daughter characters in *The Farewell* and *The Half of It* reveals a common thread of resistance against the model minority stereotype in contemporary American films. The films reject the stereotype’s reductive tendency to essentialise the complex and multifaceted identities and experiences of Chinese American women into the narrow Asian American success frame defined by noble attributes such as hard work, intelligence, obedience, academic excellence and economic prosperity. This research exposes the intricate and diverse experiences of negotiating race, ethnicity, gender and class.

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The Wishing Well: Harnessing Bollywood's Motivational Arc as a Framework for Participatory Design

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Abstract

In India, few mediums shape public imagination as profoundly as Bollywood. Producing over 1,000 films and billions of views annually, it generates social scripts influencing how people dream, love, resist, and succeed. This study explores the intersection of visual communication, participatory design, and motivation by adapting Bollywood's signature arc of triumph into an interactive public installation. A comparative analysis of ten iconic films was done to identify common narrative motivators such as self-discovery, activated desires, and visualised victories, that inspire protagonists to achieve goals. An attempt to induce these motivators in real-life scenarios was made through The Wishing Well, an interactive installation presented at the India Film Project, Mumbai. A six-foot cardboard well was erected, where participants wrote personal wishes on origami paper boats and released them into the well, symbolising an external motivator event. This was followed by a digital questionnaire designed to introduce remaining motivators through guided self-reflection, prompting participants to reframe their passive "Wish" as an active "Goal." To reinforce this transformation, a personalised Goal-book was sent to the participants. It consisted of psychological and behavioural frameworks, customised according to the participants' responses, using AI. The installation engaged 450+ participants, with 40 interviewed based on completion/engagement criteria. Thematic analysis showed that 95% reported increased belief in their ability to fulfil their wish, and 87.5% gained a more actionable perspective of their Goal. The study demonstrates strong replicable potential by underscoring how culturally rooted media narratives can be harnessed to influence mindset and design behaviour change frameworks.

Keywords: participatory art, art installation, Bollywood

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Introduction

The Wishing Well is an installation was created for the India Film Project at Mehboob Studios, Mumbai, where the year's central theme was Bollywood. The conceptual foundation of the work drew from a narrative structure deeply embedded in mainstream Hindi cinema: the "hero's journey." While originally articulated through Joseph Campbell's (1949) monomyth, the structure has been widely adapted in Bollywood films, where protagonists frequently encounter adversity, experience pivotal turning points, and ultimately achieve their goals. These turning points—moments that redirect the hero, reignite motivation, or clarify purpose—formed the basis of this installation's conceptual focus. The intention was to examine whether such "motivators," commonly used in cinematic storytelling to propel fictional characters forward, could be translated into a real-life context through participatory art.

The installation, titled *The Wishing Well*, reimagined the familiar Indian superstition of tossing a coin into a well to make a wish. Rather than using a coin, participants were asked to fold an origami paper boat and write their wish on it before placing it into the installation. This twist served multiple purposes. First, handmaking the boat required time, attention, and a degree of personal investment, deepening the emotional connection to the act of wishing. Second, the process of writing the wish was intended to cognitively solidify the goal in the participant's mind, a phenomenon supported by research in goal-setting and self-regulation, where articulating a goal has been shown to enhance clarity, commitment, and perceived attainability (Gollwitzer, 1999; Locke & Latham, 2002). Ritualized actions, even simple ones, can also strengthen emotional grounding and perceived control, contributing to higher motivation (Norton & Gino, 2014).

The theoretical framing for the installation was grounded in established discussions on participatory art and relational engagement. Claire Bishop (2012) identifies participatory installations as artworks in which participants become co-creators of meaning, while Nicolas Bourriaud's (2002) notion of relational aesthetics positions these works as social encounters that can influence affect and interpersonal connection. These frameworks suggest that participatory installations have the capacity to generate emotional shifts, foster personal reflection, and potentially shape short-term psychological states. Building upon these ideas, *The Wishing Well* attempted to explore whether such artistic environments could evoke small but meaningful motivational effects.

The installation's design intentionally layered symbolic, narrative, and behavioral components: a Bollywood-inspired narrative arc; a culturally rooted ritual of wish-making; and a crafted object that functioned as a vessel for participants' goals. The combination of these elements aimed to simulate the kind of motivational "push" often portrayed in cinema, a moment where the hero regains clarity, hope, or determination. In this context, participants were positioned as the protagonists of their own micro-narratives, engaging in a symbolic gesture that mirrored the motivational beats found in films.

To understand the impact of the experience, participant responses were recorded during the event, and a subset of approximately 40 individuals (around 10% of total participants) were selected to complete a survey evaluating changes in their belief about achieving the wish they placed into the installation. This provided an opportunity to examine whether the participatory ritual generated a temporary increase in perceived self-efficacy or motivation. Follow-up conversations were conducted several months later to assess the longevity of the experience,

whether participants recalled the activity, whether it continued to hold meaning, and whether the motivational effect persisted beyond the immediate moment.

By integrating narrative theory, motivational psychology, and participatory art practice, this project sought to explore how artistic interventions might create brief but impactful motivational experiences. The installation also aimed to contribute toward early inquiry into how creative and symbolic actions, particularly those embedded in culturally familiar narratives may influence belief formation, emotional engagement, and small-scale behavioral intention.

Figure 1
The Wishing Well Art Installation



Research

We watched over 50 Bollywood movies in different Genres and shortlisted ten, where the theme was similar. The protagonist wishing for something and eventually fulfilling their wish. We tracked the protagonist's storyline and identified motivators that pushed them to fulfilling their wish.

Table 1
List of Movies Included in Research

Movie	Summary	Genre/Year
Wake Up Sid	A directionless young man discovers responsibility and purpose through self-growth and new perspectives.	Coming-of-age, Drama (2009)
Bhaag Milkha Bhaag	An athlete transforms personal trauma into extraordinary discipline to become a national champion.	Biographical Sports Drama (2013)
Om Shanti Om	A reincarnated actor seeks justice and fulfils unfinished destiny through courage and persistence.	Musical Drama, Romantic Thriller (2007)

Zindagi Na Milegi Dobaara	Three friends confront fears and rediscover themselves on a transformative road trip.	Adventure, Drama, Coming-of-age (2011)
Udaan	A teenager breaks free from an abusive environment to pursue his dreams and reclaim his identity.	Coming-of-age, Drama (2010)
Gully Boy	A young man from the slums rises through self-belief and expression to become a celebrated rapper.	Musical Drama (2019)
Rocket Singh	An honest salesman builds an ethical company from scratch by valuing trust over shortcuts.	Comedy-Drama (2009)
Mary Kom	A determined woman overcomes societal and personal obstacles to become a world boxing champion.	Biographical Sports Drama (2014)
Chandni Chowk to China	A humble cook discovers his hidden potential when he is mistaken for a legendary warrior and thrust into an unexpected hero's journey.	Action Comedy, Martial Arts (2009)
Chak De! India	A former hockey player redeems himself by uniting a diverse women's team and leading them to world championship victory.	Drama (2007)

The motivators identified in the movies were:

1. Future-State Visualization
Helps individuals articulate the personal significance of achieving their goal, strengthening intrinsic motivation.
2. Success Simulation
Guides individuals to imagine the exact moment their goal is fulfilled, creating a vivid emotional anchor that motivates action.
3. Time-Bound Goal Structuring
Encourages individuals to set a clear, time-bound target that converts an intention into a concrete, trackable goal.
4. Immediate Action Trigger
Prompts individuals to identify one small step they can take today to overcome inertia and begin moving forward.
5. Dedicated Time Allocation
Asks individuals to commit a specific amount of time each day, ensuring consistent progress and reinforcing discipline.
6. Barrier Mapping
Helps individuals identify their biggest barrier, enabling more realistic planning and proactive problem-solving.
7. Future-State Visualization
Helps individuals articulate the personal significance of achieving their goal, strengthening intrinsic motivation.

Installation Process

The Structure

The physical structure of the Wishing Well was designed as both a sculptural centrepiece and a functional surface for holding hundreds of participant wishes. To evoke the symbolic act of releasing a wish into water, the installation was built around a circular well form from which three dynamic waves emerged, rising to heights of approximately 3.5 feet, 3 feet, and 1.5 feet. Each wave was constructed using layered cardboard sheets, carefully cut and assembled to create flowing, upward-moving contours that suggested motion and buoyancy. For the body of the well, foam sheets were cut into precise half-inch triangular segments, allowing them to tessellate seamlessly and create a textured, stone-like surface. During early prototyping, brick-like modules were tested, but given the technical complexity of integrating them with the curved wave forms, the design shifted to a column-based internal support structure to stabilise the overall piece while keeping the construction process efficient. The origami boats, the central interactive element were designed using 5-inch square sheets, an ideal size for folding while remaining visually prominent on the installation. Based on surface measurements and placement tests, it was calculated that the completed structure could accommodate over 400 boats across the wave surfaces and the inner well walls. Together, the combination of dimensional waves, modular foam detailing, and structural columns created a visually striking, sturdy, and highly interactive installation that could withstand continuous public engagement throughout the event.

Figure 2
Making of the Well

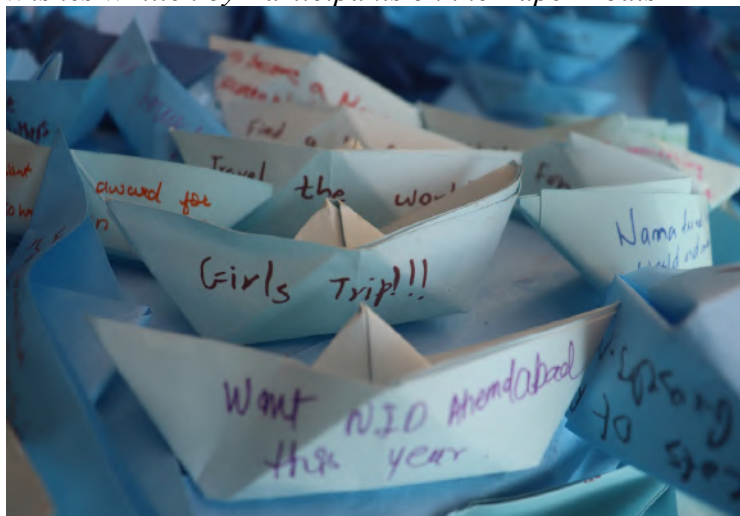


The Experience

The interaction began with participants folding a paper boat, encouraging them to engage physically and personally with the installation. They were then invited to write their wish on the boat following simple criteria, specifically, that the wish be achievable and personally meaningful.

Figure 3*Participants Making the Paper Boat*

Once written, the boats were placed inside the large sculptural “wishing well” using pre-cut double-sided tape, symbolising the externalisation of their intention. After this, participants scanned a QR code that informed them that by articulating their wish, they had already taken the first step toward converting it into a goal, and that the next stage would help them work toward fulfilling it.

Figure 4*Wishes Written by Participants on the Paper Boats*

The digital questionnaire that followed prompted them to rethink their wish through guided reflection; identifying actionable steps, setting a deadline, visualising the outcome, and selecting small tasks they could begin immediately. This moment of structured introspection represented the most critical mindset shift in the experience. Upon completing the digital journey, each participant received an “All the Best” card featuring an iconic movie quote about perseverance, offering a tangible reminder of their commitment. Finally, they were sent a personalised plan that outlined actionable tasks and strategies, drawn from psychological and behavioural frameworks to help them stay consistent and accountable in working toward their newly defined goal.

Figure 5*Participants Adding the Boat to the Well****Digital Survey***

After the boat was added to the installation by the participant, they were asked to scan a QR code near the installation, leading to a digital survey. Here the participant was guided to go through a deeper thought process regarding their wish. At the end of the survey, participants were given a printed card with a movie quote regarding fulfilling of wishes.

Table 2*Questions Asked in Survey, and Their Corresponding Motivators*

Question	Motivator	Description	Type
What will achieving this goal mean for you?	Future-State Visualization	Helps individuals articulate the personal significance of achieving their goal, strengthening intrinsic motivation.	Multiple Select
Take a minute and imagine the exact moment when your goal is fulfilled. What is the first thing you would do after that?	Success Simulation	Guides individuals to imagine the exact moment their goal is fulfilled, creating a vivid emotional anchor that motivates action.	Open Ended
Give yourself a deadline to reach this goal.	Time-Bound Goal Structuring	Encourages setting a clear, time-bound target to convert an intention into a concrete, trackable goal.	Date Format
What is one thing you can start today to take a step closer to your goal?	Immediate Action Trigger	Prompts individuals to identify one small step they can take today to overcome inertia and begin moving forward.	Open Ended

How much time can you give daily to active this goal?	Dedicated Time Allocation	Asks individuals to commit a specific amount of time each day, ensuring consistent progress and reinforcing discipline.	Multiple Choice
Where lies the biggest obstacle to this journey?	Barrier Mapping	Helps individuals identify their biggest barrier, enabling more realistic planning and proactive problem-solving.	Multiple Select

Figure 7
Digital Design of the Survey

Welcome to the wishing well!
Are you ready to make your wish come true?

"When you write down a wish, it becomes a goal."
By writing your wish on the boat, you have solidified your intention towards it. It is no longer a wish. It is now a goal. A goal you have to fulfill for yourself!

What will achieving this goal mean for you? *

- ☐ Increased confidence
- ☒ Improved skills or knowledge
- ☐ Better physical or mental well-being
- ☐ A sense of accomplishment
- ☐ A change in lifestyle
- ☐ Recognition or validation from others
- ☐ Other

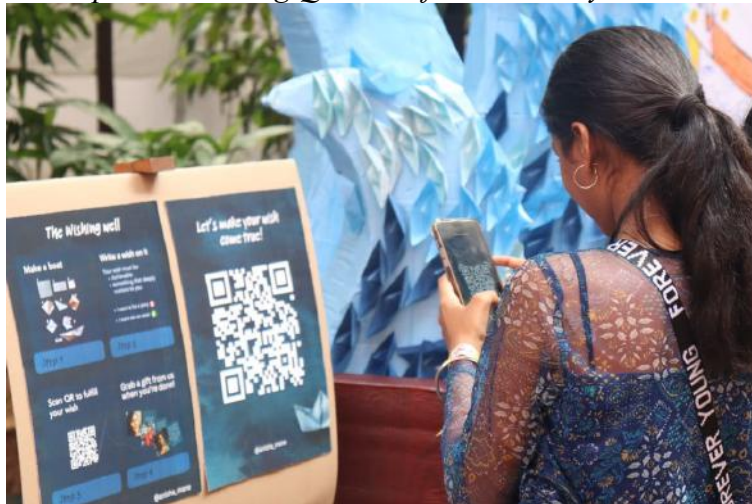
Take a minute and imagine the exact moment when your goal is fulfilled.
What is the first thing you would do after that?

Give yourself a deadline to reach this goal. *
MM/DD/YYYY

What is one thing you can start today to take a step closer to your goal? *

Where lies the biggest obstacle to this journey? *

- ☐ Inside Me (mental block)
- ☐ Outside Me (External reasons)

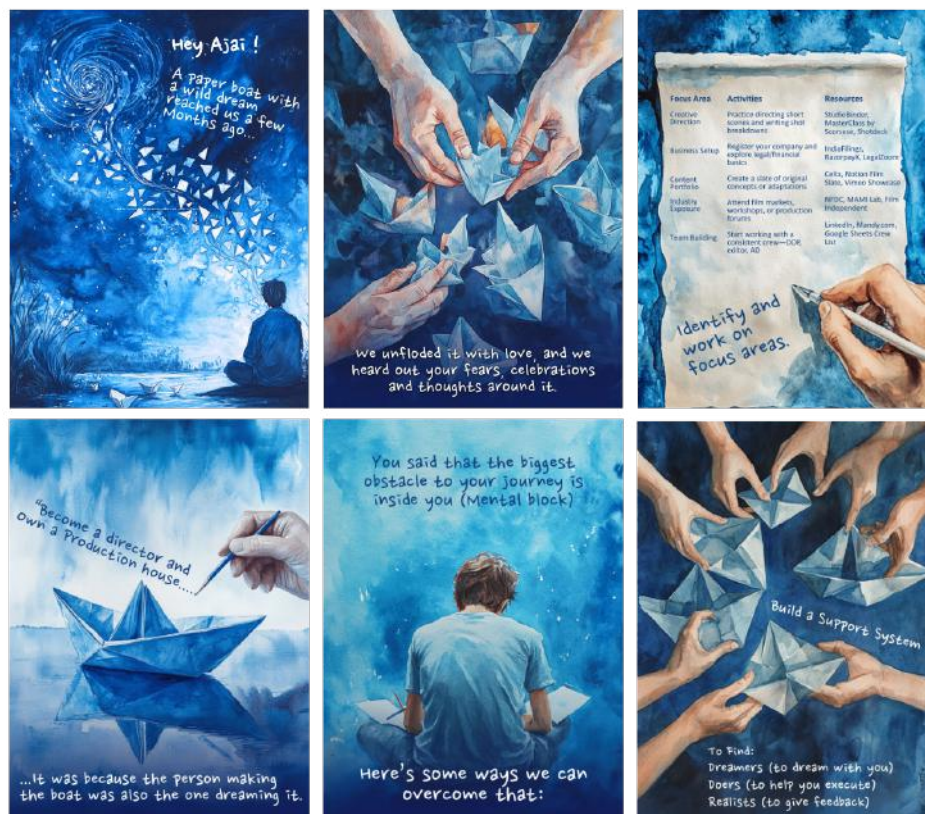
Figure 8*Participants Scanning QR Code for the Survey***Goal Book**

Based on their answers, we created a custom goalbook for every participant that aimed to rebuild the typical Bollywood story, but put the participant as a protagonist. We included the participants answers, and also added Focus areas, Resources, Activities, Objectives and Key results for the participants to follow.

The Goalbook script was as follows:

Hey [Participant Name]! A paper boat with a wild dream reached us a few Months ago... We were amazed how a light paper could hold a dream so big. It was because the person making the boat was also the one dreaming it. [Participant Dream, as written on Boat.] We unfolded it with love, and we heard out your fears, celebrations and thoughts around it. You said that the biggest obstacle to your journey is [Participant Answer- Where lies the biggest obstacle to this journey?] Here's some ways we can overcome that: Build a Support System. Find Dreamers (to dream with you), Doers (to help you execute) and Realists (to give feedback). Identify and work on focus areas. [Custom Focus Areas, Activities and Resources generated using AI.] What sets you apart from other dreamers might be the Actions you do: Monthly Check-In Plan Every month, set one Objective and 3 Key Results: [Custom Objectives and 3 Key results.] Every big goal starts with a small step... [Participant Answer- What is one thing you can start today to take a step closer to your goal?] You gave us a date when your boat will grow wings and fly... [Participant Answer- Give yourself a deadline to reach this goal]. And then, a well earned celebration for an meaningful victory! [Participant Answer- Take a minute and imagine the exact moment when your goal is fulfilled. What is the first thing you would do after that?] Maybe you grow with the process, not the result! All the best on your journey! See you on the other side of your success! Your wish lives on with us, Forever!

Figure 9
Goalbook Pages



Results

The installation received an encouraging level of engagement, with 453 individuals interacting with the Wishing Well and 218 completing the digital reflection form that followed. Of these, 40 participants were further interviewed based on their level of engagement, providing richer qualitative insight. The quantitative findings indicate a strong impact: 87.5% of respondents reported that the experience helped them rethink their initial wish in a more practical and inspiring way, suggesting the effectiveness of the narrative reframing techniques embedded in the design. Moreover, 95% noted an increased belief in their ability to achieve the goal they articulated, highlighting the installation's ability to activate internal motivation through a culturally familiar narrative structure. Together, these results reinforce the potential of the Wishing Well as a scalable, behaviour-shaping intervention grounded in the emotional logic of Bollywood storytelling.

Some interviews were later conducted with the participants:

The activity of making boats reminded me of my childhood, and took me back to all the dreams I'd seen for myself back then. Then, solving the form and turning my wishes into reality made me want to do it for my childhood self.

I had written a wish to perform at this event next year. When attending an open mic event, they offered for anyone to come onstage and perform. because my goal was already in my mind due to the installation, I got the courage to come forward, and got my wish fulfilled within a day itself!

Conclusion

The qualitative and quantitative findings of the study collectively indicate that The Wishing Well was successful in generating measurable shifts in participants' motivational states. Survey responses revealed that a substantial majority of participants reported an increased belief in their ability to achieve the goals they articulated during the installation. This heightened sense of self-efficacy immediately following the experience suggests that symbolic, participatory actions such as crafting an origami boat, inscribing a wish, and engaging with a culturally resonant ritual can function as meaningful psychological triggers.

Importantly, the follow-up interviews conducted six months after the installation further affirmed the durability of this effect. Participants frequently described the experience as memorable and personally significant, noting that the process had provided clarity on their aspirations and accelerated their engagement with their goals. Many recalled the act of goal-setting within the installation as a pivotal moment that helped them organize their thoughts, confront barriers, and adopt a more proactive mindset. The personalized Goal-Book, designed using their initial responses, emerged as a particularly influential tool; participants described it as a practical guide that offered structure, consistency, and a renewed sense of direction in the months following the event.

Together, these findings highlight the unique capacity of participatory art to shape motivational experiences, especially when grounded in cultural narratives that hold deep emotional resonance. By drawing from Bollywood's symbolic language of triumph, struggle, and self-transformation, the installation created a narrative environment in which participants could momentarily cast themselves as protagonists in their own journeys. This interplay between cinema-inspired symbolism and ritualized artistic participation underscores the broader potential of visual art to influence belief formation, goal clarity, and behavioral intention. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that when thoughtfully designed, artistic interventions can serve not only as aesthetic experiences but as catalysts for meaningful psychological change.

Acknowledgements

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Preserving Sacred Heritage at the Royal Palace of Yogyakarta Through Digital Innovation

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Abstract

The Royal Palace of Yogyakarta (Kraton Jogja) is 260-year-old Javanese monarchy and living cultural institution. Located in Yogyakarta—the sister city of Kyoto—The Palace, which is traditionally rooted in hundreds of sacred heritage; ceremonies, way of life, heirlooms, beliefs, etc., initially faced resistance to digital adoption due to concerns over preserving cultural sanctity. These sacred heritage and inherent values within The Palace were previously known only to a limited audience, largely due to the absence of digital transformation, which is the primary focus of this paper. Despite this, the integration of digital exposure does not eradicate its authenticity. Using a mixed-method approach including literature review, stakeholder interviews, firsthand field experience, and digital platform analytics, this research investigates The Palace's evolving digital strategy. Since launching its Instagram account in 2014, followed by YouTube, an official website, manuscripts digital archive, and TikTok, Kraton Jogja has grown into a trusted source of cultural knowledge and community engagement including its digital ecosystem all over the world. The findings affirm that digitalization acts as a tool for dissemination rather than dilution. It preserves sacred traditions while setting clear boundaries between what is publicly shared and what remains within institutional privacy. Moreover, this approach differentiates modernization from westernization, emphasizing local values and indigenous frameworks. All of which reinforce its role as a dynamic cultural epicenter. The paper concludes by highlighting the urgent need for digital archiving in safeguarding intangible heritage, and it considers future possibilities such as the use of artificial intelligence in long-term heritage/cultural conservation. Ultimately, The Palace's digital journey illustrates how tradition and innovation can coexist to ensure continuity across generations. It ultimately affirms that tradition and technology need not exist in opposition, but can coalesce to uphold cultural legacy in the digital age.

Keywords: Javanese kingdom, the royal palace of Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta monarch, culture preservation, digital heritage

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Introduction

The Heritage Imperative and Modernization Philosophy

The Keraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat (Keraton Yogyakarta) or the Palace of Yogyakarta stands as a vital and extensive repository of sacred Javanese heritage, culture, and philosophy. The Palace's holdings encompass thousands of items of both tangible and intangible heritage, ranging from over 700 manuscripts and written documents held in the Widya Budaya Library to traditional dances, musical instruments, weaponry, and spiritual beliefs.

Furthermore, the Keraton executes more than 100 annual traditional ceremonies and rituals, known as *Hajad Dalem*, supported by a dedicated staff of approximately 3,000 *Abdi Dalem* (Palace Servants/Officials). The term Hajad Dalem (Royal Vows/Offerings) refers to the entire corpus of traditional ceremonies and commemorative rituals executed by the Keraton. These ceremonies primarily serve three major commemorative and celebratory functions:

- a. Islamic Holy Days: The majority of Hajad Dalem center around the Islamic calendar, particularly commemorating major dates such as: Garebeg: The largest and most prominent rituals, held three times a year to mark important Islamic occasions: Garebeg Mulud (commemorating the birth of Prophet Muhammad), Garebeg Sawal (marking the end of Ramadan/Idul Fitri), and Garebeg Besar (marking Idul Adha/the Festival of Sacrifice). These events famously feature the Gunungan (mountain-like offerings of food and crops), symbolizing royal prosperity and generosity.
- b. Malam Selikur (The 25th Night): The special night prayer and pilgrimage during the fasting month of Ramadan.
- c. Royal and Dynastic Commemorations: These rituals honor the reigning Sultan and the founding of the dynasty.
- d. Tingalan Jumenengan Dalem: The annual commemoration of the reigning Sultan's accession to the throne, marked by solemn processions and offerings.
- e. Labuhan: An annual offering ceremony conducted at specific sacred sites (the South Sea, Mount Merapi, and Kahyangan Dlepih) to express gratitude and seek safety and harmony for the Sultan, the Palace, and the realm.
- f. Life Cycle and Pusaka (Heirloom) Rituals: Smaller, more frequent rituals dedicated to the care and maintenance of sacred objects and the observance of traditional Javanese calendrical cycles, ensuring cosmic balance.

These ceremonies are vital as they embody the philosophy of the Sultan as the cultural and spiritual leader (*Sayidin Panatagama Khalifatullah*), linking the Palace, the people, and the divine order. The successful execution of the Hajad Dalem and the daily operation of the Keraton rely on a dedicated staff of approximately 3,000 Abdi Dalem (Palace Servants or Officials). Serving as an Abdi Dalem is an honor and a dedication to the cultural and spiritual values of the Keraton. Their duties are divided based on their designated Kanca (departments) and Golongan (status/rank).

Male Abdi Dalem generally handle duties that require physical strength, public visibility, or administrative authority:

1. Security and Protocol: Serving in the Kanca Kawedanan Hageng Punakawan (Internal Security and Royal Guard) or Kanca Gedhong Kiwa/Tengen (Administrative Affairs), ensuring the safety of the Palace and managing ceremonial procedures, including guarding the Pusaka (heirlooms) and leading processions.

2. **Art and Documentation:** Working in areas like Kanca Widyabudaya (Culture and Research), managing archives, documenting ceremonies, and preserving traditional art forms such as Gamelan music and Wayang performance.
3. **Clerical and Technical:** Handling general administrative tasks, maintenance, and specific technical roles within the various departments, like Tandha Yekti (IT and Documentation).

Female Abdi Dalem predominantly manage domestic, ritualistic, and spiritual aspects of the Palace life:

1. **Ritual Preparation and Service:** Their primary roles, often in the Kanca Kawedanan Hageng Punakawan or Gedhong (Household), involve preparing the ceremonial offerings, or Sajen, and the elaborate food known as Ngebluk for the Hajad Dalem. They also manage the preparation of ritualistic necessities for the Sultan and the royal family.
2. **Cleanliness and Maintenance:** Maintaining the sacred cleanliness of the Palace's inner sanctums, heirlooms, and particularly the royal tombs, a task imbued with deep spiritual significance.
3. **Cultural Mentorship:** Often serving as cultural mentors or custodians of traditional knowledge, particularly in areas like Javanese etiquette, court dance, and herbal medicine.
4. In essence, the Abdi Dalem structure is a highly sophisticated, voluntary workforce, with men and women fulfilling complementary roles to ensure that the Keraton remains a fully functioning, sacred, and administrative institution, constantly reinforced by the execution of the Hajad Dalem.

For an institution so deeply rooted in tradition, the challenge of preservation and ensuring the continued relevance of its sacred knowledge in the modern age became paramount. The response was a strategic adoption of digital technology, guided by a potent philosophical framework articulated by the royal family: "Technology is not the enemy of culture" (HRH Princess Hayu of Yogyakarta) and, crucially, "Modernization is not Westernization" (His Majesty Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono X). This perspective posits digital innovation not as a corrosive force, but as an essential, culturally appropriate tool for enduring cultural stewardship.

The Pre-digitalization Context: Bridging Gaps (Before 2012)

Prior to 2012, the Keraton faced several significant challenges concerning communication, accessibility, and cultural outreach. A critical issue was the lack of a credible internal communication platform that could serve as a trusted reference for the public, researchers, and cultural enthusiasts. This contributed to limited public access to the extensive Javanese cultural knowledge held within the Palace walls. Consequently, there existed a perceived or actual disparity between the life lived within the *cepuri* (the inner compound of the palace) and the surrounding general community.

The communication issues faced by the Keraton prior to 2012 were compounded by a serious structural problem concerning information validity and dissemination, severely limiting its cultural outreach potential. Crucially, the public domain was characterized by a proliferation of references regarding the Keraton that were often non-authoritative, conflicting, or demonstrably spurious.

This fragmentation of information created a landscape of unverified knowledge, making it exceedingly difficult for the public, academic researchers, and cultural enthusiasts to discern credible facts from folklore or misinterpretations. This challenge was directly amplified by the fact that the Keraton possessed no official, centrally controlled channel that could serve as a definitive, trusted point of reference.

Anyone seeking to conduct serious research, understand ceremonial procedures, or verify historical details about the Keraton lacked a primary, authoritative source. Consequently, interpretations of the Palace's history, philosophy, and practices were often drawn from secondary, unreliable sources, leading to misrepresentation and the potential erosion of authentic cultural understanding.

This lack of official engagement created a significant cultural deficit. The vital process of Javanese cultural education was severely hampered within this information vacuum, particularly amidst the accelerating pace of globalization and the relentless influx of external cultural trends, or "future trends," which often lacked inherent historical or cultural value. The Keraton, as the epicenter of high Javanese culture, struggled to transmit its profound ethical and philosophical values in a compelling and accessible manner to younger generations competing for attention in the digital age. Furthermore, a widespread perception persisted that the profound knowledge and elaborate events contained within the Keraton were strictly reserved for a limited, internal circle, often perceived as exclusive or esoteric.

A large segment of the general community remained largely unacquainted with the Keraton's depth, unaware that its rituals, courtly arts, and administrative philosophies are richly imbued with historical, educational, and cultural value. The inaccessibility of this knowledge created an artificial barrier, leading to a sense of disconnect between the vibrant life within the Cepuri (inner compound) and the surrounding community.

This environment solidified the notion that the Palace was a repository of static history rather than a dynamic source of living Javanese wisdom, making the implementation of a proactive, modern communication strategy a non-negotiable imperative to break down these barriers and universally disseminate the cultural narrative.

This environment hindered the effective dissemination of Javanese values universally. The need was clear: to proactively engage the wider world and invite them into the cultural narrative of the Palace, using modern tools to dismantle historical barriers without compromising authenticity.

Strategic Digital Implementation and Institutionalization (Post-2012)

The Keraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat's commitment to digital transformation crystallized in 2013, prompted by a pivotal moment: the public dissemination of news surrounding the wedding of Sri Sultan Hamengkubawana X's fourth daughter, GKR Hayu, to KPH Notonegoro. What began as a singular communication requirement quickly revealed the vast potential of digital media in extending the Palace's outreach. The success of this initial venture catalyzed a broader institutional adoption of digital tools and reshaped the Palace's approach to public communication.

The Keraton's digital presence first took form through major social media platforms—Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Over the following years, the digital ecosystem expanded

considerably. By 2017, the Palace launched its official YouTube channel and website, which became central hubs for audiovisual storytelling and structured information. This growth continued with the adoption of TikTok and the establishment of a designated portal for press releases and media coordination at **mediacenter.kratonjogja.id**. Together, these platforms form a comprehensive digital infrastructure that allows the Keraton to communicate with diverse audiences while maintaining institutional authority and authenticity.

A crucial turning point in this transformation was the formal establishment of **Kawedanan Tandha Yekti** (The Palace Bureau of Information and Media) in 2015, enacted through a *Dhawuh Dalem* (Royal Decree). Initially assembled to manage communications related to the royal wedding, Tandha Yekti evolved into a permanent structural organ within the Palace. Its inauguration marked a departure from ad-hoc digital activities toward a systematic and sustainable governance model for information management.

Tandha Yekti functions as the Keraton's official center for data, information, documentation, and technological oversight. It operates effectively as an internal media agency, orchestrating an end-to-end content development cycle. This includes formulating annual and monthly editorial themes, conducting regular editorial meetings, drafting narratives, producing audiovisual materials, scheduling publications, ensuring brand and message consistency across platforms, and evaluating monthly performance through statistical analytics. Such a structured mechanism guarantees both the coherence and the long-term sustainability of the Keraton's digital presence.

Figure 1

Digitalisation Project Done by Kawedanan Tandha Yekti's Staff



Source: Kawedanan Tandha Yekti

The Evolution of Tandha Yekti: From Administrative Unit to Professional Media Production House

What distinguishes Tandha Yekti is not merely its mandate but its operational sophistication. Over the past decade, the bureau has matured into a professional in-house media production entity whose workflow mirrors the standards of contemporary journalism and digital production studios. Its role extends far beyond basic administration: it curates, interprets, and

communicates the Keraton's cultural knowledge systems to broad and varied publics. The internal structure encompasses specialized roles typically found in established media organizations, content strategists, writers, photographers, videographers, digital archivists, designers, and data analysts. This professionalization ensures that every piece of content is produced with editorial precision, cultural sensitivity, and technical excellence. Its processes, from pre-production planning and field documentation to editing, publishing, and post-release evaluation, reflect an integrated and highly disciplined production ecosystem. Such evolution speaks to a broader institutional vision: the Keraton is not only preserving its cultural heritage but actively shaping how that heritage is understood in the digital age. Tandha Yekti's transformation demonstrates that cultural institutions can maintain intellectual and traditional authority while embracing modern communication paradigms. In doing so, the Keraton positions itself as a leading example of how heritage organizations can strategically negotiate modernity without compromising authenticity.

Personnel and Expertise

A key element in Tandha Yekti's success and high-quality output is the composition of its team. Tandha Yekti's personnel are not exclusively composed of, or limited to, Abdi Dalem (Palace Servants) with traditional statuses; a significant number of its members are seasoned professionals who possess mastery in their respective technical fields.

This strategic blend of traditional loyalty and modern, professional expertise ensures that their approach to IT, documentation, and content creation is both culturally authentic and technologically cutting-edge. The involvement of experienced professionals, particularly in the demanding areas of digital content, information technology, and media management, guarantees that the Palace's digital presence meets contemporary standards of communication.

They operate with a clear division of labor that includes roles comparable to journalists, photojournalists, videographers, and data analysts, all working synergistically to fulfill the communication mandate.

Expansion in Scope and Scale

The substantial growth in the unit's size directly reflects the escalating demands placed upon it. Initially operating with a modest team of fewer than ten members, Tandha Yekti has since expanded significantly to nearly forty personnel. This dramatic increase in staffing is a direct consequence of the unit's evolving duties, expanded responsibilities, and, most importantly, the proliferation of Palace agendas.

As the Keraton (Palace) has become increasingly accessible and visible to the public, both locally and internationally, the sheer volume and complexity of events requiring documentation, immediate publication, and strategic communication have multiplied exponentially. The expanded team is now essential to maintain the high frequency and quality of content required to keep pace with the Palace's heightened public profile and its robust calendar of cultural and diplomatic activities.

Figure 2*Team of Kawedanan Tandha Yekti During Documentation*

Source: Kawedanan Tandha Yekti

Archival and Documentation Authority

Within the Palace's organizational structure, Tandha Yekti has now become widely recognized as a pivotal division with primary responsibility for photographic and video archival matters. This designation highlights their indispensable role not merely in content creation but also in the crucial, long-term preservation of the Palace's contemporary history.

Their comprehensive approach to documentation ensures that every significant event, ceremony, and royal activity is captured, cataloged, and maintained with the meticulous standards necessary for historical and cultural record-keeping. This function is vital for future research, exhibitions, and the continuity of the Palace's narrative, establishing the unit as the institutional memory keeper for visual media.

Collaborative and Diplomatic Engagements

In its advanced stage of development, Tandha Yekti's role has transcended internal documentation, blossoming into a vital external communication and liaison unit. The team now actively collaborates with a diverse array of stakeholders, encompassing both domestic and international entities, including various ministries and even engaging in bilateral state-level affairs, particularly concerning Public Relations (PR).

This expanded mandate sees Tandha Yekti acting as a crucial interface, ensuring accurate and consistent messaging in high-stakes public and diplomatic contexts. Whether coordinating media coverage for state visits, managing public perception during cultural exchanges, or providing official photographic documentation for government-level publications, this collaborative function solidifies Tandha Yekti's position as a sophisticated public relations arm of the Palace, capable of navigating complex national and international media landscapes. The ability to engage professionally with these diverse partners underscores the unit's advanced maturity and its indispensable role in projecting the Palace's image and narrative on a global stage.

In summary, Tandha Yekti represents a successful paradigm shift from a traditional documentation office to a dynamic, professionalized in-house media production facility. The

unit's current structure, with its professional personnel, expanded capacity, definitive archival authority, and sophisticated external collaborations, is the fundamental mechanism that guarantees the consistency, quality, and academic rigor of the Palace's digital communication and historical preservation efforts. This evolution is central to ensuring that the cultural heritage and contemporary activities of the Palace are communicated effectively and professionally to a worldwide audience.

The Tandha Yekti also serves as a crucial point of cultural and diplomatic engagement for global leaders and royalty. In these high-stakes scenarios, Tepas Tandha Yekti transcends its role as a mere internal documentation unit, functioning instead as the centralized coordination hub for all official media and public relations activities. This elevated mandate was particularly evident during the visit of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito of Japan on June 21st, 2023.

The Diplomatic Imperative: Emperor Naruhito's Visit

During the Imperial visit, Tepas Tandha Yekti assumed a highly sensitive and critical position as the chief liaison for publication coordination, extending its oversight far beyond the internal palace media channels. They were entrusted with managing and facilitating the access, verification, and dissemination of content not only for Indonesian national media but, crucially, for the accompanying Japanese media delegations. This role required meticulous diplomatic precision:

Content Control and Verification

Tandha Yekti became the sole authoritative source responsible for the capture and verification of all official photographs, video footage, and contextual data related to the Emperor's interactions with the Sultan and the cultural significance of the sites visited. This measure was essential to ensure that all published material accurately reflected the delicate protocol and dignity of the engagement, upholding the specific communication requirements of both the Keraton and the Japanese Imperial Household Agency.

Media Facilitation

The team coordinated logistical access for the media pool, ensuring that photographers and videographers, including those from Japan, adhered to the strict ceremonial guidelines of the Keraton. This proactive management prevented protocol breaches and maintained the solemnity of the event while fulfilling the global demand for immediate, high-quality documentation.

Official Feed Distribution

By controlling the primary visual feed, Tandha Yekti ensured the consistency and quality of the historical record, providing a clean, authoritative visual narrative for the world's press, thus mitigating the risk of misinformation or unverified content entering the public domain.

Figure 3*In House Documentation From Kawedanan Tandha Yekti During Emperor Naruhito Visit**Source: Kawedanan Tandha Yekti*

A Crucial Role in High-Level State Documentation

The coordination during Emperor Naruhito's visit is representative of Tandha Yekti's crucial and sustained role in documenting and publicizing all high-level state and royal visits to the Keraton. Over the years, the unit has consistently proven its capability in managing complex communication logistics for diverse international dignitaries.

The unit's specialized expertise in handling sensitive documentation and publication extends to a comprehensive list of world leaders and royal figures who have visited the Palace, including:

- Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand
- The President of the Federal Republic of Germany (e.g., Frank-Walter Steinmeier)
- His Majesty the King of the Netherlands (Willem-Alexander) and Her Majesty the Queen (Máxima)
- Her Majesty the Queen of Denmark (Margrethe II)
- The President of Ukraine (e.g., prior to 2022)
- The President of Singapore
- The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (e.g., David Cameron, prior to 2023), etc.

In each instance, Tandha Yekti acts as the bridge between traditional Javanese court protocol and modern global media requirements. They effectively manage the dual imperative of preserving the sacred dignity of the Palace while ensuring global accessibility and comprehensive public relations (PR). This crucial function solidifies Tandha Yekti's position not merely as a documentation center, but as an essential diplomatic instrument responsible for curating the Keraton's international image and preserving the visual history of its most significant external engagements.

Temporal Growth Trajectory: Earning Public Trust and Affection

The sustained growth in the follower base over time is arguably the most crucial metric, as it demonstrates that the Keraton is increasingly resonating with the public heart (Mendapatkan

Hati Masyarakat) on a profound, enduring level, moving beyond transient novelty. While specific year-by-year data is proprietary, the growth trend follows a distinct pattern consistent with successful institutional digital campaigns:

1. Initial Uptake (2012–2015): Following the establishment of Tandha Yekti and the launch of official channels, the growth was initially steady but modest, driven largely by local cultural enthusiasts and academic circles. This phase established the platform's credibility as the sole authoritative source.
2. Acceleration Phase (2016–2020): With the consistent digitalization and streaming of major Hajad Dalem (such as Garebeg and Labuhan), visibility exploded. The unique, high-quality, and official documentation of previously unseen rituals attracted a broader national audience interested in cultural heritage. The authenticity of the content differentiated it immediately from unreliable third-party sources.
3. Mass Adoption and Global Reach (2021–Present): The strategic adoption of platforms like TikTok, alongside continuous high-production-value output on YouTube and Instagram, accelerated growth exponentially. The content diversified to include educational segments, interviews with Abdi Dalem, and explanations of Javanese philosophy, appealing to international audiences and younger demographics. This phase cemented the Keraton's relevance in the contemporary cultural dialogue.

The Digital Outreach and Achievements

The strategic digital pivot undertaken by the Yogyakarta Keraton has yielded remarkable and quantifiable results, transforming its social media presence from a nascent effort into a powerful engine for global awareness and cultural engagement. This section details the key metrics that illuminate the Keraton's success in capturing the public's attention and securing a place in the digital landscape, solidifying its role as a relevant cultural institution in the modern era.

The multifaceted content strategy employed by the Palace utilizes a wide range of formats to capture public interest and fulfill its preservation mandate. Content types are highly varied and include: thematic posts, detailed features on *Hajad Dalem* (Royal Ceremonies/Events), profiles of *Abdi Dalem* (Palace Servants), trivia (#askkraton/#tanyakraton), and live reports during activities. This approach has significantly increased the exposure of customary ceremonies and the intrinsic values of life within the inner palace compound (*cepuri*), leading to broader recognition among the general public from diverse demographics.

The results of this digital pivot are remarkable and quantifiable. Over 90% of the Palace's traditional events are now streamed and digitalized, ensuring archival integrity and global accessibility. This has directly led to a significant increase in public awareness, with documented growth of over 60%.

The commercial impact is equally striking, showing a massive increase in online ticketing purchases: visitor numbers soared from approximately 4,000–5,000 visitors per month to an impressive 25,000–30,000 visitors per month. Social media metrics confirm this expansive reach, with, for example, over 450K followers on Instagram, 53K on TikTok, and 225K subscribers on YouTube.

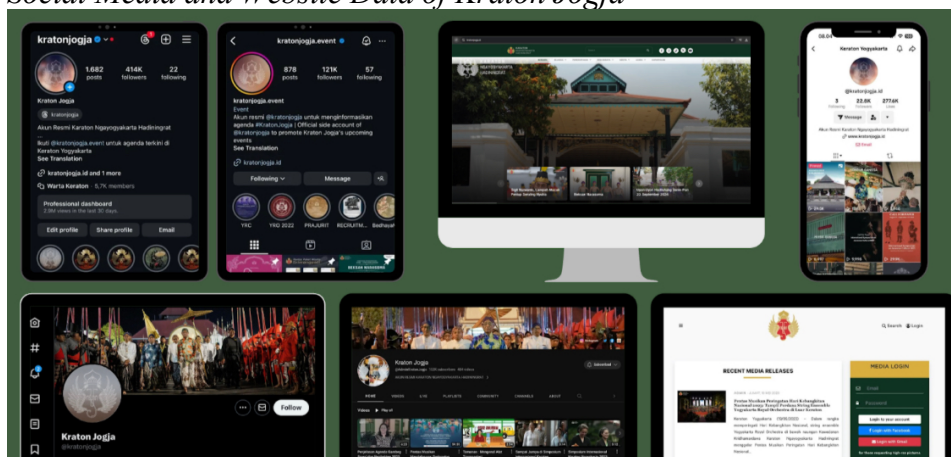
Trend Analysis on Social Media Platforms

The Keraton's success in digital outreach is a function of its ability to strategically adapt traditional content for modern consumption patterns:

1. **YouTube: The Archival and Educational Authority:** The high subscriber count here is particularly significant. YouTube serves as the Keraton's digital archive, hosting full-length streams of royal ceremonies and detailed, educational series (e.g., *Sesorah Dalem*, or Royal Addresses). This platform attracts users seeking in-depth knowledge and archival integrity. The engagement metrics (e.g., view duration) often surpass those of similar cultural institutions, suggesting the audience views the Keraton's content as academic-grade material.
2. **Instagram: The Visual Narrative and Aesthetic Appeal:** The largest follower base on Instagram confirms the platform's role as the primary engine for visual storytelling and immediate public relations. High-resolution photographs and short video snippets effectively convey the majesty and aesthetic beauty of court life, attire, and architecture. This platform fosters direct, emotional connection, allowing followers to feel proximate to the royal family and courtly activities.
3. **TikTok: Bridging Tradition and Youth Culture:** The rapid growth on TikTok, despite its lower absolute count compared to Instagram, is a critical strategic victory. By adapting complex cultural concepts into short, engaging, and often humorous formats, the Keraton has successfully utilized trend engagement to introduce Javanese heritage to the generation most susceptible to external cultural pressures. This platform demonstrates the Keraton's proactive effort to prevent the educational value of its heritage from being sidelined by global youth trends.

Figure 4

Social Media and Website Data of Kraton Jogja



In conclusion, the social media statistics provide empirical evidence of the profound shift in the Keraton's public identity. The quantified awareness growth of over 60%, the massive surge in physical visitors (from ~4,000 to ~30,000 per month), and the commanding digital audience of over 700,000 followers collectively confirm that the digital pivot has been a triumph of cultural dissemination. It has successfully repositioned the Keraton as an internationally accessible cultural beacon, effectively using modern metrics to gauge the successful reinvigoration of ancient cultural values within the contemporary world.

Beyond internal metrics, the digitalization effort has fostered a larger public dialogue, evident in the proliferation of public accounts and content creators disseminating information about the

Palace, and the expansion of public discussion addressing the Keraton's cultural heritage, supported by an annual academic forum (International Symposium on Javanese Culture since 2019). Furthermore, the Palace has successfully engaged in international diplomacy, as exemplified by the Yogyakarta Royal Orchestra's performance in Kyoto, Japan, and collaborations with foreign embassies.

Challenges and Future Considerations

While the achievements are substantial, the digitization process is not without its ongoing challenges. These include the persistent issue of bridging the disparity in understanding between the communicator and the message recipient, ensuring the universal socialization of Javanese values, and constantly adjusting the communication strategy to align with the changing characteristics and interests of the public. There is also the continuous internal need for upgrading the digital mindset to keep pace with the development of technology and foreign culture. Successfully navigating these challenges requires sustained dedication to data analysis and adaptive content creation, ensuring the digital content remains relevant, resonant, and authentic.

Conclusion

The digital transformation of the Keraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat demonstrates that sacred heritage can not only survive but thrive within the technological landscape of the 21st century. Far from diminishing its sanctity, the Keraton's strategic approach—anchored in the philosophies that *technology is not the enemy of culture* and *modernization is not Westernization*—proves that digital innovation can operate as a sophisticated tool of cultural continuity. Through the institutional strength of Kawedanan Tandha Yekti, the Palace has redefined itself from a historically revered yet largely secluded institution into an accessible, authoritative, and globally resonant cultural epicenter.

The dramatic rise in public engagement—evidenced by exponential visitor growth, robust digital audiences, and heightened international visibility—confirms that well-curated digital exposure can deepen, rather than dilute, cultural reverence. Instead of fragmenting tradition, digitalization has clarified it; instead of widening the gap between the Palace and the public, it has invited a global community into a narrative once confined to the Cepuri. This success positions the Keraton as a pioneering model for cultural institutions navigating the tension between sacred preservation and modern demand.

Looking forward, the Keraton's sustainability hinges on several strategic imperatives: strengthening digital literacy across institutional levels, maintaining rigorous content authenticity amidst fast-evolving platforms, and embracing future technologies—such as AI-driven archiving, immersive environments, and long-term digital conservation frameworks—that can safeguard intangible heritage at unprecedented scales. These steps are not merely technological advancements; they are acts of cultural responsibility.

Ultimately, the Keraton's digital journey affirms a powerful lesson for cultural custodians worldwide: tradition and innovation are not adversaries but vital partners. When guided with philosophical clarity and institutional discipline, technology becomes a vessel through which cultural legacy is not only preserved, but projected confidently into the future. Through this synthesis, the Royal Palace of Yogyakarta ensures that its living heritage continues to inform, inspire, and endure across generations—both within Indonesia and on the global stage.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that ChatGPT and Gemini AI were used in the preparation of this manuscript solely for minor linguistic refinement, including grammar correction, small sentence-level adjustments to improve clarity, and translation. The software was not used to conduct analysis, create substantive content or draw conclusions. The intellectual content, interpretations and conclusions presented in this manuscript are entirely the author's own.

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Audience Characteristics in the Dominance of Celebrity Political Podcast in Indonesia

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Abstract

Audiences in the digital ecosystem become active actors in public discussions by providing engagement, expressiveness, and collaboration in the digital space. Digital media commodifies audiences by utilizing attention as a commodity. In addition, Audiences indirectly work by receiving and distributing content in digital media, including podcast content. Podcasts are an alternative digital media that provides freedom of discussion in the digital space. In Indonesia, podcasts are often dominated by political information from celebrities, especially on YouTube. Celebrities upload political podcasts on YouTube based on consumption patterns that match the characteristics of the audience. This article aims to examine how the characteristics of the audience contribute to giving space for public discussion, which is now dominated by political celebrities in podcast media. This study adopts the theory of audience labor by Fisher (2015), focusing on the audience as a commodity that works under the influence of media algorithms and as gatekeepers. This research uses a netnography approach by combining virtual observation of YouTube political podcast channels. The findings indicate that the audience tends to have characteristics of consuming viral and sensational content. This characteristic is a form of audience labour that is commodified by political celebrities. Furthermore, the audience works as a gatekeeper in controlling information flows. Thus, audiences play a role in strengthening celebrity dominance, especially in political podcasts.

Keywords: audience characteristic, audience labour, celebrity, gatekeeper, political podcast

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Introduction

The understanding of audiences has changed with the advancement of digital technology. The role of audiences has become more active in the media environment, shifting from being passive recipients of media effects to active actors interpreting messages. More recently, audiences have been understood as active agents in the political and economic context of media, with the assumption that audiences on social media are producers of data that generate value. Fisher (2015) explains that audiences on social media are engaged, expressive, and collaborative. Audiences demonstrate involvement in the interaction process on social media (such as liking, recommending, or commenting). In addition to active engagement, audiences demonstrate self-expression through the production and distribution of content (such as providing opinions, sharing experiences in the form of text, images, or videos). Finally, audiences with collaborative characteristics work together to spread messages.

Audience characteristics on social media become data that is continuously processed by the media system and forms an algorithm. The algorithm is formed based on data on audience consumption patterns on digital media, such as viewing history, engagement time, click frequency, and social interactions (likes, comments, shares). By collecting this behavioral data, the algorithm system builds a user profile that is then used to deliver personalized and customized content. Fuchs (2014) argues that algorithms act as surveillance by collecting audience interaction data, and as predictive by suggesting content that will interest users based on previous interactions. This suggests that algorithms play a significant role in transforming audience segments into profitable commodities for digital media and advertisers.

Communication studies on the relationship between audiences and digital media continue to develop, using various approaches. One such approach is the concept of audiences as both commodities and workers within the political economy of media. Canada Dallas Smythe (1981) argues that audiences generate “audience power,” which involves the work of concentration and attention. However, this concept still fails to define the audience that has evolved in digital media, where attention and time are no longer traded values. This concept was later expanded with the emergence of the concept of audience labor in digital media, where audiences perform more tasks beyond just attention in the form of viewing. Audiences act as “laborers” through participation and interaction, which are processed into data by media companies.

In addition to consuming content, audiences also participate by receiving and producing content on digital media, including podcasts. Audiences are not limited to a passive role, but actively expand and shape the meaning of the content. A content creator is responsible for all information provided to a specific target audience through digital media, and they strive to fulfil content objectives such as promotion, education, entertainment, or information, as well as adapting the content to the chosen platform. YouTube is often used by creators because it is considered free without censorship or strict rules. This makes podcasts an alternative digital medium that is more familiar and closer to its audience. The development of podcasts on media like YouTube has become an alternative form of digital media that can be used by anyone to broadcast from home using online video (Meidina, 2023).

Podcasts have grown rapidly in Indonesia, driven by technological advancements, a growing digital industry, the creativity of content creators, and social adoption. Podcasts are recognised as a new alternative medium for practicing journalism (Muslimah, 2022) and a valuable tool for developing communication skills and disseminating information, including for educational purposes, across various digital platforms. This growth reflects a public desire for greater free

speech and on-demand features, indicating that audiences are seeking greater control over their media consumption and more personal connections with content creators.

Political podcasts as a long-form conversation format offer an intimate feel, time flexibility, and a more relaxed communication style than mainstream journalism. In Indonesia, political podcasts on YouTube can be broadly divided into two categories. The first category consists of celebrity-owned or artist-owned channels in which political content is embedded within a broader repertoire of entertainment, lifestyle, and personal branding. The second category includes dedicated political or news podcast channels that focus primarily on in-depth political content, policy analysis, and issue-based discussion. While both categories address political themes, they are differently marked in style, framing, and the centrality of entertainment value.

An interesting phenomenon is the emergence of the dominance of political podcasts owned by celebrities, such as Deddy Corbuzier with *Close The Door* and Denny Sumargo with *CURHAT BANG!*, which often invite politicians, public officials, or political sources for dialogue. On the other hand, there are political channels that specifically focus on policy issues and political dynamics, such as Total Politics and Podberita. Even though they both contain political content, the performance of these two types of channels is very different.

Celebrity-owned political podcasts tend to attract far higher numbers of views, likes, comments, and shares than their more conventional political counterparts, even when discussing similar issues. Programs hosted by high-profile figures such as Deddy Corbuzier and Denny Sumargo regularly reach tens of millions of views for politically themed episodes, far exceeding the reach of specialized political channels that focus more on substantive policy discussions. This imbalance raises an important question: to what extent is the dominance of celebrity political podcasts driven not only by celebrity power and platform design but also by the characteristics and practices of audiences themselves?

This paper aims to analyse how audience characteristics shape, and even drive, the dominance of celebrity political podcasts in Indonesia. It pays particular attention to three interrelated audience characteristics: engagement, expressiveness, and collaboration. These characteristics are examined through the lenses of audience labour theory and audience-as-gatekeeper theory, within a political podcast landscape marked by the growing centrality of celebrity figures. By doing so, the study seeks to contribute to scholarly debates on political communication, digital labour, and the political economy of platformised media.

Literature Review

Audience Labour Theory

In the context of digital media, this active audience is further redefined as a productive force. Audiences don't just interpret content; they comment on it, share it, combine it, and use it as raw material for ongoing social interactions. This has given rise to concepts like "prosumption," where production and consumption are intertwined (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), as well as a renewed interest in the economic value generated by audience activity, particularly in the data-driven platform economy (Fuchs, 2014; Gillespie & Boczkowski, 2014).

Active audiences have the following characteristics: (a) Engaged audiences are highly attentive and engaged. They watch long-form episodes, follow series consistently, and respond quickly

to new uploads. Engagement is seen in metrics such as retained views and watch duration (McClure, 2020). (b) Expressive audiences articulate their opinions, emotions, and identities in the comments section and through other interactive features. They debate, support, criticise, or ridicule political actors and podcast hosts, often using humour, sarcasm, or moralising language. (c) Collaborative audiences coordinate with each other, explicitly or implicitly, to amplify specific content. This can include encouraging others to like or share, participating in collective comments, or migrating discussions from one platform to another (Jenkins, 2006).

Audience labour builds on the work of the political economy of communication, particularly Dallas Smythe's discussion of the "audience commodity." In an advertising-supported media system, audience attention is packaged and sold to advertisers, making the audience itself the primary commodity. Under digital capitalism, this logic is intensified: audiences don't just watch; they click, like, comment, and share. These activities generate data that can be analyzed, targeted, and monetized on a massive scale (Mosco, 2009). Recent audience studies have argued that audience participation constitutes a form of unpaid labour. Fisher proposed the concept of "audiencing as marketing" to demonstrate how audiences perform marketing work through participation and interaction. Terranova (2000), in "Free Labour," emphasizes that value production in the digital economy often relies on the free labour of user communities. In the context of political podcasts, audience labour. This is the key to why certain content is more dominant than others.

Audience activity in consuming, interacting, and sharing content can be interpreted as a form of audience labour that generates economic value not only for the platform but also for the creator. Forms of audience labour, such as likes and reactions, reviews and mentions, comments and replies, shares and resharing, and interactions, are forms of active engagement that generate data that is then utilized and exploited by podcast creators.

Audience as Gatekeeper

In platformed media ecosystems, algorithms play a central role in determining which content is recommended, surfaced, and made visible to users. However, algorithmic visibility is closely tied to audience behaviour. Engagement metric, such as watch time, likes, comments, and shares are central signal that algorithms use to rank content (Couldry & Meijas, 2019). As a result, audiences effectively participate in the process of gatekeeping, collectively pushing certain content into prominence while relegating other content to oblivion.

Traditional gatekeeping theory media focuses on media professionals deciding what information enters the public sphere. In the digital environment, audiences become gatekeepers of distributed systems that shape the public agenda through their interaction patterns (Napoli, 2011). At the same time, algorithmic personalization and the logic of maximization engagement can contribute to echo chambers, sensationalism, and prioritization of emotionally charged content over nuanced discussion. Technological advancements have made audiences themselves gatekeepers who actively participate in shaping the flow of information and online dynamics based on what they find interesting or important.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative netnographic approach. Netnography is a form of ethnography adapted to online environments, focusing on naturally occurring interactions and cultural practices in digital communities. This approach was chosen to study audience behavior

on platforms like YouTube, where most activity occurs in the comments section, engagement metrics, and cross-platform sharing. The study is designed as a multiple-case netnography, examining four political podcast channels on YouTube: two celebrity-owned channels and two dedicated political channels. This comparative design allows for the identification of patterns that distinguish audience labor and gatekeeping in celebrity political podcasts from those in more traditional political talk shows. The research subjects are four YouTube channels actively producing political podcasts:

1. Deddy Corbuzier – *Close The Door* (celebrity podcast)
2. Denny Sumargo – *CURHAT BANG!* (celebrity podcast)
3. Total Politics (political channel)
4. Podberita (political channel)

These channels were selected based on subscriber numbers, frequency of political content, and their prominence in public discussions about politics on social media. Within these channels, episodes dealing with salient political events, such as public demonstrations, parliamentary controversies, or high-profile political debates, were purposive sampled for closer analysis.

Data collection in this study was conducted over three months, from August to October 2025, using a netnographic method that combined virtual observation with in-depth interviews. The primary data source consisted of three complementary components. First, virtual observation was systematically conducted on selected political podcast episodes and YouTube comment sections. Researchers watched episodes with high political relevance, qualitatively read comments, and recorded metrics engagement which is visible in the number of views, likes, and shares. This observation includes not only verbal content but also visualization of thumbnails, titles, and interaction patterns that develop in the comments column.

Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with a number of active audience members who regularly interact with political podcast content. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling based on the criteria of frequency of interaction and active engagement in the comments section. These semi-structured interviews explored their motivations for watching celebrity podcasts versus dedicated political podcasts, their perceptions of political discussion in these formats, and the engagement practice they perform in everyday media use (Creswell, 2014). Data analysis techniques use thematic analysis to explore audience characteristics that influence audience labor and the dominance of political content produced by celebrities.

Results and Discussion

Throughout the observation period, celebrity-hosted political podcast episodes consistently achieved far higher visibility and engagement than episodes with comparable political themes on dedicated political channels. This is evident in Figure 1, which shows that political episodes on Deddy Corbuzier's channel received tens of millions of views, with significantly higher likes and comments.

Figure 1*Political Content by Celebrity-Host Podcast**Source:* Denny Sumargo's Youtube Podcast

Different from Figure 2. This shows the views number of channel Total Politics, which tend to have a more limited audience, even though the topics discussed are similar or even more in-depth.

Figure 2*Content by Political Podcast Channel**Source:* Total Politik's Youtube Podcast

Celebrity-hosted episodes on contentious topics such as parliamentary controversies or public protests regularly reached multimillion-view counts within weeks, whereas similar topics on political channels tended to attract far fewer views. This pattern was mirrored in likes and comments. Celebrity podcasts generated not only larger absolute numbers of reactions and comments but also denser, more continuous discussion threads. Comment sections remained active longer, with users continuing to discuss episodes weeks after publication. Political channels, while generating substantive exchanges, often had less intense and more short-lived engagement.

Importantly, the main content of celebrity podcasts is not exclusively, and sometimes not primarily, political. Political episodes often appear alongside entertainment-focused content

featuring actors, athletes, or other public figures. However, when celebrity hosts address political issues, these episodes disproportionately benefit from the channel's pre-existing audience base and its algorithmic momentum.

Audience Characteristic: Engaged, Expressive, Collaborative

Analysis of comments and interviews revealed three main characteristics of celebrity political podcast audiences:

1. Engaged: Audiences watch long episodes and follow series regularly. Many commentators mention rewatching certain segments, especially those deemed “irritating,” conflict-filled, or controversial. This contributes to the high watch time, one of the main indicators of the algorithm.
2. Expressive: Audiences use the comments section as an arena for expressing political opinions, emotions, and identities. They praise, criticize, or ridicule guests and hosts using expressive, humorous, or even aggressive language. These expressions often take the form of short narratives, memes, or pop culture references that other users can easily respond to.
3. Collaborative: Audiences encourage each other to boost the algorithm for specific episodes (“like to increase,” “help trend”), share clips on other platforms, and suggest specific parts to watch through timestamps. These practices create a collective effort that significantly increases a video's visibility.

Pattern of Audience Labour

Audience labour was evident in the celebrity podcast channels. Viewers did more than simply watch, they actively worked to increase the reach and impact of the episodes they considered entertaining, emotionally resonant, or politically validating. Several forms of audience labour were evident. Intensive viewing and rewatching, some users reported watching long episodes more than once, especially when specific political statements or confrontational exchanges went viral. This reinforced watch time metrics that are crucial for algorithmic promotion. Likes, reactions, and emoji-based responses, Audiences habitually use likes and emoji reactions to signal approval, amusement, or outrage. These signals were particularly concentrated around moments of emotional drama, humour, or perceived authenticity.

Commenting and replying, Comments often functioned as micro-essays, jokes, or arguments that extended the content of the episode. Users respond to one another, creating multilayered threads that further increased engagement statistics. And sharing and resharing, Viewers shared links and short clips across platforms such as X, Instagram, and messaging apps. Some explicitly described their sharing as a way to “spread awareness” or “make this go viral,” blending political intention with fan-like promotion. These labour practices generated a dense field of engagement around celebrity podcasts, which was then processed by the platform's recommendation system into greater visibility and, ultimately, greater economic value for the celebrity hosts and the platform.

The findings indicate that the dominance of celebrity political podcasts cannot be fully explained by celebrity status or platform algorithms alone. Audience labour is a crucial intermediary. Through sustained viewing, intensive interaction, and cross-platform promotion, audiences collectively transform celebrity-hosted episodes into highly visible and economically valuable content.

From a political economy perspective, this labour is largely unpaid and unrecognised. Yet it is essential to the monetisation model of both platforms and celebrity creators. Advertising revenue, sponsorship deals, and brand partnerships all depend on the level of audience activity surrounding a channel. In celebrity podcasts, where hosts often already possess strong personal brands, audience labour multiplies this advantage and further marginalises less glamorous but more substantively political channels. This dynamic suggests that audiences, far from being mere beneficiaries or victims of celebrity-dominated political discourse, are deeply implicated in structurally sustaining that dominance. Their preferences, emotions, and interaction strategies help determine which formats and framings of politics become hegemonic in the digital sphere.

Audience labour in celebrity podcasts is strongly oriented toward emotionally charged, sensational, and conflict-driven content. Episodes that feature confrontation, dramatic revelations, or provocative statements tend to generate the highest engagement. In turn, audiences reinforce these tendencies by rewarding them with likes, comments, and shares, often framing them as “brave,” “honest,” or “entertaining.” This creates a feedback loop. As creators observe which episodes perform best, they have incentives to reproduce similar formulas: inviting controversial guests, emphasising personal drama over structural analysis, or simplifying complex issues into moral tales or interpersonal conflicts. Audiences, in turn, focus their labour on these emotionally salient elements, sidelining more nuanced and demanding discussions.

The audience also played a gatekeeping role in determining which issues and framings gained prominence. In celebrity podcasts, comment sections frequently elevate particular segments, such as emotional reactions, confrontations, or controversial statements, by repeatedly referencing them, quoting them, or time-stamping them. Other users would then go directly to these “highlighted” segments, bypassing more complex or nuanced parts of the discussion.

Audience members effectively curated their own “best moments” within episodes, narrowing attention to clips that were most entertaining or emotionally charged. Political channels, by contrast, tended to centre more on policy substance and institutional processes, which generated less meme-able or quotable content. While their audiences were often knowledgeable and engaged, they did not match the scale or intensity of emotional amplification found in celebrity channels.

Furthermore, audiences in celebrity podcasts often acted as *de facto* defenders of their favourite hosts, pushing back against criticism, reframing political issues in ways favourable to the host, or dismissing more complex viewpoints as “too complicated” or “boring.” In this sense, gatekeeping did not simply mean selecting which topics mattered but also shaping the tone and direction of political interpretation. In celebrity podcasts, audience gatekeeping tends to privilege sensational, personalised, and emotionally resonant narratives. This form of gatekeeping contributes to content homogenisation. Political discussion is increasingly filtered through similar templates: charismatic host, emotionally engaging storytelling, and simplified framing of complex issues. More diverse or complex forms of political talk, those that might challenge comfort zones, require sustained attention, or foreground unpopular perspectives, struggle to break through.

The dominance of celebrity political podcasts, as co-produced by platforms and audiences, has several implications for political communication in Indonesia. On the one hand, these podcasts can broaden access to political information by attracting audiences who might not otherwise

watch traditional news or political programmes. They can also humanise political actors and make abstract issues more relatable.

On the other hand, the form of politicisation they promote is often shallow, personality-driven, and heavily mediated by entertainment logics. Structural issues, long-term policy debates, and perspectives from less mediated actors may be underrepresented. The risk is that public understanding of politics becomes increasingly shaped by emotionally resonant anecdotes and celebrity narratives rather than by sustained engagement with institutions, processes, and competing policy options. Moreover, the concentration of visibility and influence in the hands of a few celebrity hosts raises concerns about pluralism and accountability. When a small number of personalities become primary gateways to political discourse, their personal biases, commercial interests, and relationships with political actors can have outsized effects on public opinion.

Conclusion

This research shows that the dominance of celebrity political podcasts in Indonesia cannot be understood solely as a result of individual popularity or the platform's technical superiority. Audience characteristics and practices play a central role in sustaining this dominance. Celebrity political podcast audiences are engaged, expressive, and collaborative. Through audience labour such as watching, commenting, and sharing, audiences create economic and algorithmic value that strengthens the position of celebrity podcasts over dedicated political channels. At the same time, audiences function as algorithmic gatekeepers, prioritizing emotional and sensational content, thus encouraging the homogenization of entertainment-oriented political content.

The main implication of this research is the need to recognize the structural role of audiences in the digital political communication ecosystem. Efforts to improve the quality of political discourse require more than just requiring media and creators to be “more educational,” but also encouraging audiences to understand that their engagement practices have political consequences.

This study has limitations, such as limited channel coverage and a focus on YouTube alone. Further research could expand the study to other platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram) and examine how demographic variables or audience political orientation influence engagement patterns.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

Generative AI was used as an assistant in creating writing points according to guidelines, including support for paraphrasing and language refinement. The author used perplexity.ai for the generative AI. The author reviewed, edited, and approved the final manuscript and is fully responsible for its content.

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The Dominance of Celebrities as Media Actors in Indonesian Political Podcasts

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Abstract

Podcasts are an alternative digital media that complement the limitations of conventional radio and become the latest version of audio concept media, by offering flexibility, personalization, and interactivity. Podcasts aim to express the voices of marginalized communities that remain underrepresented in mainstream media. Among Indonesian audiences, YouTube has become the most favored platform for podcasts. The types of podcasts used by Indonesian creators are interview podcasts, solo podcasts, and multi-host podcasts. Interestingly, celebrities have also become podcast creators by constructing audience segments in discussions that prioritize political trends. Celebrities upload political podcasts on YouTube based on trending societal issues. Celebrities become media actors who pursue their interests as opinion leaders and agenda setters. This article aims to analyze the phenomenon of celebrities as media actors who dominate political podcasts in Indonesia. This research uses the structuration theory by Anthony Giddens (1984), which emphasizes duality, agency, and structure. Giddens's structuration theory helps us see the complexity of the interaction between podcast structure and celebrity as agents. The method used in this study is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. The results of the study indicate that celebrity dominance is the result of the structuration process. The political podcasts trend becomes output of social structure from celebrity behavior as agency, thereby becoming input for reproduction in creating the next homogeneous content. Thus, celebrities are producing virality, popularity, and entertainment content, hence strengthening the position of celebrities as dominant actors.

Keywords: celebrities, dominance, media actor, political podcasts, structuration

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Introduction

The development of digital media has brought about significant transformations in the digital media communications landscape in Indonesia. One medium that has grown rapidly since 2019 is the podcast. The emergence of podcasts has long been a form of digital broadcasting media development. Podcasts are considered an alternative that can complement the shortcomings of conventional radio and are the latest version of the audio media concept (Muslimah, 2022). Unlike conventional radio, which is one-way and institution-based, podcasts offer a more flexible, personal, and decentralized dialogic space. This makes podcasts an alternative medium that provides space for voices not accommodated in mainstream media.

The potential of podcasts, which are automatically accessible, portable, and listenable, and always up to date, allows for the emergence of issues not always covered in mainstream media. Sensitive topics such as human rights, social justice, criticism of the government, religion, and so on, have emerged as podcast attractions (Syafina, 2022). Communities who feel marginalized are emerging and utilizing this alternative medium to present independent narratives and critical perspectives. Podcast creators aim to build a group of listeners as an audience segment and generate in-depth discussions on issues.

In Indonesia, podcasts are starting to be widely accessed on various platforms such as YouTube. One of the most popular podcasts is...*Close The Door* by Deddy Corbuzier who discusses politics, gossip, and interviews with public figures with diverse backgrounds. Other examples include Kiky Saputri's podcast, Uya Kuya's, Andovi da Lopez and Jovial da Lopez's *SkinnyIndonesian24*, and others. The presence of diverse podcast creators and topics provides alternative options for audiences bored with mainstream media topics.

Amidst the growth of the podcast ecosystem in Indonesia, an interesting phenomenon has emerged: the involvement of celebrities in producing and distributing political content. Celebrities are synonymous with film, music, and television entertainment. However, they are now starting to enter the political arena through digital platforms like YouTube Podcasts. The presence of celebrities in the political sphere on digital media has blurred the lines between information, opinion, and entertainment. These celebrities differ from those of journalists and academics. Celebrities leverage their social and symbolic capital to build rapport with audiences in discussing political issues. They not only facilitate discussions but also act as opinion leaders and agenda setters, marking a shift in the position of celebrities from mere entertainment figures to political media actors (Turner, 2014). The collaboration between the symbolic power of celebrities and digital platform algorithms has created new patterns of political communication that do not always adhere to traditional journalistic norms but instead are oriented towards popularity, virality, and performativity. This, in turn, increases exposure to celebrity-created content, thereby increasing their opportunities to dominate the digital public sphere (Bishop, 2021).

Celebrity involvement in political podcasts creates an ambiguity between informative political content and content commodified for popularity and virality. Podcasts, which should be a space for public discussion, risk being reduced to a platform for individual expression affiliated with personal or institutional interests. In this context, the position of celebrities as media actors needs to be questioned: is their involvement in political discussions through podcasts merely entertainment spiced with political issues, or is it a concrete form of discourse domination in the digital public sphere? Therefore, this study will begin by

examining how celebrities utilize digital media structures and construct their agency in shaping public political perceptions.

Conceptual Framework

Anthony Giddens's Structuration Theory

Giddens' structuration theory emerged as a result of the elaboration and critique of various other theories such as Marxism, symbolic interactionism, and structural functionalism (Ritzer & Goodman, 2007, p. 507). Giddens focused his theory on the relationship between agents and structures (Ritzer & Goodman, 2007, p. 505). Recently, various social theories have been confronted with two opposing perspectives: interpretive sociology and functionalism and structuralism (Ritzer & Goodman, 2007 & Giddens, 1984).

Giddens later rejected these two differing views in social theory, particularly those that examined social science from only one aspect, namely the dominance of individual subjects (agency) compared to the dominance of the totality of society (structure). According to Giddens, what needs to be considered in the study of social sciences is the combination of interpretive sociology and functionalism and structuralism in a dialectical relationship. This encounter between agency and structure is manifested in social practices that are arranged according to space and time and occur recursively or repeatedly (Giddens, 2003, pp. 2–3).

Giddens argues that social research is always concerned with agency and structure. However, this does not imply that structure determines action and action determines structure. Giddens' structuration theory is recognized as the most widely recognized attempt to combine agency with structure (Ritzer & Goodman, 2007, p. 507). Giddens's unification of agency and structure is based on the concept of structural duality as a counter to dualism. Giddens's theory of structuration is based on the premise that:

The constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality...the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize...the moment of the production of action is also one of reproduction in the contexts of the day-to-day enactment of social life. (Giddens, 1984, as cited in Hidayat, 2000, p. 440)

In the concept of duality, agents who perform repeated actions can create patterns and memory traces that then have the potential to be repeated by other agents. In Giddens' theory, structure is present in the form of certain practices and becomes a memory trace that is oriented towards human behavior as a knowledgeable human agent (Giddens, 2003, pp. 20–21). These repeated practices then become something that is constraining, but also an enabler of future actions (Giddens, 1984: 25, 26) in (Ritzer & Goodman, 2007, p. 510). Structure here plays a role as both a medium and a result of repeated and organized social practices (Ritzer & Goodman, 2007, p. 511).

The actions of celebrities as agents in conveying their political opinions to audiences through YouTube podcasts represent a form of reproduction of social values and conditions that enable others to do the same in the future. Through the repetition of these actions, a sense of normalcy emerges, which then develops into a communication culture. Thus, these celebrity practices become part of a recursive process that shapes the structure of communication

culture. According to Giddens, structures only exist through the activities of human agents. Structures are formed through the existence of rules and resources. The social practices carried out by agents have the potential to become structures themselves (Ritzer & Goodman, 2007, p. 510).

In the context of interconnected and convergent digital media, social practices can take place across space and time. Giddens views agents as knowledgeable, rational actors who constantly monitor their own actions through a process called *reflexive monitoring of action*. Agency refers to the ability of an agent to act, regardless of whether the outcome is in accordance with the initial goal or not.

This study examines the dominance of celebrities in political podcasts in Indonesia. In this context, Giddens' structuration theory is used as an analytical tool to understand how celebrities, as media actors, utilize digital media structures (e.g., YouTube algorithms, virality logic, podcast formats) as resources; engage in repeated communicative actions (through content production, political issue framing, collaboration, and communication strategies) that indirectly reproduce these structures; and shape and strengthen their dominant position as producers of political narratives in the digital public sphere.

The Concept of Celebrity as a Media Actor

Celebrities in the Perspective of Media Studies

In media studies, celebrities are not only understood as public figures widely known through mass media, but also as social and cultural constructs formed through repeated representations across various media (Turner, 2014). Celebrities are symbols of representational power, where popularity, imagined closeness to the public, and emotional involvement are the main assets in building influence.

In the context of digital media, the definition of celebrity has expanded. Celebrities no longer originate solely from the conventional entertainment industry; they can now also emerge from digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok, enabling ordinary people to become famous figures thanks to algorithmic exposure and the practice of “curated self-presentation” (Abidin, 2018). Digital celebrities build their authority through engagement, not solely through achievement or institutionalization.

According to Marwick and Boyd (2011), digital celebrities use social media to establish an authentic and interactive public presence, building parasocial relationships with audiences that feel intimate yet one-way. They have the capacity to shape public perception, direct opinion, and influence the agenda of discourse in the digital public sphere.

Celebrities as Media Actors

As media actors, celebrities play two roles: producers of meaning and distributors of discourse. They not only convey messages but also shape how society views an issue through selection, framing, and style of delivery (Couldry & Hepp, 2007). This role becomes even more complex when celebrities enter the political and social spheres, as they carry symbolic authority that can replace the traditional role of journalists or academics in shaping public opinion.

In the digital age, celebrities have become part of “decentralized media producers.” They curate content, select sources, edit narratives, and distribute them directly to audiences without the intermediary of formal media institutions. This creates a new communication model, one that is more fluid, horizontal, and based on performativity and popularity.

According to Driessens (2013), celebrities possess symbolic capital, namely the ability to attract attention and gain public trust on various issues. When celebrities discuss politics through podcasts, they not only offer information but also give meaning to political issues through narratives packaged with personal style, humor, or storytelling.

Research Method

This study aims to examine the role of celebrities as media actors in political podcasts in Indonesia, which are now dominated by political celebrities. In this study, the researcher employed a critical paradigm with descriptive analysis. Data collection was conducted through non-participatory observation.

Discussion

Digital Media as a “Structure” in Celebrity Political Podcasts in Indonesia

In the context of political podcasts by celebrities in Indonesia, such as *Close The Door* by Deddy Corbuzier, *Talkpod* Kiky Saputri, and *Late Night Nasi Goreng*. In a study involving SkinnyIndonesian24, digital media functions as a social structure that both regulates and enables communicative action in the public sphere. Referring to Anthony Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, digital structures not only constrain but also provide resources that shape social practices and the production of political meaning. In this regard, platforms like YouTube and Spotify act as arenas where algorithmic rules, audience expectations, and the logic of attention capitalism interact to determine who and what deserves visibility.

Digital platforms are not neutral. YouTube's algorithmic mechanisms, for example, prioritize content with a high level of engagement and *watch time high*. This is in accordance with the findings of van Dijck et al. (2018) in *The Platform Society*, that digital systems operate through three principles: *datafication*, *commodification*, and *selection*. In the case of Deddy Corbuzier, the algorithm promoted videos containing provocative political debates or featuring famous figures to gain more clicks. As a result, political communication became personalized and performative—emphasizing celebrity identity over the substance of political discourse (Nisa, 2023; Susilo, 2021).

This condition reinforces the logic of attention capitalism (Citton, 2017), where public attention is treated as an economic commodity. Celebrity political podcasts capitalize attention *economy* to convert audience interest into traffic, advertising, and digital legitimacy. As a result, politics is packaged in an entertainment format (*polytainment*), with a humorous or satirical style, such as that of Kiky Saputri, who can normalize heavy political topics through light and emotional narratives (Rachmawati, 2022). Thus, the structure of digital media is not merely a neutral platform but rather forms a political communication field oriented toward popularity, emotional engagement, and market logic rather than public deliberative rationality (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

Celebrities as “Agents” in Political Podcast Production

In the context of Anthony Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, agency is understood as an individual's capacity to act reflectively in the face of social structures. Celebrities involved in political podcasts in Indonesia leverage their agency to navigate and utilize digital media structures. They strategize content, selecting political issues with high entertainment value and viral potential, and framing political discussions in a lighthearted, humorous, and communicative manner. Through these reflective actions, celebrities are able to maintain social relevance while expanding their influence in the competitive digital public sphere.

Celebrities' actions in producing political podcasts constitute a form of reflective social practice in which every decision, from the selection of sources and topics to the presentation style, is based on an awareness of audience expectations and platform algorithms. According to Marwick and Boyd (2011), digital celebrities actively engage in political podcasting. *strategic self-presentation* to maintain public image and audience engagement. In this context, they act not only as political communicators but also as producers of meaning, framing political discourse in a popular format.

Furthermore, through repetitive practices such as regular uploads, cross-celebrity collaborations, and the use of informal language, they not only adapt to digital media structures but also create new ones. These new structures take the form of new norms and logics in political communication, where popularity and personal appeal are more important than depth of substance. As Turner (2014) points out, celebrities have now become “cultural intermediaries” bridging the worlds of politics and entertainment. Thus, celebrities act as agents who reproduce digital media structures through the logic of popularity, creating a hybridization between politics and entertainment (politainment) that is changing the face of contemporary political communication.

Celebrity Dominance in Political Podcasts as a Result of the Structuring Process

The dominance of celebrities in political podcasts in Indonesia can be understood through the concept *duality of structure*. Anthony Giddens (1984) explains how social structures and agency reciprocally shape each other. In the context of digital media, these structures include platform algorithms, the logic of attention capitalism, and audience expectations of entertainment. These structures not only constrain celebrities' actions but also provide the resources they use to strengthen their symbolic positions in the digital public sphere. Conversely, through reflective actions such as topic selection, communication styles, and strategic collaborations, celebrities contribute to the reproduction of these structures, creating a cycle that maintains their dominance.

This phenomenon is evident in political podcasts in Indonesia, where celebrities have successfully taken over a space that should be a forum for critical public discourse. For example, in the podcast *Close The Door* (Deddy Corbuzier), *LaporPak! The Podcast* (Kiky Saputri), and *Late Night Nasi Goreng* (SkinnyIndonesian24). All three exhibit a pattern in which political discourse is packaged in an entertainment format, combining elements of humor, personal narratives, and social drama to remain engaging for digital audiences. A study by Nisa (2023) found that Deddy Corbuzier plays a role as a cultural *broker* which connects politics with the world of pop culture through lighthearted conversation and personification of issues. Likewise, Kiky Saputri utilizes a satirical style and *roasting* toward public figures to engage audiences in political discourse without losing the comedic nuance.

(Rachmawati, 2022). Meanwhile, SkinnyIndonesian24 presents reflective content with a more neutral narrative approach, emphasizing the representation of the younger generation in understanding digital politics (Siregar, 2024).

Political legitimacy in this space is no longer built through competence or substantive knowledge, but rather through symbolic capital in the form of popularity, emotional closeness, and high visibility in digital media. By understanding how algorithms work, they are able to package political issues in an engaging format, employ a light and entertaining communication style, and tailor content to go viral through headlines, *clickbait*, collaborations with famous figures, or presentations that evoke emotional resonance.

Unlike journalists or academics who are bound by professional ethics, celebrities operate within the logic of performativity and relatability that encourages audiences to feel close and involved. According to Marwick and Boyd (2011), digital celebrities perform *strategic self-presentation* to maintain public attention. Within this framework, they act as *cultural intermediaries* (Turner, 2014) which bridges the worlds of politics and entertainment and shapes the way the public understands political issues.

The algorithmic structure of platforms like YouTube and Spotify (van Dijck et al., 2018) reinforces this dominance, as content with high engagement is more frequently recommended. Consequently, epistemic authority in political discourse shifts from pundits and mainstream media to celebrity figures who can capture attention and influence public opinion. Thus, celebrity dominance is the result of an ongoing process of structuration—a mechanism by which celebrity agencies and digital media structures mutually create and reinforce each other, marking a shift in political communication toward an era of *celebrity-driven politics*.

Conclusion

The research findings suggest that celebrity dominance in political podcasts is the result of a simultaneous structuration process between digital media structures and celebrity agency. Platform structures—including algorithms, the logic of attention capitalism, and audience expectations—provide opportunities for celebrities to act as dominant actors. Through a reflective awareness of how platforms operate, celebrities utilize digital rules and resources to produce viral, popular, and entertaining political content, rather than focusing on the depth of political substance.

This repeated practice creates a homogenous pattern of discourse production, where political issues are packaged according to the logic of entertainment and audience emotional engagement. Consequently, political podcasts have evolved into arenas that reinforce the symbolic capital of celebrities, while the deliberative function of public communication is increasingly marginalized. Thus, celebrity dominance is not a single form of power, but rather the result of a continuous interaction between media structures and agency practices, which together reproduce a popularity-based communication system. This process confirms that celebrities are now hegemonic media actors, capable of shaping the direction of political discourse and strengthening their position in the contemporary public communication ecology through digital mechanisms.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Grammarly and ChatGPT, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly and ChatGPT, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Digital Activism Through #JulidFiSabililah on Social Media X, the Unity of Netizens Fighting Against the Zionist Israeli Army

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Abstract

Digital activism is a form of social movement that utilizes digital media. In this article, the researcher specifically analyzes one form of digital activism through social media X related to the dissemination of social issues. This study aims to analyze how the #Julidfisabilillah movement was developed through the @erlanishere and @greschinov accounts, as well as how the digital dynamics of this activism in building public opinion. The method used is descriptive qualitative with primary data collection through observation of content and interactions on both @erlanishere and @greschinov accounts as well as semi structure interviews. The analysis was conducted using Vincent Mosco's political economy of media theory, with a focus on aspects of commodification, spatialization, and structuration. The research findings show that the commodification of the #Julidfiisabilillah Movement is a form of mass mobilization and increases global awareness of the conflict. Spatialization, shown by the acceleration of digital distribution through social media X and organizing digital activism, as a communication space and a means of inter ideological battle. Meanwhile, the social media accounts @erlanishere and @greschinov successfully led netizens' digital activism, contributing to the virality of #JulidFiiSabililah and becoming a key structuring pattern within the activism. This research also emphasizes the need for foresight in interpreting its influence on external parties outside the digital community.

Keywords: digital activism, netizen, social media, political economy

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Introduction

The Palestine Israel conflict first began in 1948. The war was sparked by a 1937 international plan to propose the separation of Palestine into two states: an Arab state and a Jewish state, with the cities of Jerusalem and Haifa remaining under the supervision of the British Mandate government. However, this proposal was rejected by both parties. The reason for this rejection was that Palestine and Israel themselves desired the establishment of an independent state, free from interference from other nations (Badjodah et al., 2021).

The conflict between the two parties has not ended amicably to this day. The Zionist army has even attempted to enforce a ceasefire, further tearing apart the humanitarian situation, with many civilian casualties. This protracted conflict has become a global polemic that has captured international attention. Every year, problems arise between the two countries. The war has gradually turned into a genocide perpetrated by Israel against Palestine, which has not yet ended and has claimed many and more victims (Karisha, 2023).

The development of digital technology from the transition period of old media to new media as it today provides a digital interaction space that allows individuals to build relationships and participate in a community or online-based organizational group based on shared interests, passions, or goals to be achieved, including social movements. New media produces internet networks in the form of digital devices such as mobile *phones which* makes it easier for humans to communicate, interact with each other, socialize, and carry out business activities (Putri & Pratiwi, 2022).

Since the ceasefire between the two countries, militia resistance has been carried out as a protection measure against Palestinian fighters led by Hamas since October 7, 2023, which was then responded to with a massive Israeli military bombardment of the Gaza Strip and other Palestinian territories such as Rafah. This global conflict has not only highlighted international news, but also headlines national news. Not only platform news, the conflict also spread on many social media platforms, one of which is social media X or has changed its name and was previously Twitter.

The powerful power of social media, which dominates the new media realm, has made Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip aware of the need to disseminate information about their situation and what they are experiencing on the ground. X and other social media platforms are filled with videos showing bombings of homes, hospitals, universities, and other institutions in Gaza. Thanks to the ongoing ceasefire, several individuals from Gaza have become well known, such as Motaz Azaiza, Bisan Owda, Palestine Alaqad, Hind Khoudary, and veteran journalist Wael al-Dahdouh, as sources of information. This is because they have provided shocking and heartbreaking images directly to global social media networks, which are disseminated through social media. However, Western politicians have done the opposite. They continue to try to dominate the narrative of this conflict, even by spreading false facts. However, the voices of activists, amplified through social media, have an indelible influence (Mohammed, 2024).

This research article examines how the networked community reacted to the ceasefire in the Israeli Palestinian conflict by utilizing social media networks as a medium for activism through the theory of media political economy. Political economy studies, in the narrow sense, attempt to explain the power relations between various actors capable of influencing the flow of production, distribution, and consumption of a media message. While in the

broad sense, it is a study that examines control and survival in social life (Mosco, 2014). The definition of political economy, simply put, is the relationship involving (political) power and various economic resources in society.

Mosco's perspective on power places greater emphasis on those who control social life, while the foundation of social life is economics. Therefore, a political economy approach is a way of looking at problems that appear on the surface (Sugiono, 2020). However, in its application, many changes can be made to the human constructivist structure, thus forming a more cohesive social network, becoming a digital society through the technology. Digital media shapes changes in digital participation and activism. Bennett and Segerberg formulated a new conceptual framework to understand the dynamics of activism in the digital space. This concept is called connective action (*connective action*) or individual participation patterns based on digital media connectivity (Putri & Pratiwi, 2022).

Thinking Framework

In this article, researchers will examine communication science based on the adaptation of political economy theory and apply the concepts of commodification, spatialization, and structuration, adapted from the thinking of Vincent Mosco. The concept of commodification in communication studies involves the transformation of messages into attractive products that can be sold on the market. Political economy theory emphasizes the relationship between power, economics, and communication. In the context of digital activism #JulidFiSabilillah, social media functions as a medium where political and economic powers interact with each other (Mosco, 2014).

Structuration is a process in which social structures are mutually maintained by social agents, and each part can act to serve the other parts. Issues regarding social class, social movements, and hegemony are part of the discussion of structuration. Along with the development of media technology, political economy theory has now entered the realm of online media. In this case, spatialization is an effort to overcome the barriers of space and time by utilizing communication technology, thus making it easier for social media users to access political campaign content (Mosco, 2014).

In his theory, Vincent Mosco explains that globalization influences both economics and politics. In practice, media plays a crucial role in the spread of globalization, explaining where transitions occur from old media to the emergence of new ones. Commodification, spatialization, and structuration are three elements of Vincent Mosco's theory that are crucial in political economy because they can lead to changes in functional or use value. Commodification is one element directly related to the transformation of goods or services (along with their use value) into commodities with exchange value in the market. Spatialization is the process of overcoming space and time. Structuration is a communication or media activity linked to social structure (Hanifah et al., 2021).

Studies on digital activism have been carried out by many previous researchers, including digital activism and the use of new media as an approach to community empowerment on environmental issues by Putri and Pratiwi (2022) using qualitative descriptive methods with the implementation of CMC theory or computer *mediated communications*. Qoirunnisa and Mustofa (2024) more articles Hashtag War in Gaza: An Analysis of the Role of Indonesian Citizens in #JulidFisabilillah from the Transnational Conflict Dimension has also examined and investigated the digital landscape of the Israeli Palestinian conflict, specifically focusing

on online activism regarding the Gaza conflict. Through *#JulidFisabilillah*, which distinguishes the research by implying a netnographic method with comprehensive narrative analysis and highlighting how the role of society in the formation of written narratives in showing resistance to Zionism (Qoirunnisa & Mustofa, 2024).

Research Methods

This research implements a qualitative descriptive approach method by collecting primary data in the form of uploads or posts in the form of writing, images, photos related to networking actions *#JulidFiSabilillah* from the accounts @erlanishere and @greschinov. Both accounts belong to Erlangga Greschinov, the first to initiate the digital activism movement on humanitarian issues. Secondary data for this study will be drawn from a literature review that explains the phenomena and related issues that occur based on previous scientific studies. Researchers studied references in the form of books, journal articles, and factual news related to the discussion. Researchers collected, selected, and analyzed related information to then formulate their ideas.

Results and Discussion

Diplomatic efforts initiated by numerous policymakers from various countries have been undertaken to end the conflict between the two countries, which has remained unresolved for decades. This conflict refers to violence in the form of bombing, missiles, and other ceasefires carried out by Israel in its attempt to seize territory officially owned by the Palestinian government. Beginning on May 14, 1948, David Ben Gourion declared the State of Israel. This issue subsequently sparked Palestinian rejection. The Palestinians, represented by Hamas, responded to this rejection by launching suicide bombings against strategic Israeli defense targets in Jerusalem, Ashkelon, and Tel Aviv in February and March 1996. In these incidents, 60 Israelis died (Aswir F Badjodah et al., 2021).

The escalation of the conflict has again sparked a range of public opinions, both globally and in Indonesia. Some expressed their urge to take actions deemed supportive of Israel. This public opinion encompasses a wide range of viewpoints, both supporting and opposing both sides in the conflict. These sentiments and views are widely expressed through various social media platforms. One netizen reaction in Indonesia is the emergence of a digital activism movement on social media platform X (Jaelani & Nursyifa, 2024).

Julid Fi Sabilillah is a combination of the terms “julid” and “*Sabilillah*” julid in Indonesian is an informal word that is negative and carries a tone of criticism. This word is subjective depending on the context of the conversation or social environment or gossip. In the Big Indonesian Dictionary, julid has the meaning of envy or jealousy towards the success of others. Then society often applies the word “julid” through negative comments or a sneer. The term is also often used to describe a cynical attitude or also in terms of commenting on other people's lives in an unethical manner or finding fault with others.

Then *jihad fi sabilillah* is fighting in the path of Allah, which is taken from Arabic. Referring to this meaning, the term *jihad fi sabilillah* has the meaning of a verbal attack aimed at fighting in the path of Allah. As for terminology, the term “*May Allah bless you*” refers to the netizens' movement to fight against the Zionist Israelis on social media (Nuruzzaman, n.d.).

The beginning of the movement was initiated by Erlangga Greschinov via the social media account X with *username* @Erlanishere and @Greschinov. Erlangga is a influencer in social media platform that frequently posts activism and a supporter of Palestinian solidarity. The #JulidFiSabilillah digital activism movement on social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) emerged as a spontaneous response by Indonesians to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine, particularly following Israel's intensified attacks on the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023.

The activist movement also emerged as a response to the widespread propaganda surrounding Israeli soldiers' posts about their genocide on social media. As the movement's pioneer, Erlangga Greschinov then initiated and collective action on social media. The movement grew organically through trolling techniques, spamming negative comments, and sending critical messages to pro israel accounts.

The researcher examines digital activism that occurs on social media X with analytical implications from Vincent Mosco's theory of commodification, spatialization and structuration and looks at the activism that occurs with the keyword #Julid.FiSabilillah. Initially it was a solidarity movement that did not see geographical boundaries, then it was followed and received support from many parties and resulted in several factors that changed the order.

Commodification

Commodification in the context of #Julidactivism*FiSabilillah* is refers to how information and actions in digital activism are utilized or transformed into a product that can be traded and consumed or how the movement begins and then becomes widely followed and discussed by the public at large and openly. In digital activism, the content produced is like #JulidFiiSabililahbecome a main commodity in which activism not only spreads or distributes messages but also attracts attention and produces results for digital netizens.

In this context, the social media utilized is social media X or the previous one is Twitter also Instagram media as a supporter of the network. Social media X utilized by Erlangga as the command of the activism movement is considered to have media mobilization that can provide rapid and easy influence, in supporting the movement, he also announced the social media account X that will be used. Hashtag #JulidFiSabilillah can be used to build solidarity and rally support for issues related to Palestine, then leverage the hashtag as a tool to mobilize the masses and raise global awareness of the conflict. This aligns with Mosco's view that new media allows for the commodification of messages more efficiently and broadly.

Figure 1
Movement Post of Activism #JulidFiSabilillah



Source: Social Media X

Circulating content, such as memes, videos, and narratives stemming from the #Julidfisabilillah activism has become a digital commodity voicing support for Palestine. Digital communities participating in this activism by uploading content become a commodity for digital platforms. Supportive activities, such as likes, shares, and comments, are believed to increase support and the traffic on social media and become another potential benefit.

Spatialization

The spatialization of digital activism is demonstrated by how digital space creates new contexts for social interaction and activism. In the #JulidFiSabilillah social media X becomes a media or provides platform for netizens to interact, exchange, and distribute information on issues related to Zionism. Spatialization also refers to how digital spaces create new spaces for activists to interact and discuss without geographical limitations. These digital spaces enable netizens to connect with individuals from diverse backgrounds, further creating global networks.

Figure 2
Solidarity Among Indonesian and Malaysian Netizens



Source: Social Media X

The spatialization of digital activism can be seen in how social media users with pro-Palestinian goals can quickly disseminate information and organize online campaigns to support and encourage the Palestinian people. Digital space can be used not only as a place to exchange communication channels but also as a means of ideological warfare. In the #JulidFiSabilillah movement, social media users from various backgrounds can unite to voice support for Palestine.

This digital space allows for the instant exchange of ideas and mobilization of support. Through #JulidFiSabilillah, the distribution of the initiated activism narrative can build solidarity openly and comprehensively in the global environment, thus enabling Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim majority in the world, to become a significant actor in digital advocacy for the Palestinian issue as a form of digital expansion.

Structuration

According to Vincent Mosco, structuration is how to explain the relationship between social structures that influence individual actions. In the context of digital activism, netizens' actions in using the #JulidFiSabilillah. This reflects a larger social structure, namely the growing sense of solidarity and concern among netizens for Palestine. Individual actions in spreading messages are influenced not only by social norms but also by established power structures. This activism movement has also spread widely in Malaysia and Turkey, where Malaysian and Turkish netizens have joined in calling for and participating in the #Julidfisabilillah digital activism.

The structure of this activism also stemmed from netizens' disappointment over the unresponsiveness or unheard responses of their demands and criticisms from governments or international institutions regarding the Israeli genocide against Palestine. This fueled netizens' anger and support for a previously planned action by one of the main parties, which then shifted to a digital platform to express their dissatisfaction and demand change.

Social movements influenced by global activity on social media platforms form a broader movement structure. Interactions between users and digital activists create larger, interconnected patterns of action. The societal structure of this activism transforms small movements into agents of change within society. Social media, initially a platform for digital distribution, has transformed into a battleground for political, economic, and communication in the modern world, powered by digital applications.

The Impact of #JulidFiSabilillah Hashtag Activism

Increasing Public Awareness

Digital activism movement can increase public awareness regarding humanitarian issues occurring in Palestine. By using #JulidFiSabilillah Indonesian and Malaysian netizens can share information and discuss various aspects of the conflict. The longstanding conflict between Israel and Palestine impacts many aspects of life, including economic, social, and political aspects. However, information on this issue is sometimes unequally distributed, as demonstrated by the Pro Palestine Movement through #JulidFiSabilillah can be distributed because the Movement attracts the attention and visibility of a very wide community.

This then creates a discussion space for netizens through platform digital activism more broadly on issues of social justice and human rights. This digital activism also serves as a tool to convey humanitarian concerns and values, as well as advocate for social change in a broader context, resulting in widespread information distribution and subsequently producing just policies for individuals harmed by the ceasefire implemented by the Zionist army (Fahmi et al., 2024).

Solidarity Mobilization

Solidarity mobilization is a process in which individuals or groups unite to achieve a common goal, especially in the context of social or political change. Mobilization often occurs within social movements, where community members support each other through collective action and share resources to achieve goals they deem important. In this context, solidarity serves as a bond that strengthens relationships between individuals and creates a strong collective identity (Klandermans, 2005).

Solidarity mobilization can be seen in various movements, such as fundraising, protests, awareness campaigns, and the use of social media to spread messages. In the context of the #JulidFiSabilillah Solidarity mobilization is evident when netizens unite to support humanitarian issues and oppose the injustices experienced by Palestine. Solidarity mobilization is not just a physical movement but also encompasses emotional aspects and collective identity, strengthening bonds between individuals in society.

This digital activism movement has also succeeded in mobilizing solidarity among netizens. For example, many social media users participated in the action. Trolling against accounts deemed to support Zionism and disseminate pro-Palestinian information. This mobilization demonstrates that digital activism can create virtual communities united by a common goal, even among netizens from diverse geographic regions and cultures.

Action *trolling* campaign also had several impacts, namely, several accounts deleted or deactivated their personal accounts in response to pressure and criticism from netizens calling for such activism. One such account is @DrEliDavid. Eli David is an Israeli propagandist. Eli David's account was temporary suspended after receiving mass reports from Indonesian netizens involved in the activism movement. Although Eli David's account has since been reactivated, the incident demonstrates the direct impact of the digital attacks carried out by supporters of the #JulidFiSabilillah movements.

Figure 3
Eli David's Social Media X



Source: social media X

Another account that was also suspended is a social media account belonging to @NataliaFadeev. Natalia is an Israeli soldier who frequently posts about military aggression against Palestine. Natalia Fadeev then faced pressure from netizens due to numerous negative comments and verbal attacks. Netizens also nicknamed her “*baby killer*” which shows how big an impact this movement has on the individuals it targets.

Figure 4
Natalia Fadeev's X Account



Source: Social Media X

#Julidfisabilillah activism movement not only targets specific accounts, but also creates an environment where many users feel stressed and choose to deactivate or delete their accounts to avoid attacks that can impact the psychological condition of the attacked party.

Influence on Global Narrative

Activism through #JulidFiSabilillah has contributed to shaping the global narrative of the Israeli Palestinian conflict. With increasing netizen participation in these acts, the movement has become part of a larger trend of unity and support for global Muslim solidarity. This reflects how digital activism can influence public opinion and international policy on humanitarian issues.

This action can be said to be successful because the Israeli side issued a statement regarding the disturbances from the #JulidFiSabilillah movement. The statement is reuploaded or *repost* by Azzam Mujahid Izzulhaq, with the statement:

to all citizens of indonesia and other countries, i ask to stop all your actions to terrorize my children and my entire family, i promise to provide justice for all palestinian citizens, i have also received more than 7000 telephone calls, 15,000 pages from all my social media, and 200,000 hot comments 95% from indonesian citizens, so i please stop terrorizing my family, if it is still done, i will not hesitate to report it to the israel ministry of defense and all israel superiors!!!

Figure 5

Protest Post From Israel on the Impact of @JulidFiSabilillah



Source: Social Media X

Political economy theory emphasizes the relationship between power, economics, and communication. In the context of the #JulidFiSabilillah digital activism, social media serves as a medium or platform through which political and economic power intersect. The movement emerged as a response to the injustice experienced by the Palestinian people due to Israeli military aggression. By utilizing digital platforms, activism facilitates the

distribution and exchange of information, allowing messages from all netizens participating in the digital activism to spread widely and quickly, raising global awareness of the issues facing Palestine.

Conclusion

Digital activism that occurs on social media X with the hashtag #JulidFiSabilillah reflects the complex dynamics between the commodification of broadcasts and distribution of information, spatialization with the results of social interactions that occur in digital media platforms, and structuration is demonstrated by the presence of influential and collective public actions. This digital activism not only serves as a channel for voicing opinions but also as a tool or medium for building global solidarity in addressing social justice issues openly and without geographical limitations. Overall, the actions of the digital activism movement #JulidFiSabilillah does not directly have a significant psychological impact on accounts deemed to support Zionism, but the real impact is seen in the efforts of account owners to close or temporarily deactivate their accounts as a form of protection.

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Adaptive Performances of Gay Identity on Tinder and Grindr: A Comparative Study of Self-Presentation Strategies

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Abstract

This study examines how Taiwanese gay men adapt their self-presentation strategies on two major dating platforms, Tinder and Grindr, using content analysis of profile bios and images. Drawing on 165 user profiles (67 from Tinder, 98 from Grindr), the study investigates differences in visual and textual self-presentation in terms of three variables: biography word count, use of body-focused imagery, and inclusion of coded language. Statistical analysis reveals that Grindr users are significantly more likely to include body-centered images and coded sexual language (e.g., “top,” “discreet”), reinforcing the app’s association with fast-paced, desire-oriented interactions. In contrast, Tinder users generally employ less sexualized visual content and exhibit slightly longer bios, suggesting a more narrative-oriented or relational self-presentation style, even though the difference in word count was not statistically significant. These findings highlight how digital platforms shape gay identity performances through both technical affordances and community expectations. By contextualizing these patterns within Taiwanese gay culture and sociolinguistic frameworks, the study demonstrates that online dating profiles are dynamic, adaptive performances shaped by both user intention and platform design. It contributes to digital queer studies by emphasizing how self-presentation practices respond to differing cultural (gay culture) and technological norms.

Keywords: Taiwanese gay men, dating apps, self-presentations, Tinder, Grindr

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Introduction

The development of digital technology and social networking platforms has changed how people form romantic and social relationships. Dating apps are now common tools for these interactions, especially among LGBTQ+ communities. These apps not only help users find potential partners, but also offer a space where people can show and express their sexual and gender identities. This study focuses on how gay men in Taiwan present themselves on two dating apps: Tinder and Grindr.

Tinder and Grindr are both popular dating apps around the world. However, they serve different groups of people and have different features. Tinder is open to users of all gender and sexual identities. Most of its users are male (Branson, 2025). Grindr is mainly used by LGBTQ+ individuals, especially gay and bisexual men (Grindr, 2025).

As Dorn (2025) explains, these two apps are different in how people use them and in their social settings. Tinder is often used for both casual dating and long-term relationships. It encourages people to chat before meeting in person. This usually leads to a slower pace of interaction. Grindr is more commonly used for quick, location-based meetings. Many people use it for same-day or casual encounters. The app makes it easy for users to message others nearby without restrictions. Because of this, users on both apps need to carefully choose how they present themselves. They often do this through their profile photos and short self-descriptions.

Research has shown that users think carefully about what pictures and words they use in their profiles. He (2021) found that many users of the gay dating app, Blued, avoid using photos that clearly show their faces. Instead, they prefer body-centered or anonymous images. Rodriguez et al. (2019) found that Grindr users often post pictures showing muscles or sexual features. These pictures reflect common beauty ideals in gay communities. Language also plays an important role. Wu and Trottier (2024) noted that many profiles include short terms like “top,” “fit,” or “discreet.” These words are used to signal sexual preferences or identity roles.

Although dating apps are popular in Taiwan, there are still few studies that compare how gay men present themselves on different dating platforms. This study helps fill that gap. It looks at the ways gay men in Taiwan use photos and language in their Tinder and Grindr profiles. It pays attention to the type of image they use, how many words they write, and whether they use coded language. The goal is to see how people shape their online gay identities based on the platform they are using and if their self-presentational styles are adaptive to the nature of the two dating apps.

This research is important because it shows how technology affects how people think about themselves and how they share that identity with others. It also helps us understand how gay culture, gay community rules, and dating platform design influence online romance-pursuing behavior. Lastly, it shows how personal choices, like what photo to post or what words to use, are shaped by deeper social and cultural forces, such as, gay identity.

Given the above, this study asks two main questions:

QR1: How do gay men in Taiwan visually present themselves on Tinder and Grindr, especially in the use of body-focused versus non-body-focused images?

QR2: How do gay men in Taiwan differ in their language use across the two platforms, specifically in bio word count and the presence of coded language?

Literature Review

Research has shown that dating apps influence how users behave. This happens through both the design of the app and the expectations of the people who use it (Wu & Trottier, 2024). For example, Tinder allows longer biographies and encourages users to post lifestyle photos. This creates an image of the app as a place for dating and getting to know someone. Grindr is different. Its design is based on GPS location and has shorter profile fields. This leads to faster, image-focused communication. It often centers on physical appearance or allows for anonymous interaction.

This study builds on those ideas by looking at how gay men in Taiwan use both images and text on Tinder and Grindr. It focuses on how personal construction of gay identity is shaped by the features of each platform.

Profile photos are an important part of how users present themselves. He (2021), studying users of the gay dating app, Blued, in China, found that only one-third of users showed their faces. Many chose photos of their bodies, like torsos or abs, or used pictures that hid their identity. These choices help users attract attention while staying partly anonymous. This pattern shows how some gay men use photos to manage how others see them.

Rodriguez et al. (2019) also found that Grindr gay users often post images that show muscular bodies, tattoos, or gym settings. These images match common beauty standards in gay communities. While such photos may help gay users look attractive, they can also lead to body image concerns or pressure to fit narrow ideas of beauty.

Other studies on gay men and the self-presentational patterns on dating apps in Asia found similar results. Chan (2016) noted that shirtless photos are common on Grindr profiles. Fitzpatrick et al. (2015) reported that 5% of Chinese Grindr gay users included at least one photo showing a shirtless torso without a face. Tziallas (2015) described this as “do-it-yourself pornification.” He suggested that the app rewards gay users for posting sexual images.

Low et al. (2022) reviewed many studies about online dating behaviors in Asia. The review found that users on apps like Grindr often focus on showing off their bodies. This shows that physical appearance is a major concern in how users choose their profile photos.

Tinder shows different patterns. For example, Tricky Taipei (2020) noted that Tinder profiles often include smiling selfies, travel photos, or group shots. These images match Tinder’s being recognized as a more serious dating platform that supports friendly and open self-presentation.

Language is also important in online dating profiles. Wu and Trottier (2024) explained that LGBTQ+ users change how they write their bios depending on which app they are using. On Grindr, bios are usually short and use direct words such as “top,” “fit only,” or “discreet.” These terms are examples of coded language. They help users quickly show their sexual identity or sex preferences without sharing emotional or personal details.

Tinder users tend to write longer bios. These often include hobbies, jobs, dating goals, or personality traits. This shows a more open and descriptive form of self-presentation, which fits with Tinder’s design. He (2021) found that many gay users also use words like “straight-acting,” “sporty,” or “normal” in their bios. These terms suggest that users want to show themselves as

masculine which is one feature considered socially acceptable. This also reflects pressure from society, both inside and outside the LGBTQ+ community.

Grindr's simple design and location-based features make emotional expression more difficult. Kann (2019) found that using Grindr too much can lead to more anxiety and lower self-esteem. This may happen because users face constant judgment based on appearance. Tinder's design, which includes swiping and more flexible profile sections, allows for more types of self-presentation. It may also help users connect in ways that feel more balanced.

Overall, these studies show that Tinder and Grindr have very different cultures. Grindr encourages quick contact, short messages, and physical self-display. Tinder allows more conversation and emotional sharing. These differences affect how users choose to present themselves on each app. This study intends to verify such differences, however, by focusing on gay males' self-presentations as evidence.

Methodology

This study uses a comparative content analysis to examine how gay men in Taiwan present themselves on two dating apps: Tinder and Grindr. It looks at both visual elements (such as profile photos) and written content (such as bios) to understand patterns in self-presentation. The study compares these patterns across the two apps and across two age groups. The data is analyzed using a quantitative method, to verify the findings as reviewed in section 2.

Data Collection

The samples were collected between May and June 2025. A total of 60 Taiwanese gay users' profiles were randomly selected: 30 from Tinder and 30 from Grindr. No private or identifying information was accessed. No private or personal information, such as usernames or photos, was saved. The researcher only viewed profiles that were publicly accessed and did not contact or interact with any users. The study followed ethical guidelines for online research, especially those related to LGBTQ+ topics. It respected user privacy and avoided any form of harm or disruption. The ages of the sampled gay users are approximately between 20 to 30 years old.

Variables and Coding Scheme

In this study, each profile was analyzed based on four key variables. These variables were chosen to reflect how users present themselves through both images and written language. Each variable is described below in more detail (Table 1).

Table 1
Coding Variables and the Coding Values

Variable	Description
Platform	Tinder (1) or Grindr (2)
Body-focused Image	1 = the presence of a body-centered photo 0 = no presence of a body-centered photo
Bio Word Count	Total number of words in the self-description
Use of Coded Language	1 = the presence of coded language 0 = no presence of coded language

- Platform: This variable identifies which app the profile came from: Tinder (assigned with the value of 1) or Grindr (assigned value 2); the goal was to compare how users behave differently on the two platforms.
- Inclusion of sexy body-focused image: This binary variable examines whether the user selects any of the images to highlight his sexual body figure, nudity, and shape/size of sexual organs. In this case, the value of 1 is assigned to this case. If the user does not select any of the above images, the value assigned to this case is 0.
- Bio word count: This variable counts how many words are written in the user's profile bio (self-description section). The word count gives a sense of how much effort gay users put into describing themselves, and whether they chose to share a detailed personal introduction or a very short one.
- Use of coded language: This binary variable checks whether the profile used short, culturally specific terms common in LGBTQ+ dating spaces. These terms often communicate sexual identity, sex preferences, or roles without using full sentences. The coding values include: 1 = Yes (coded language is used); Examples: words like "top," "bottom," "discreet," "straight-acting," "fit only," "vers," "looking," or similar expressions. 0 = No (no coded language used; such kind of profiles either uses no descriptive terms or only includes general phrases (e.g., "hi there," "just browsing") in the bios.

Statistical Analysis

The profile data was first organized in Microsoft Excel and then analyzed using IBM SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate frequency distribution of binary variables, and mean values of the word counts in bios on two apps.

To compare how gay users behave differently across the two platforms, the study used two types of statistical tests:

1. Independent Samples t-test: A t-test was used to compare the average number of words in user bios between Tinder and Grindr. This is because word count is a continuous variable, and the t-test is a good way to see if there is a meaningful difference in average word use between the two groups.
2. Chi-Square Test of Independence: The chi-square test was used to check for differences between Tinder and Grindr users on two binary variables:
 - Use of body-focused images: This test shows whether there is a significant difference in the number of users who posted body-centered photos on each platform.
 - Use of coded language: This test shows whether there is a significant difference in how often users included coded terms like "top," "fit only," or "discreet" in their bios.

The chi-square test checks if the pattern of responses (yes/no) is different between the two platforms in a way that is unlikely to be caused by chance.

All tests were run using a significance level of $p < .05$. This means that results were considered statistically significant if the chance of the difference happening randomly was less than 5.

Findings

Comparisons in Terms of Word Counts in Biographies

On average, Tinder profiles contained about 42 words in the biography, whereas Grindr profiles had about 41 words (Table 2). This difference in mean bio length (approximately one word) was not statistically significant, $t(163) = 0.178$, $p = 0.859$. In other words, there is no evidence of a meaningful difference in how much users write in their profiles on Tinder versus Grindr. Both groups of Taiwanese gay men tended to provide similarly sized textual self-descriptions in their dating app bios.

Table 2

Comparison of Word Counts in Biography by Dating Apps

Variable	Dating apps	N	Average	T	df	P
Word counts of biography	Tinder	67	42.09	0.178	163	0.859
	Grindr	98	40.86			

Comparisons in Terms of the Use of Coded Language

The use of coded language in profiles differed markedly between the two platforms. A clear majority of Grindr profiles (62 out of 98, about 63%) contained at least one coded term (e.g., words signalling sexual role or preference), compared to only 19 out of 67 Tinder profiles (28%) that did so (Table 3). This disparity was statistically significant (chi-square test, $\chi^2(1, 165) = 19.40$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that Grindr users were significantly more likely to include coded language in their self-profiles than Tinder users.

The very low p-value (well below 0.001) suggests that this difference is highly unlikely to be due to chance. These results imply that Taiwanese gay men on Grindr more frequently employ shorthand or coded terms to express personal or desired traits and desires (such as sexual preferences), whereas Tinder users are less inclined to use such coded language in their self-presentations.

Table 3

Comparisons of Presence of Coded Language for Sex by Dating Apps

variables	presence of coded language for sex		Total	Chi-Square
	No	Yes		
Tinder	48	19	67	P = 0.000
Grindr	36	62	98	
Total	84	81	165	

Comparisons in Terms of Body-Focused Images

There was also a significant difference in the prevalence of body-focused images between Tinder and Grindr profiles. Over half of Grindr users (55 out of 98, about 56%) featured a body-centric photo (such as a shirtless picture or emphasis on physique) in their profile,

compared to only 16 out of 67 Tinder users (approximately 24%) who did so (Table 4). This platform-based gap in image type was statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, 165) = 16.87, p < 0.001$), confirming that Grindr profiles are much more likely to display body-focused images than Tinder profiles.

The difference in proportions is substantial, and the p-value below 0.001 indicates a very high confidence in this finding. In practical terms, this suggests that Grindr users put greater emphasis on showcasing physical appearance in their profile photos, whereas Tinder users are less prone to present themselves with explicitly body-revealing images, potentially favoring face pictures or more sexually modest visual presentation.

Table 4

Comparisons of Presence of Body-Focused Images by Dating Apps

variables	presence of body-focused images		Total	Chi-Square
	No	Yes		
Tinder	51	16	67	P = 0.000
Grindr	43	55	98	
Total	94	71	165	

Discussion and Conclusion

Summary and Interpretations

This study explored how gay men in Taiwan present themselves on two major dating platforms, that is, Tinder and Grindr and the analysis focused on three main dimensions: (1) biography word count, (2) coded language use for sex, and (3) body-focused imagery. Although no significant difference was found in biography word count between the two platforms, significant differences emerged in the use of coded language and body-focused profile images.

Grindr users were significantly more likely to use coded language (e.g., “top,” “bottom,” “discreet,” “vers,” “side,” “0 or 1”) and body-centric imagery (e.g., shirtless photos or a zoom-in image of the penis/nipple/butt) in their profiles, aligning with the app’s reputation for facilitating quick, sexually oriented interactions. In contrast, Tinder users demonstrated more conservative self-presentational strategies, writing slightly longer bios and including fewer sexualized images or coded sexual references. These findings support existing literature suggesting that app affordances and community norms shape how identities are performed online (Rodriguez et al., 2019; Wu & Trottier, 2024).

The results reinforce that online self-presentation is not just a matter of individual preference but also of adaptation to technological affordances and platform cultures. The contrast between the two platforms suggests that users make strategic choices to align their (sexuality) identity performances with the platform’s implicit norms and audience expectations.

Implications

These findings contribute to the field of digital sociolinguistics and queer communication studies in several ways. First, they demonstrate that self-presentation strategies among gay men are highly adaptive and context-sensitive. The difference in coded language use reflects users' ability to navigate in-group communication practices, using concise terms that resonate within the gay community and are understood within the specific app culture.

Second, the prevalence of body-centered images on Grindr suggests an ongoing reinforcement of physical ideals within gay dating apps. This has implications for discussions on body politics and performative masculinity, as it reflects how online dating platforms can amplify narrow standards of attractiveness.

Third, the minimal difference in biography length indicates a possible convergence in how users engage with self-description across apps, suggesting that while platforms may nudge users toward certain behaviors, individual differences and broader cultural factors also play a role. The content of the examined biographies were not qualitatively interpreted but gay users on both dating platforms commonly shared the dedication to express what they were expected to express in line with the communication norms on both dating apps.

Finally, from a sociotechnical perspective, the results remind us that platform design matters: Grindr's GPS-based immediacy and visual-first interface reinforce quicker, appearance-driven exchanges, while Tinder's swiping model and narrative-friendly design afford more room for holistic identity expression. These structural differences influence not only who gay users can match with, but also how they choose to represent themselves in the first place.

Future Research Suggestions

While this study focuses on Taiwanese gay men aged 20–30, future research could extend the analysis to older age groups or other sexual and gender identities within LGBTQ+ populations. It would also be valuable to investigate how users shift their presentation styles across platforms over time, or how they reflect on their own profile strategies. Longitudinal studies could explore whether users' self-presentational styles evolve with increased app experience or life stage.

Moreover, qualitative interviews with users could complement quantitative content analysis by providing insight into the motivations behind their image or language choices. It is also worthwhile to compare textually and qualitatively as to what and how gay users express themselves, project expectations from potential dating partners, prioritize their various social identities in self-introduction sections on dating apps. Finally, future research could examine how cultural values, such as modesty, masculinity, or sexual discretion, could intersect with platform affordances to shape (sexuality) identity performance across cultural contexts.

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Proactive Approach to Digital Reputation Management in Managing ESG Issues: A Case Study of Mining Industry Indonesia (MIND ID)

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Abstract

Issue management in the context of social media presents significant challenges, particularly for high-reputation-risk industries such as mining, which are often targeted by cyber defamation and character assassination. Organizations operating in such sectors must adopt effective strategies to manage issues proactively in the digital sphere. This case study explores the issue management approach of MIND ID, the state-owned holding company overseeing several major mining enterprises in Indonesia. The research employs qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with four key informants and document analysis. Findings indicate that MIND ID adopts a proactive, systematic approach to issue management, focusing strategically on real-time media monitoring. This system enables the organization to detect early signs of reputational threats, resolve misinformation, and engage transparently with stakeholders before issues escalate into a full-blown crisis. MIND ID can respond swiftly and strategically to emerging concerns by continuously tracking digital conversations, reinforcing its public image and organizational legitimacy in a volatile media environment. This study contributes to the discourse on digital reputation management by highlighting the critical role of anticipatory strategies and continuous issue surveillance in high-risk sectors. It argues that in the era of heightened stakeholder scrutiny and digital interconnectivity, a proactive approach to reputation management is essential for safeguarding corporate reputation and sustaining stakeholder trust.

Keywords: corporate reputation, issue management, media monitoring, proactive approach

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Introduction

The swift evolution of digital media and communication platforms has fundamentally reshaped the dynamics of corporate reputation management. This paradigm shift has curtailed organizational control over public messaging, necessitating the adoption of specific digital communication strategies that markedly diverge from traditional media relations. The digital sphere inherently contains risks, particularly the rapid and frequently anonymous dissemination of digital attacks, leading to substantial challenges such as cyber defamation and character assassination. Consequently, effective issue management is paramount for organizations aiming to sustain and bolster their corporate reputation within the digital environment.

The difficulty of executing effective issue management is magnified for firms operating in sensitive sectors, such as the mining industry, given their intrinsically high reputational risk profile. Robust issue management is crucial for ensuring the accurate reception of corporate messages and for precluding information vacuums. A solid issue management program, which involves the systematic preparation and resolution of problems, allows companies to identify emerging concerns early, thereby preventing their escalation into full-blown crises (Bratfalean & Deaconu, 2020).

This research focuses on MIND ID, Indonesia's state-owned mining holding company. This entity faces the unique complexity of being a nascent organization (established in 2023) while simultaneously managing the reputation tied to the legacy and public perception of its older member companies, such as Antam and Bukit Asam. In the digital realm, attacks often target individual executives, posing the risk of character assassination, which can subsequently damage the corporate reputation as a whole.

A salient challenge confronting MIND ID involves the stewardship of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) concerns. A critical case involves the international critique directed at Indonesian nickel, which is frequently branded "dirty nickel." This controversy arises from documented concerns regarding extensive deforestation, air and water contamination from nickel smelter waste, suboptimal working conditions, and significant carbon emissions stemming from reliance on coal-fired power for processing. MIND ID's official position asserts that the "dirty nickel" campaign constitutes a negative strategy employed by rival nations who perceive Indonesia's success as the world's largest nickel producer as a threat. Hence, strategic reputation management is indispensable for surmounting these digital and geopolitical hurdles and ensuring business continuity (Jančiauskaitė et al., 2019).

The digitization of information requires integrating reputation management with robust risk and effective communication strategies to mitigate opportunistic behavior and information asymmetry (Bernini et al., 2021). To competently navigate this dynamic landscape, the deployment of technology in reputation management is essential, particularly through the proactive observation, collection, and analysis of information from diverse social media sources. Contemporary technological tools empower organizations to monitor online discourse in real-time, enabling rapid issue identification and efficient response, thus curtailing negative reputational impacts. This technological innovation and rapid response capability are vital for maintaining the digital reputation, public trust, and business sustainability of a large, high-risk holding company like MIND ID. Proactive issue management ensures active digital platform surveillance to detect early indicators of reputational attacks, swiftly correct misinformation, and preserve transparency in stakeholder communication.

Research Question

Issue management is a crucial element in maintaining and developing a digital reputation (Forcadell et al., 2020). This study specifically seeks to understand How is the issue management of MIND ID implemented in maintaining and developing the digital reputation of the mining holding company in the face of ESG issues?

Literature Review

Effective management of digital reputation necessitates an integrated approach founded on established concepts of issue and reputation management, all adapted for the dynamic digital age. This chapter will delineate key theoretical concepts, including Online Reputation Management (ORM), the issue management process, and associated reputational risks such as cyber defamation and character assassination, which are essential considerations for organizations like MIND ID operating in high-risk sectors.

Online Reputation Management (ORM)

Online Reputation Management is formally defined as the strategic process of monitoring, influencing, and managing how an organization, brand, or individual is perceived across various digital platforms. The central objective of ORM is to ensure that positive digital content achieves prominence in search engine results and social media platforms, thereby mitigating the visibility and potential impact of negative information.

Effective ORM demands active participation on social media, real-time monitoring, and a rapid crisis response capability. Its scope transcends merely handling negative reports to encompass the deliberate management of both positive and negative reports. Digital communication strategies in ORM are generally categorized based on their origin (positive or negative content) and their nature (active or reactive engagement).

1. Active-Positive: The organization proactively disseminates positive content to build and reinforce its reputation. This includes campaigns and positive messaging (Kaiser, 2011, as cited in Portmann 2013, pp. 79; van Gaalen, 2009).
2. Active-Negative: Disseminating negative information about competitors or counteracting potential threats.
3. Reactive-Positive: Responding to and promoting existing positive content about the organization.
4. Reactive-Negative (Issue Management): Responding to existing negative content to reduce its adverse impact. This involves managing complaints and negative messages to minimize their visibility in search results (Portmann, 2013, pp. 79).

ORM is fundamentally interwoven with Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Word of Mouth (WOM) marketing. Its ultimate goal is to protect and enhance reputation by strategically influencing search engine results and effectively leveraging positive stakeholder testimonials (Beal & Strauss, 2008; Dover, 2011; Silverman, 2011, as cited in Portmann 2013, pp. 81).

The Online Reputation Analysis Process

The effective analysis of online reputation involves three critical stages: Scanning, Monitoring, and Forecasting (Portmann, 2013, pp. 82). Scanning (Stage I): This initial detection phase involves continuous environmental analysis to identify early changes that could potentially

affect the organization. In this stage, automated text analysis (sentiment analysis, Natural Language Processing/NLP) can process data from the social web, although human expertise remains crucial for interpreting this data into meaningful information (Sterne, 2011, as cited in Portmann, 2013, pp. 82). The challenge here is managing information overload to filter raw data into manageable issues.

Monitoring (Stage II): Following identification, monitoring focuses on continuous, targeted observation of issues deemed important. Unlike scanning (which is broad), monitoring is deductive, focusing on previously identified reputational threats across social platforms. It is crucial because information can flow from the social web to traditional media, increasing the potential impact. **Forecasting (Stage III):** This final stage uses predictive techniques (like scenario planning or trend analysis) to anticipate future issues related to business activities. The goal is to predict trends based on historical data, though predictions are often inexact. Because digital media demands rapid response, analysis often feeds directly into forecasting, requiring well-trained communication personnel for interpretation and analysis.

Issue Management Process

Issue management is a proactive, strategic process developed to identify, evaluate, and respond to socio-political issues that may significantly affect a company's reputation and operational scope (Cornelissen, 2014, pp. 280–281). By adopting a proactive stance, organizations prevent latent issues from escalating into major crises.

The classic issue management framework consists of four primary stages: (1) Environmental Scanning, this involves the deep analysis of variables across commercial, economic, political, technological, social, and cultural environments to understand potential changes. Tools like DESTEP (Demographic, Economic, Social, Technological, Ecological, and Political factors) and SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) are utilized to identify relevant trends and potential issues that concern both the organization and its stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2014, pp. 284–285).

Issue Identification and Analysis, the purpose of this stage is to determine the intensity, public interest, and urgency of an identified issue. Analysis assesses the issue's persistence, the organization's capacity to influence its resolution, and the identity of key stakeholders involved (Cornelissen, 2014, pp. 286). A valuable tool for this stage is the Position-Importance Matrix, which maps stakeholders and the public based on their position (support or opposition, scaled -5 to +5) towards an issue, and their importance (0 to 10) to the organization.

Issue-specific Response Strategies, based on the analysis, organizations choose one of three primary response strategies (Cornelissen, 2014, pp. 286): **Buffering (Delay/Avoidance):** Strategies aimed at resisting external demands or delaying the issue's development by maintaining existing organizational behavior and limiting public communication. Tactics include decision postponement, remaining silent (non-reaction), and avoiding involvement with external demands, **Bridging (Adaptation/Dialogue):** Involves recognizing the issue, acknowledging external expectations, and adjusting organizational activities to align with stakeholder concerns. This is achieved through transparent reporting (e.g., environmental performance) and open dialogue, **Advocacy (Influence/Lobbying):** Aimed at actively altering public opinion and stakeholder expectations through issue campaigns and lobbying efforts to align them with the organization's views and practices. This requires strong public persuasion to frame the organization's position as rational and morally sound.

Evaluation, the final stage evaluates the evolution of the issue and the resulting changes in public opinion and stakeholder expectations. This assessment determines whether the chosen strategy (buffering, bridging, or advocacy) successfully influenced public opinion and was positively received by stakeholders. For instance, evaluation for bridging assesses whether transparency successfully built trust.

Methodology

Research Paradigm

This research operates under the post-positivist paradigm, which recognizes that scientific claims are tentative and must be open to continuous testing and questioning. The post-positivist framework necessitates that research hypotheses remain open to the possibility of falsification. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in the post-positivist paradigm, recognizing that scientific claims are tentative and require continuous testing and questioning. An intrinsic single case study focusing on MIND ID was utilized to gain deep insights into the “how” and “why” of its issue management practices.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants relevant to issue management, including a Director (Peak Management/Decision Maker), a Division Head, a Department Head, and an Issue Implementer from MIND ID, plus two Media Industry Actors, this was supplemented by document studies, such as the company’s Annual Report, Sustainability Report (2023), and Media Monitoring Reports (October 2023–June 2024).

The primary technique used for data analysis was pattern matching (Yin, 2018). This technique involves systematically comparing empirical data patterns collected through interviews and documents against the established theoretical propositions laid out in the theoretical framework. Data gathered was coded using categories corresponding to the elements of the theoretical framework. If the identified patterns align with the propositions, the initial hypothesis is supported; conversely, deviations require the revision of the hypothesis.

Findings

The research found that MIND ID implements a comprehensive five-stage proactive issue management framework (Identify, Capture, Plan, Mitigate, and Validate) which expands upon the traditional four-stage model (Cornelissen, 2014) to suit the high-risk digital environment of a mining holding company. This proactive approach aims not only to safeguard digital reputation but also to actively develop it.

This framework aligns with the concept that effective reputation management in the digital age requires a proactive system centered on continuous issue monitoring and data-driven decision-making.

Identify (Environmental Scanning)

The initial stage, Identify, focuses on early warning detection and intensive environmental monitoring to recognize and detect potential issues before they escalate into crises. This stage

expands on Cornelissen's traditional Environmental Scanning by incorporating specific data-driven tools.

Table 1

MIND ID's Implementation Elements for the Identify

Implementation Element	Point of Detail
Issue Identification through Risk Assessment	Potential issues are prioritized based on risk levels and categorized using the six pillars of the MIND ID Sustainability Pathway (e.g., Environment & Climate Change; Governance). This process helps prevent minor issues from escalating into major crises by addressing problems early. For instance, the "Dirty Nickel" issue was categorized as having high expectation and high risk
Corporate KPI	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) related to reputation and stakeholder satisfaction are used to measure management effectiveness. These KPIs are newly implemented in 2024 to assess the health of the company's reputation. Monitoring KPI changes (e.g., a drop in community satisfaction) allows MIND ID to take immediate corrective action
Stakeholder Mapping	Critical internal and external stakeholders (e.g., local communities, investors, government) are mapped using power-interest grids to understand their influence and relationship to the issue. This mapping helps determine which stakeholders must be prioritized for communication and involvement
Historical Data Media Monitoring	Analyzing past media data and trends (e.g., prior pollution incidents or labor issues) allows the company to identify recurring patterns. This knowledge informs proactive strategies, ensuring readiness before similar problems resurface

Capture (Issue Identification and Analysis)

The Capture stage focuses on intensive, real-time data collection and analysis related to a specific, detected issue, thus expanding the scope of initial Issue Identification and Analysis (Cornelissen, 2014).

Table 2*MIND ID's Implementation Elements for the Capture*

Implementation Element	Point of Detail
Media Monitoring on Realtime-Issue	Employing technology to detect and respond to developing issues rapidly, often identifying negative news or shifting public sentiment within hours. This enables immediate response to negative coverage (e.g., corruption allegations)
Survey On-Site	Conducting physical surveys in operational areas (e.g., nickel mines) to gather immediate empirical data on environmental quality (air/water) or working conditions to ensure response accuracy and transparency
Survey Perception	Gathering stakeholder perceptions (e.g., from local communities, investors) to understand external views of the issue, aiding in adjusting corrective actions and communications

Plan (Issue-Specific Response Strategies)

MIND ID executes its strategic response planning (Plan) across four steps, emphasizing Stakeholder Engagement and the control of public narrative.

Table 3*MIND ID's Implementation Elements for the Plan Stage*

Implementation Element	Point of Detail
Stakeholder Engagement	Active dialogue with primary stakeholders (e.g., local communities, investors) is crucial for developing robust, supported, and comprehensive mitigation plans. This reduces resistance to new projects and supports sustainability pillars
Agenda Setting Plan	A structured approach (often monthly) defining key messages and communication strategies, prioritizing issues, and ensuring consistency with corporate values. Effectiveness is regularly measured by the Ministry of BUMN

Mitigate (Issue-Specific Response Strategies: Implementation)

This stage focuses on executing the planned strategy to reduce negative exposure and impact.

Table 4*MIND ID's Implementation Elements for the Mitigate Stage*

Implementation Element	Point of Detail
Content & Narrative Development	Crafting clear, transparent, and consistent messages that highlight corporate commitment and responsibility. Narratives counter negative campaigns (e.g., “Dirty Nickel” motives) and emphasize operational efficiency
Publication	Disseminating the developed narrative through targeted channels (website, press releases, social media, media interviews) to ensure wide reach and positive opinion promotion. Timely and consistent release is essential

Validate (Evaluation)

The final stage, Validate, assesses the success of the intervention and provides feedback for continuous improvement, going beyond Cornelissen's traditional Evaluation phase.

Table 5*MIND ID's Implementation Elements for the Validate (Evaluation) Stage*

Implementation Element	Point of Detail
Scoring Agenda Setting	Quantitatively assessing the effectiveness of implemented steps against planned objectives. This scoring system helps determine if communication strategies successfully influenced public opinion and achieved the desired goals
Monitoring & Evaluation	Continuous quantitative and qualitative measurement of impact, such as measuring environmental changes or local satisfaction levels after intervention. This determines if the issue has been thoroughly resolved
Media Monitoring & Evaluation on Relevant Issue	Analyzing post-mitigation media coverage and public sentiment change. For example, monitoring successfully neutralized negative hashtags (e.g., #RampokdiMIT was removed within 2 hours), and tracking dominant positive media exposure on environmental initiatives (262 positive articles vs. 7 negative articles in June 2024)

Discussion

The implementation of issue management by MIND ID confirms the theoretical argument that a proactive system is central to successfully managing high-risk digital reputation. The findings demonstrate that MIND ID adapts and expands the conventional issue management framework (Cornelissen, 2014) into a robust, five-stage process (Identify, Capture, Plan, Mitigate, and Validate) to suit the unique challenges of the mining sector in the digital age. This approach prioritizes early detection and strategic coordination, overcoming the traditional limitations of reactive crisis management.

Proactive Issue Management and Digital Reputation

The core principle driving MIND ID's strategy is proactivity, primarily achieved through intense real-time media monitoring.

Technological Integration for Early Detection

The transition from traditional environmental scanning to the Identify and Capture stages highlights the central role of technology in reputation management. MIND ID uses advanced monitoring tools to track online conversations and shifts in public sentiment across various digital platforms in real-time. This real-time capability allows the company to detect early signs of reputational attacks, such as cyber defamation and character assassination, which are frequent risks for high-reputation-risk entities like mining companies. This immediate detection capability ensures issues are identified within hours, preventing minor problems from escalating into major crises. Academically, this supports the argument that continuous digital monitoring is the most critical factor for effective reputation management.

Data-Driven Decision Making

The extensive use of data, particularly through Corporate KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and Historical Data Media Monitoring, moves the process beyond subjective assessment. KPIs tied directly to reputation and stakeholder satisfaction allow MIND ID to quantitatively measure management effectiveness and pinpoint areas needing immediate improvement, such as declines in local community satisfaction. By analyzing historical data on recurring issues (e.g., environmental concerns), the company can anticipate future problems and prepare proactive strategies, reinforcing the predictive element necessary for successful Online Reputation Management (ORM). This data-driven approach strengthens the theoretical argument that effective issue management must be transparent and rooted in accurate, relevant information.

Stakeholder Engagement as a Central Strategic Element

The findings underscore that Stakeholder Engagement is not merely a communication function but a central strategic element integrated across the entire framework, particularly in the Plan and Mitigate stages.

Legitimacy in Critical Sectors

For a holding company in the critical mining sector, dealing with complex ESG issues (such as "Dirty Nickel") requires robust legitimacy. MIND ID addresses this by emphasizing that defining critical issues must have a clear legal basis and align with the company's six Sustainability Pillars (Environment & Climate Change; Society; Economic Development). This strategic alignment ensures that external communications about positive contributions (e.g., managing waste, supporting local economic development) are consistent and aimed at reducing social friction and resistance to new explorations.

Strategic Prioritization Through Mapping

MIND ID utilizes detailed Stakeholder Mapping (using power-interest grids) to categorize stakeholders (e.g., Key Player, Context Setter, Subject, Crowd). This allows for the efficient

allocation of limited resources by prioritizing engagement with the most influential and interested parties (Key Players), ensuring strategic communication is tailored to specific groups, such as addressing investor concerns about environmental impact or managing media narratives about community issues. This inclusive, collaborative approach, exemplified by working with academic institutions like IPB on mitigation strategies, builds trust and ensures response plans are robust and supported externally.

Strategic Response and Narrative Control

The success of MIND ID's reputation management is heavily dependent on controlling the narrative through effective response strategies.

Proactive Narrative Shaping (Agenda Setting)

MIND ID employs a formal Agenda Setting Plan to define key messages and publication priorities, often conducted monthly. This proactive shaping of the narrative is crucial for steering media attention toward positive corporate actions (e.g., environmental initiatives like tree planting or CSR programs) and away from negative issues. The effectiveness of this agenda setting is quantitatively assessed through scoring, which includes measuring the percentage of negative news coverage against positive coverage.

Mitigating Cyber Attacks

In cases involving high-risk attacks like character assassination against the CEO, the Mitigate stage involves swift and targeted counter-measures. For example, in managing the negative hashtag #RampokdiMIT, MIND ID used strategic interventions (including competitive hashtag use) to dilute the negative narrative, resulting in the hashtag being neutralized within two hours. This rapid, technology-driven intervention showcases the effectiveness of a proactive, coordinated response in minimizing the impact of reputation threats in the highly dynamic social media environment.

Conclusion

MIND ID implements a comprehensive and proactive issue management process, which is crucial for safeguarding and cultivating its digital reputation, particularly when confronting complex Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) issues, given the high reputational risks faced by mining companies, including cyber defamation and character assassination. This strategy adapts conventional models into a robust five-stage framework: Identify, Capture, Plan, Mitigate, and Validate. The effectiveness of this system hinges on the use of real-time media monitoring and advanced technology for early detection, enabling the organization to rapidly identify emerging issues and swiftly correct misinformation, ensuring transparency with stakeholders. Data collection in the Capture phase is comprehensive, relying not only on media monitoring but also onsite surveys and perception surveys to gather accurate, empirical information regarding the issue's impact, forming a strong foundation for developing strategic responses.

The implementation of this proactive model has significant implications, theoretically arguing that constant, technology-driven monitoring of issue developments on digital media is the most critical factor in effective reputation management. The framework demonstrates the necessity of integrating data-driven decision-making and continuous evaluation (the Validate phase) to

ensure accountability and organizational learning. Practically, this model serves as a reference for companies operating in high-risk environments, emphasizing the need for comprehensive empirical data collection, clear and consistent content and narrative development, and active engagement with stakeholders to build legitimacy and trust.

For future academic contributions, it is recommended to conduct further research, such as comparative analysis between the MIND ID model and other national or international mining companies, to identify industry best practices and understand how contextual differences influence issue management effectiveness regarding ESG issues. There should also be a dedicated focus on exploring the role of advanced digital technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data analytics in enhancing predictive capabilities and increasing the speed and accuracy of corporate response. Additionally, longitudinal studies are necessary to assess the long-term effectiveness of these proactive strategies on digital reputation and stakeholder trust, ensuring the continuous development and improvement of the strategic framework for managing complex issues in the dynamic digital environment.

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Fan's Intervention in Affective Transmission of Media Texts: A Case Study of Wanda Vision

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Abstract

With the prevalence of digital media and the rise of fan translators, the mode of media consumption and translation has evolved into interventional and cooperative despite AI's increasingly influence for human translation. Inspired by Henry Jenkins' "participatory culture" and Mark Deuze's "media love," this study aims to explore how fans' new translation pattern on China's new media platforms such as bilibili affect the interrelationships among audiovisual media, public emotions and popular culture. Focusing on fan translation of the Marvel TV series *Wanda Vision*, this article starts from quantitative analysis of fan activities and their revenue by chart. Based on it, the paper concentrates on qualitative content analysis around works by a sample fan translator to discuss how he influences artistic design and emotional theme of the media text as well as its value for social issues and cultural phenomena in China. Through three dimensions including the cultural image of "magic" and its philosophical implication, design of five main characters and their connections with the text's emotional theme, artistic tension by the tragic life experience of superhero, this article clarifies the decisive role of fan translators in emotional resonance, cultural transmission and aesthetic value of the media text, demonstrating innovation in intervention intensity, dominant power, and cultural status of the emerging translator group. Finally, this study intends to explore strategies for human translator's sustainable development under the background of AI and digital technologies.

Keywords: *Wanda Vision*, participatory culture, media love, translational fandom, new media platforms

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Introduction

Traditionally, the cross-cultural translation and introduction of written texts or media have mainly turned to be one-way. The author has absolute dominance and decision-making power over its semantics, emotional themes, and expression strategies. Translators, however, are supposed to passively decode and transmit messages from the author. With the rise of new media, amateur and fan translators have sprung up, showing extremely high autonomy in creation, interpretation and cross-cultural dissemination of text information. Moreover, the interaction between text users and the author as well as cooperation within themselves have obviously strengthened, making text users play an increasingly significant role in the production and transmission of text information.

Film and television media are important channels of cultural spread, emotional exchange, and cross-cultural communication. Thanks to development of mass media and new media, fans, as an audience group, are playing an increasingly active role in the translation and introduction of film and television media.

Fan Translation and Remix

Broadly speaking, most of the fan's audiovisual translation works center on the information processing at linguistic level through dubbing and subtitles. In recent years, the development of new technologies has given birth to more participation forms of fan translation. For example, after cutting and remixing scenes of the original text, they tend to offer extra explanations and retellings of the plot, discussions about personal attitude, and evaluations of the text's artistic design. Translators take into account the cross-cultural transmission of original information, cultural and artistic messages, the display of personal cognition, the expression of individual attitudes at the same time, and largely depend on cooperation in translation practices. Their own process of thinking, common stance and creative abilities play a more active and prominent role in creation and dissemination of the text.

However, current research about fan translation mainly discusses traditional forms such as fansubbing and fandubbing, including definitions, history and current situation, motivations, major translation strategies such as intervention in choice of words, sentence structure and text format. For instance, Tessa Dwyer (2019, 436–452) investigates fan audiovisual translation's connection with the two concepts "participatory culture" and "productive consumer." She concludes that fan translators have become the "leading users" of new technologies together with new cooperative audio-visual translation. In addition, scholars such as Ting Guo and Jonathan Evans (2020, 515–529) have focused on the interventional features of fansubbing especially experiments in text form, namely adjustments of font, color, number, layout and location of subtitles, to discuss how fan translators optimize audience experience through active interventions. Rocío Baños (2020, 209–226) believes that fandubbing highlights the positive contribution of "productive consumers" to creation and rewriting of media. The main difference between fandubbing and commercial dubbing lies in the communication between creators and users. Chinese scholars Wang Dingkun and Zhang Xiaochun focus on the fansubbing and fandubbing in China. They (2017, 303–320) find that Chinese fansubbing aims at resisting cultural capitalism and its colonization on people's life, which has evolved into an interactive social space serving for cross-cultural dissemination and consumption of audio-visual products. Besides, they clarify fansubbing's goal of pursuing social benefits and psychological earnings such as group recognition and personal identification. As for fandubbing, the two scholars (2016, 173–192) believe that whether the target of fandubbing is purely out of personal interest

or to convey different voices about social and political events, fans have abandoned the semantic transformation in traditional translation and fully carried out independent and bold creation. All the above studies have pointed out fan translator's interventional and cooperative features while failing to pay enough attention to the more extensive and diverse manifestation of fans' autonomy apart from fansubbing and fandubbing.

Therefore, this paper is committed to in-depth investigation of the new creative and participatory methods by fans around the dissemination of film and television media, trying to explore their intervention in popular culture, ideological consciousness, and public emotions thereby. It finally aims to clarify the more and more comprehensive and thorough interaction of film and television media with the audience, social life, and popular culture under the context of new media and novel translator group.

MCU and *Wanda Vision*

MCU is one of the most well-known media brands in the United States. It refers to a series of superhero movies and TV shows produced by Marvel Studio. Altogether, they create consistent and unique character framework, brand values of protecting people from danger and safeguarding world peace, and a superhero complex, thus carrying a distinct cultural label. At the same time, it has established a huge fan base from different cultural environments through cross-cultural communication, achieving extremely high brand reputation, profound influence, and strong emotional resonance among the audience. Therefore, Marvel films and television works become an excellent sample for this paper to discuss the dominant role and autonomy of fans in the cross-cultural translation and introduction of audiovisual media.

Wanda Vision was released by Disney+ from 15 January 2021 to 5 March 2021, with a total of 9 episodes. The story follows the plot of Vision's death in the film "Avengers 4: Endgame." Wanda, extremely grief-stricken and out of mind by emotional collapse, uses magic to control the small town "Westview" and its residents and creates a brand-new Vision. In the fantasy world, the two characters finally manage to enjoy a rare moment of happiness. However, the intervention of S.W.O.R.D., an organization outside the town and interference of the witch Agatha break the tranquility, and the imaginary space maintained by Wanda's magic also falls into crisis. Faced with the dilemma of restoring the peace and harmony of the town, returning freedom to the innocent residents, and protecting her own family members selfishly, Wanda has to destroy the illusory world painstakingly established with her own hands, and suffer from the pain of separation with her loved husband and children once again.

The TV series weaves a parallel world with fantasies and enables the superhero to realize the aspiration of resurrecting her loved ones and enjoy ordinary family life in the illusion. In fact, it discusses thought-provoking topics such as how to deal with personal sentiments in the face of loss and farewell as well as whether we common people without magic can make up for past regrets. It breaks away from Marvel's consistent tradition of focusing on world peace and conflicts between good and evil, thus becoming the major link between Marvel's third and fourth phases. At the end of this TV series, the heroine with magic also cannot escape the choice of human ethics, morality and the unchangeable fate. In addition to arousing strong emotional resonance and reflection among the audience, it can also trigger in-depth thinking about Marvel's brand culture. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the effectiveness of the emotional output and cultural transmission through this transitional media text in MCU and its affective interaction with Chinese fan audience, thereby exploring the innovation potential of audiovisual translation strategies in the context of new media and emerging translator group.

Theoretical Basis

The meaning of the word “fan” has expanded from initial reference to followers of sports activities to participants in commercial and entertainment activities. Now it includes all the people who have stable loyalty and solid experience to any cultural product, social phenomenon, belief or ideology. “Fandom” emphasizes the clustering of fans on this basis (Jenkins, 2018).

Participatory Culture of Fandom

American communication scholar Henry Jenkins (1992) believes that fans are active creators and manipulators of text content and important participants in meaning construction and circulation. They invade popular culture, reuse its materials for their own purposes, and strive to make media representations blend with their social and life experiences, thereby realizing their own cultural creation and social interaction. Later, Jenkins introduced the concept of “poaching” proposed by Michel de Certeau. He believes that readers are constantly competing for ownership and control of the text and its meaning with authors, stealing beneficial resources and creating new meanings. By doing so, fans establish an independent culture relying on the symbolic materials provided by the media text (Jenkins, 2014).

Finally, Jenkins concludes that fandom has changed the original reception mode and maintains both emotional closeness and critical alienation to audiovisual texts. They repeatedly examine the details and dig out the meaning therein, thus mastering the text narration. At the same time, fans have achieved sharing, communication and interaction among themselves, transforming the reception process into a process of social interaction. For fans, the combination of media acceptance and self-elaboration provides a premise for autonomous expression and active intervention (Jenkins, 1992).

On this basis, Jason Mittell (2022) proposes “forensic fandom,” focusing on in-depth exploration of the complexity of texts and introducing fan participation to the vertical dimension. Chandler Harriss (2017) states that as media creators and recipients, fans independently recreate source texts, decode it with critical attitude or deeply explore and delve into a certain theme, highlighting the feasibility of cultural participation and critical inquiry. Therefore, authors and audiences no longer enjoy different roles but are on two distinct but equivalent planes.

In terms of the research target of this article, the fan translation through video remix focuses on in-depth dissection and active speculation of the plot, implicit details and clues, character design, artistic style, cultural elements and emotional themes of the TV series, by which completes interaction and cooperation with the author. Hence, fans participate in decoding and transmission of the text information, dissemination of cultural connotations, promotion of aesthetic and artistic value in both horizontal and vertical directions, thereby establishing dominance in information production, emotional expression, and cultural creation. This paper aims to carefully analyze the significance of fan’s participatory translation regarding aspects such as their self-expression as well as personal subjectivity and stance, author’s emotional intentions and artistic ideas, the media text’s connection with social culture and ideology.

Fan’s Emotional Investment and Media Love

The above research on fandom clearly points out fan’s explicit intervention in media creation, expression, and dissemination as translator. More specifically, when it comes to fan’s

relationship with media, society and mainstream culture, Jeremy Deller (Grant & Love, 2019) once said, “Fandom, as an emotional economy emphasizes love and identification, while advocating transcending traditional cognitions and limitations related to class, race, nationality, or gender, thus completing identity shaping” (p. 9). Therefore, this paper strives to explore how fans, as a community, highlight their own positions and independent cognition through media translation and intercultural transmission, especially to clarify fan’s strategies of establishing an interactive relationship with other social members, the media industry, mainstream culture, and social ideology.

Mark Deuze (2021) further proposes the concept of “media love.” It focuses on how media practices arrange and organize other social practices and blend with them more widely, and how audiences explain and understand their own media consumption experiences. The core proposition is that media resets the interactive methods within social members and with the surrounding world, thereby exerting emotional intervention in social life. On the contrary, an individual’s love and strong feelings towards media are reflected in the opportunities that media offer its audiences for self-expression and their impetus for discovery and recognition of own identities, thereupon cultivating a sense of belonging and offering opportunities of emotional expression and meaning creation. Therefore, the audiovisual translation involved in this paper not only means the close interaction between fan’s personal affective representation and emotional theme of the media text but also implies an individual’s active intervention in social life and popular culture through media.

Today’s Internet and digital technology have given birth to reform in models of media creation and dissemination, encouraging the audience to form a sense of intimacy, identification and belonging, desire for dedication and investment, and willingness for self-expression and active creation around the media text. This changes their dependent relationship with the community and cultural environment they belong to, promoting their emotional interaction with popular culture and social life, and realizing autonomy and independence finally. In view of this, the paper mainly discusses fan’s dominant role at the emotional and philosophical dimensions when participate in audiovisual translation, and analyzes how they affect audience’s cognitive and emotional gains, manifestation of their own stance and identities, and the value output of media text for popular culture and ideology.

Case Analysis

Table 1

Fan Translators of Wanda Vision in bilibili

Name of uploaders in bilibili	Number of account followers	View count of fan's target texts	
进击的呆某人	31thousand	Episode 1	3723
		Episode 2	2772
		Episode 3	2808
		Episode 4	2803
		Episode 5	2965
		Episode 6	3146
		Episode 7	2307
		Episode 8	2485
		Episode 9	9809
		Collected edition	66 thousand
大聪看电影	1.016million	Episode 1,2	0.311 million
		Episode 3	0.28 million
		Episode 4	0.377 million
		Episode 5	0.338 million
		Episode 6	0.476 million
		Episode 7	0.395 million
		Episode 8	0.506 million
		Episode 9	0.41 million
努力的Lorre	4.208million	Opening episode	1.942 million
		Bonus scene	1.082 million
		Finale spoiler	1.402 million
		Final episode and prediction	1.039million
汤圆小剧场	16thousand	Episode 1,2	10 thousand
		Episode 3	5284
		Episode 4	6211
		Episode 5	18 thousand
		Episode 6	9543
		Episode 7	2279
		Episode 8	4011
		Episode9	3856
		Complete edition	84 thousand
小片片说大片	5.362million	Episode 1	1.536 million
		Episode 2	1.042 million

Table 2*Fan Translators of Wanda Vision in Weibo*

Name of bloggers in Weibo	Number of account followers	View count of fan's target texts	
大聪看电影	3.694million	Episode 1,2	0.203 million
		Episode 3	0.36 million
		Episode 4	0.255 million
		Episode 5	0.232 million
		Episode 6	0.204 million
		Episode 7	0.327 million
		Episode 8	0.237 million
		Episode 9	0.366 million
汤圆剧场	0.152million	Episode 1,2	18.8 thousand
		Episode 3	0.175 million
		Episode 4	0.161 million
		Episode 5	13.1 thousand
		Episode 6	19.4 thousand
		Episode 7	5100
		Episode 8	12.1thousand
		Episode 9	0.133million
蔡老板家的长工	0.565million	Episode 1	5400
		Episode 2	5300
		Episode 3	5900
		Episode 4	6200
		Episode 5	9400
成侃电影	0.4702million	Episode 1 ,2	520
		Episode 3	3800
		Episode 4	327
		Episode 5	1300
		Episode 7	269
		Episode 8	715

Table 3*Fan Translators of Wanda Vision in YouTube*

Name of channels in YouTube	Number of account followers	View count of fan's target texts	
大聪看电影	0.458million	Episode 1, 2	0.22 million
		Episode 3	0.13 million
		Episode 4	0.19 million
		Episode 5	0.15 million
		Episode 6	0.15 million
		Episode 7	0.14 million
		Episode 8	0.17 million
		Episode 9	0.19 million
W 的生活旅游_电影版	0.166million	Episode 1, 2	15 thousand
		Episode 3	25 thousand
		Episode 4	14 thousand
		Episode 5	17 thousand
		Episode 6	21 thousand
		Episode 7	15 thousand
		Episode 8	16 thousand
		Episode 9	13 thousand
大卫说电影	4830	Episode 1, 2	784
		Episode 3	3314
		Episode 4	4415
		Episode 5	14 thousand
		Episode 6	21 thousand
		Episode 7	8805
		Episode 8	13thousand
		Episode 9	19thousand
TEEPR 叭啦叭啦研究室	0.604million	Episode 1, 2	90 thousand
		Episode 3	46 thousand
		Episode 4	58 thousand
		Episode 5	70 thousand
		Episode 7	81 thousand
		Episode 8	68 thousand
		Episode9	12 thousand
散装官人	14.4thousand	Episode 1	1566
		Episode 2	1322

王弟说剧	2320	Episode 1, 2	1356
		Episode 3, 4	8264
		Episode 5, 6	1280
		Episode 7, 8	1207
		Finale	1355
		Complete edition	2988
汤圆小剧场	2740	Episode 1, 2	842
		Episode 3	282
		Episode 4	252
		Episode 5	408
		Episode 6	5845
		Episode 7	317
		Episode 8	1597
		Episode 9	398
超粒方	1.01million	Finale	0.71million
		Complete edition	0.77million
小片片说大片	0.142million	Episode 1	6976
		Episode 2	3926
科幻桃小柏		Complete edition	1.01million
小白瞅电影	0.27million	Episode 1, 2	32thousand
		Episode 3	19thousand
		Episode 4	18thousand
		Episode 5	21thousand
		Episode 6	19thousand
		Episode 7	20thousand
		Episode 8	18thousand
		Episode 9	24thousand
我是瓜皮儿	0.161million	Episode 1	66thousand
		Episode 2	60thousand
		Episode 3	79thousand
		Episode 4	63thousand
		Episode 5	86thousand
		Episode 6	69thousand
		Episode 7	52thousand
		Episode 8	76thousand
		Episode 9	0.87million

Through the above table 1, 2 and 3, it is easy to find that Chinese fan translation of *WandaVision* mainly concentrates on three major media platforms, namely bilibili, Weibo and YouTube. Moreover, the main translators largely overlap, which reflects the fact that in new media platforms, the translation of Marvel media texts have formed a specific fan translator community, laying a necessary foundation for this article to explore how fans, as a group,

contribute to the cross-cultural communication of media texts, as well as value of the collaborative creation by fan audience. Besides, target texts by the fan “Dacong Watching Movies” (大聪看电影 in Chinese) not only has a remarkable number of followers and view count, but also has become a typical representative of translation practice across various media platforms. This further illustrates the necessity and rationality of taking fan translation works by him as research sample of the paper.

To ensure typicality of the research, this paper relies on bilibili, the video release platform with the highest amount of fan activities in China. Moreover, it selects fan works by “Dacong Watching Movies” as sample, who is the most prominent Marvel fan translator given that he stably publishes target texts, establishes frequent communication with other fans and takes advantage of different social platforms, making his translation works enjoy most outstanding number of followers.

The Emotional and Cultural Significance of Witch’s Magic

The first layer of fan participation lies in a single cultural image and its related artistic design. Magic is a decisive factor in proceeding of the plot, character image, and emotional expression of the text, and naturally becomes the major target of the fan translator’s engagement.

First of all, the fan translator additionally explains the information related to the villain-witch Geraldine, carefully clarifies the origin of her superpower and her relationship with the protagonist according to previous MCU works, and then analyzes her role in the text’s plot and emotional theme in detail. In this way, fan has played decisive role in interpretation of character relationships and development of the plot about confrontation between good and evil, reflecting intervention of translator’s personal experience and cognition in the text’s design ideas.

In addition, the fan translator supplements and explains the cultural allusion of the witch trial in the text, emphasizing that the intertextuality implies the idealism of religious members for the purity of the soul and the world together with their excessive superstition about fictional things may trigger the public to reflect on the dialectical relationship between good and evil. He further elaborates on how to correctly deal with the comparison between fantasy and reality is crucial for interpersonal relationships and social construction in an era of information technology.

Fan’s supplementation of historical background and cultural information in the translation is conducive to the precise and systematic cross-cultural transmission of semantic, affective and philosophical messages, facilitating the deep emotional and thinking responses of the audience. Thus, the translator’s personal thoughts and knowledge reserve become the key driving factors for interaction between media, the public, social culture and ideology, fully demonstrating the power of “media love” within this audiovisual media that originates from social reality and rebounds on the public’s emotional and spiritual experience.

At the climax of the plot, in view of his own knowledge foundation about magic as a Marvel fan, the blogger selects the dialogue between Wanda and Vision and analyzes deeply on the unparalleled power of magic that makes Wanda drown in past pain and be unable to extricate herself. Fan translator accurately conveys the text’s theme, philosophical connotations, and the author’s train of thought to the audience through his personal experience, determining the realization of media’s emotional power, mental stimulation as well as empathetic value.

In the final episode, the fan translator further makes use of unprompted thinking to reveal the aesthetic value and artistic significance of the text that directly hits the audience's heart through the contrast between bitterness and happiness caused by magic. Therefore, he plays a leading role as decoder of media information and explorer of emotional implications at the same time.

Through the above discussion, the author believes that fan translator has already become an important influencing factor in text design and artistic ideas. Based on personal experience and attitude towards the Marvel brand, he plays critical role in the production, decoding, and dissemination of corporate cultural values, creative concepts, and emotional intentions. His consciousness, thinking, feelings and stance interact closely with the author's ideas, motivations and design propositions, by which media writer and receivers contribute collaboratively to its information output, emotional and philosophical expression, and artistic charm. The text's potential of empathy for the audience's minds and souls and the value under broader social, cultural, and ideological context becomes increasingly profound.

The Emotional Value and Philosophical Connotation of Characters

The second layer of fan participation is the construction of a character network. The life experiences and emotional tendencies of several core characters in the TV series have a strong catalytic effect on transmission of the text's theme, the audience's information acquisition and empathy, together with their intimate relationship with the author and the brand.

First, in the analysis of the first episode, Dacong speculates that the shout in the radio, "Who is doing this to you, Wanda?" indicates that Wanda's personality is divided into two sides of good and evil. Next, he analyzes the character's psychological motivation carefully, gives his personal judgment further, and concludes that Wanda responds to and resolves inner sufferings by herself means that the text begins to discuss the topic of how superheroes digest their own grief rather than being limited to the previous themes of their sacrifice to world peace. Dacong conducts in-depth psychological and spiritual dissection around the text's protagonist, autonomously interprets the design concepts and creative intention reflected by the character network, highlighting his right to express as well as intervention of personal viewpoints and consciousness in the translation of audiovisual texts.

Second, Dacong repeatedly points out key role of the villain Agnes (or Agatha) as core clue of the text's narration. He believes that she is a driving force for Wanda's inner world to be gradually externalized and the mutual effect between character's emotional trauma and the audience's hearts. The fan translator holds that this character arises a profound philosophical question of how superheroes make their extraordinary personal abilities adapt to external emotional stimuli. Moreover, he further explores the emotional functions, philosophical implications, and dramatic tension by Agnes' confrontation with Wanda. Fan translator thus evolves into driller and transmitter of the implicit information and creative conception of the text, showing his strong influence on the sentimental value and philosophical significance of the media.

Third, Dacong supplements and introduces the identity, experience of Geraldine and attributes of her superpower, who is the main intervention force outside the virtual world. Accordingly, he investigates whether external forces can affect Westview town and how they counteract Wanda's magical control, actively decoding the emotional connotations and design logic demonstrated by the figure. Furthermore, Dacong eventually expounds in detail Geraldine's shift of stance from enemy to assistant of Wanda in the final fight against evil forces and

explains why she becomes the only character who can freely travel between the virtual and real spaces. This promotes the philosophical connotations around virtuality and reality, self and superego involved in the media to be more profound and clearer. Fan's decisive role in information creation, artistic conception and cross-cultural transmission of emotional value as well as the autonomous intervention of their individual consciousness and thinking are particularly obvious.

Fourth, relying on his past experience as a fan, Dacong independently speculates the connection between Wanda's younger brother Quicksilver and her psychological state or emotional representation, guesses on Quicksilver's identity and function in this text. Thus, fan translator has higher level of willingness to display personal stance, initiative and thoughts, greater space for expression, and more prominent discourse power and subjectivity in text narration and artistic design.

Fifth, the fan carefully examines the potential implications of special appearance of the fake Vision created by Wanda, infers his personality traits, and consciously imagines how it affects the arrangement of the plot. Finally, he interprets meticulously the philosophical meaning of reactivating Vision's self-awareness through the Theseus paradox and explains it by the robot awakening theory in "Westworld," depicting his rich knowledge reserve, superb cognition and outstanding thinking ability, which helps to inspire spontaneous and active affective connections and ideological interactions between Chinese audiences and text author.

In short, the sample fan translator consciously dissects the hidden connotations and messages from the identities and experiences of the five core characters, representing his decisive role and autonomous power over the text's artistic design, emotional intentions, and philosophical value. His understanding towards the Marvel's character framework plus solid knowledge reserve of philosophy, western religion and art prepare necessary conditions for the cross-cultural dissemination of the text's design ideas, greatly facilitate the production, decoding, and transmission of implied information, serve for the media's pursuit of the audience sympathy, or even loyalty, and promote the media's interactive relationship with real life and popular culture.

Tragic Artistic Conception and Superhero Complex

The last participation layer is the text's whole process of foreshadowing, accumulation, and sublimation of emotion. Fan's intervention in the media text transforms from information decoding within a single cultural element from the text into in-depth dissection of the overall artistic design around characters, and eventually to extraction and externalization of the emotional core.

Emotional Foreshadowing

Initially, the fan translator points out several times that the plot builds up contrasts of joy with sorrow and constructs tragic artistic conception by Wanda's choice of being deeply immersed in sorrow and refusing farewell with lover. Moreover, the fan expresses his own insights, reactions to the dilemma of humanity choice, and attitude towards the overall theme of the text. In this example, the fan translator independently responds to and engages in the media's affective stimulation, shows personal viewpoints and stance, and becomes dominant factor for the emotional value of the work. The investment of self-cognition, psychology, and mind is even more intense.

Emotional Release

As the plot progresses, the fan blogger gradually goes deeper into the media's release of affections. In the eighth episode, Dacong recognizes that Wanda has successively lost her parents, brother, and lover. The emotional breakdown is shaped step by step. Then, the fan translator finds that the sincere expression of love and the irreparable regret in Vision's last words further create a profound emotional impact, turning to be the last straw that breaks Wanda's psychological defense and causes the superhero to be reduced to a puppet of her own life tragedy. The fan tries his best to explore the empathetic power and catalytic effect on the audience's feelings and moods according to the progressive release of emotions and contrast between joys and sorrows in the text. This confirms his notable intervention of individual sentiments and subjective judgments, and also verifies that fan's participatory translation pushes the power of "media love" to the extreme.

Tragic Ending

Dacong further takes advantage of his personal thoughts in depth and ponders on reasons for the tragic nature of the media text, finding that its affective power lies in the hero's possession of superpower but being at a loss in the dilemma between fantasy and reality. Fan's participation enhances emotional appeal and philosophical value of the text, even influences revolution in the connotations of Marvel's superhero theme. At the end of his translation activities, the fan recognizes that the last few shots in the TV series focus on Wanda and Vision's farewell, making up for the regret of their hasty separation in the movie. The intervention of fan's personal thoughts strengthens emotional thickness, expressiveness, and stimulation effect of the text.

Through the above analysis, this paper realizes that fan translators are no longer mechanically accepting and processing information of the original text. Instead, they become individuals with subjective feelings, self-awareness, and freedom of expression. They invest personal cognition and attitude in the text narration, actively interpret, and consciously convey their own feelings towards the text's theme along with emotional and ideological connotations. Through fan's participatory translation, the text's emotional intention, spiritual theme, and the author's creative purpose more directly, accurately, and effectively touch the audience's minds and souls, thereby achieving higher profits of audience's empathy and loyalty, maximizing their sense of intimacy, belonging, and desire for investment mentioned in "media love." As a result, the media's creative benefits and efficiency of cross-cultural communication are also enhanced. At the same time, thanks to the participation of fans, the media also shows more profound aesthetic and artistic charm while exhibiting deeper mutual influence with the macro society and cultural reality.

Conclusion

Wanda Vision breaks through the bloody fight scenes commonly used in superhero films with a mode of warm family drama. The whole story derives from and ends with emotional suffering as well as affective expression. This paper mainly discusses how fan translator analyzes, excavates and actively conveys personal views around the witch's cultural knowledge, the text's emotional theme related to magic and its reflection on social reality, the emotional and philosophical significance of the core character design, the layer-by-layer construction of tragic artistic conception and its emotional power. The author finds that fans have become the leading role in transmitting the media's design philosophy, emotional and ideological intentions. The

investment of personal experience, cognition, consciousness, stance and mind is more obvious, further deepening interaction with the author's attitude and viewpoints. Fans show more and more obvious autonomy and independence in media's cultural and artistic messages, narrative design and emotional output, surmounting the passive situation of pursuing faithfulness to the original content and form in the past while reflecting a higher level of intervention, creative ability and communication with the author's ideas and thinking. Thus, the text's creative concept, aesthetic value and emotional significance are further enriched and sublimated through fan intervention, and finally fulfill more effective and powerful cross-cultural dissemination.

However, in the author's opinion, fans' excavation of media love and emotional stimulation should not be limited to the text's theme, character design, cultural information, and empathetic effects mentioned above. Instead, they need to further explore the reflective function of media on the target language's cultural environment and social reality, thereby forming a more extensive and profound interaction with the audience's emotional tendencies, perception and cultural stance. For example, "Wanda Vision" naturally reminds Chinese audiences of "The Peach Blossom Spring" (桃花源记 in Chinese). The poet Tao Yuanming used the peace and happiness in the fictional space to relieve the mental and spiritual pressure caused by social injustice, unrecognized ambitions and a distressed life. Wanda uses magic to build virtual happy time to deal with the destruction of her emotional world caused by death of relatives and lover. Both of them depend on the comfort and reunion in the illusion to resolve and escape from the loneliness, fear and pain in reality. The connection between Marvel media and Chinese culture, especially its resonance with China's traditional Confucian culture and values have not received due attention and effective solution from fan translator. Therefore, the media text fails to achieve more pertinent emotional appeal and spiritual stimulation for Chinese audiences.

At present, media creation is establishing an increasingly close connection with social life, mainstream cultural phenomena, public ideology and values. As active participators of mass culture and skilled users of social platforms, the responsibility of fan translators is not only to independently investigate and interpret text content, implied information, artistic design, cultural elements and emotional or ideological intentions, but should evolve to explore the deeper resonance and relevance of texts with the target literature, culture, ideology and social life. Conversely, fan translators have to focus on how the participatory translation of media texts acts on their own autonomous rights in cultural creation along with notable and sustainable cultural identity.

Finally, the cross-cultural dissemination of this audiovisual text is in the midst of the global epidemic. The public has to face separation with family members and lovers or even death. Resolving loneliness and digesting grief have become a problem that all social members must solve properly. Marvel chose to transform into delicate and sincere emotional expression during this special period, the fundamental reason of which is that by discussing how characters deal with lonely life and the pain of farewell, it aims at providing timely inspiration and guidance for the audience to reply to emotional difficulties caused by this social phenomenon. However, the fan's intervention in the two-way interaction between media, social issues and cultural phenomenon is also insufficient.

Referring to the theory of "media love," the correlation between media and the daily life, emotional experience and spiritual world of the public is increasingly prominent, which also affects and even reshapes the relationship between social members and various social aspects. In the face of social and cultural phenomena and practical problems in the real world, fans are

supposed to take advantage of their rich knowledge or experience as well as emotional and cognitive investment, through which to play a more comprehensive role in exploring how media texts echo the target culture and social issues and meanwhile rebound on public life, cultural construction and ideological development of the target society. Eventually, fan translators become a dominant force in the text's creative value, affective or ideological orientation and aesthetic charm.

The author holds that this research breaks through the traditional unequal status between translators and authors, the limitations on the translator's creativity and the one-way faithful relationship between target text and source text. It clearly proves progress and innovation of the interrelationship of media texts with politics, culture, ideology and social life. Moreover, it is strongly enlightening for transformation of translator's behaviors, strategies and methods, gives impetus to integration and interdisciplinary development between translation and communication studies, and promotes expansion on the definition of "translation" and the research horizon of translation studies.

In future research, the author believes that it is imperative to further explore how fans correctly handle the influence of their own interests, especially negative judgments, on information decoding and emotional intervention, intensively study on the access to evolution of participatory strategies and enhancement of fan's cultural status in translation and cross-cultural communication, and finally seek for more sustainable, extensive and profound translation participation. Based on the theory of "media love," it is also necessary to discuss how to carry forward the closer connection between media and target culture, ideology and public life through translation practices, while pursuing reasonable ways to attract and motivate non-fan groups to expand communication benefits of media.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content in the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Framing the Ethical Crisis of AI-Generated Images: Social Media Discourses, Intellectual Property, and Public Sentiment in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study analyzes how Indonesian users on X (formerly Twitter) frame the ethical implications of AI-generated visual content. Through qualitative discourse analysis of 150 Indonesian-language tweets, interpreted via Entman's Framing Theory, the research identifies how problems are defined, causes diagnosed, and remedies promoted. The analysis revealed five dominant frames. The most prevalent was misinformation and deepfakes (26.6%), which highlights threats to public trust and demands legislative action. This was followed by a morally charged consent and data exploitation frame (20%). Frames diagnosing economic harm included authorship and ownership confusion (16.6%) and creative labor devaluation (13.3%). A significant optimistic and utilitarian frame (23.3%) celebrated AI's potential while still calling for ethical guardrails. Applying Crisis Informatics, the study shows these frames are disseminated through horizontal, peer-to-peer (C2C) communication, characterized by storytelling and solidarity, and vertical, citizen-to-authority (C2A) communication, which is more confrontational and demands institutional accountability. Theoretically, this work expands Framing Theory by applying it to decentralized social media and extends Crisis Informatics to gradual technological disruptions. The study concludes that Indonesian social media functions as an active incubator for ethical norms, with users co-producing frames that highlight the urgent need for culturally responsive AI governance and center a crucial Global South perspective.

Keywords: AI-generated content, framing theory, social media discourse, crisis informatics, Indonesia

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Introduction

Indonesia is one of the most socially active countries in the world, ranking among the top five global users of X (formerly Twitter) in 2024 (We Are Social, 2024). Social media in this context serves not merely as a tool for entertainment but as a central site for cultural negotiation, crisis discussion, and civic engagement. Indonesian users increasingly turn to platforms like X to voice public concerns, share ethical critiques, and push for institutional accountability, particularly in spaces where government regulation and corporate responsibility lag behind technological innovation. This digital ecosystem forms a vibrant public sphere where technology, politics, culture, and crisis communication intersect.

In recent years, the emergence of generative AI, especially AI-generated visual content, has introduced new forms of what scholars in Crisis Informatics describe as “slow-burning crises” (Palen et al., 2009; Starbird & Palen, 2011). Tools such as Midjourney, DALL·E, and OpenAI’s Sora have enabled users to produce highly realistic visual narratives, yet they simultaneously raise ethical questions around data consent, creative authorship, and misinformation. The circulation of Ghibli-style images, the rise of deepfake videos, and the commodification of AI outputs in Indonesia have fueled online discussions about exploitation, intellectual property (IP) theft, and the erosion of cultural authenticity (Ghose et al., 2024; Hasan, 2024). These concerns occur against a backdrop where regulatory infrastructures remain underdeveloped and where creators often lack institutional protection.

The Indonesian creative economy encompassing digital art, music, animation, and content creation has expanded rapidly in the absence of strong IP frameworks. As AI tools become more accessible, Indonesian artists and creators increasingly find their work mimicked, scraped, or reproduced without consent or compensation. In response, X has emerged as an informal yet influential arena for what this study conceptualizes as ethical crisis communication: a collective process where personal grievances transform into public frames of injustice, resistance, and calls for reform. Discourses surrounding AI technologies thus do not emerge in a vacuum but are embedded in broader anxieties about labor, identity, and technological power.

To analyze how these discourses unfold, this research draws on Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), which identifies four basic framing functions: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral evaluations, and suggesting remedies. Frames matter because they shape how audiences interpret issues, assign responsibility, and imagine possible solutions. Entman (1993) emphasized that framing is inherently selective—highlighting some aspects of perceived reality while omitting others.

Building on Entman’s foundational work, scholars argue that social media transform framing into an interactive, participatory process. This process operates on both macro and micro levels: the macro-level concerns how journalists and communicators present information to resonate with existing schemas, while the micro-level focuses on how individuals use this information and its presentation features to form their own impressions (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). On digital platforms such as X, these selections are no longer controlled solely by elites or media gatekeepers but are increasingly co-constructed by users who engage, remix, challenge, and circulate frames in real time (Valenzuela et al., 2017). This interactive quality is especially relevant for emerging technologies like generative AI, where established normative guidelines are lacking. As users navigate uncertainty, they articulate moral narratives—labeling AI

practices as “theft,” “cultural exploitation,” “innovation,” or “inevitable progress”—each carrying distinct implications for public perception and policy debates.

The platform itself plays a critical role in this process. Twitter’s hybrid nature as both a media platform and a political space enhances the power of framing, where actors—from political movements to individual users—shape public discourse through algorithm-driven content, influencing public perception and often deepening polarization (Rabadan, 2022). Research highlights that hashtags have traditionally served as key framing devices to establish and direct virtual communities (Güran & Özarslan, 2022). However, in Indonesia, user behavior has evolved; people often tweet full opinions within the text itself, making hashtags a less central framing tool. Hence, this study focuses on the entire tweet as the unit of analysis, rather than merely the hashtag, to better capture the nuanced ways in which frames are constructed in this specific context. To strengthen the dependability and confirmability of the interpretive framing process in this research, coding procedures were benchmarked against Entman’s operational definitions, ensuring that analytical categories remained consistent with the theoretical model rather than influenced solely by researcher intuition.

This study also integrates Crisis Informatics, a framework that reconceptualizes crises as socially constructed, evolving processes rather than discrete events. Initially developed to analyze communication during natural disasters, Crisis Informatics has since expanded to examine slow-developing, technologically mediated crises (Reuter et al., 2018). Within this framework, platforms like X function as discursive arenas where risks are debated, meanings are negotiated, and calls for accountability are amplified. A key contribution of Reuter’s Crisis Communication Matrix (2018) is its mapping of multilateral information flows across four channels: authorities to citizens (A2C), citizens to citizens (C2C), authorities to authorities (A2A), and citizens to authorities (C2A). In the Indonesian context, C2C dynamics dominate, visible through personal testimony, peer critique, and networked solidarity. At the same time, C2A interactions emerge as users tag institutions such as the DPR or BSSN, demanding regulatory intervention and signaling public dissatisfaction with institutional inertia.

This multilateral communication environment aligns with Jin and Austin’s (2017) Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) Model, which highlights how contemporary crises unfold in hybrid spaces where publics actively co-construct narratives. Indonesian users are thus not merely reacting to technological change but actively framing its ethical boundaries, defining harms, and pushing for accountability from both the state and private sector.

Despite the richness of these interactions, scholarship on AI ethics remains heavily concentrated in Western contexts, focusing on legal, philosophical, or regulatory concerns (Owen et al., 2019). While valuable, this focus overlooks bottom-up discursive practices in the Global South, particularly Southeast Asia, where publics often respond to technological shifts through informal debate rather than institutionalized consultation. This study responds to this gap by examining how Indonesian users on X frame the transition from AI-generated images to AI-generated video as an ethical crisis.

Between April and June 2025, discourse on X revealed five dominant thematic frames: ownership and authorship confusion, consent and data exploitation, creative labor devaluation, misinformation and deepfakes, and cautious optimism toward AI tools. These frames reflect both cultural anxieties and pragmatic concerns about technological disruption. The analysis distinguishes between C2C discourse—such as debates on the legitimacy of AI art—and C2A engagements, including public demands for policy intervention.

To ensure analytic trustworthiness, the study employed Holsti's reliability formula to assess coding consistency, producing a 100% agreement rate—indicating full alignment between coders on the identification of Entman's four framing functions across the sampled data. This supports the dependability and confirmability of the study's interpretive claims. Nevertheless, a methodological limitation should be acknowledged: the Boolean string used for data collection is necessarily limited by the researcher's algorithmic construction. Any keyword-based approach risks omitting relevant posts that employ unconventional phrasing, slang, or emergent terminology. Thus, while the dataset is systematically collected, it does not claim exhaustive representation of all AI-related discourse on X.

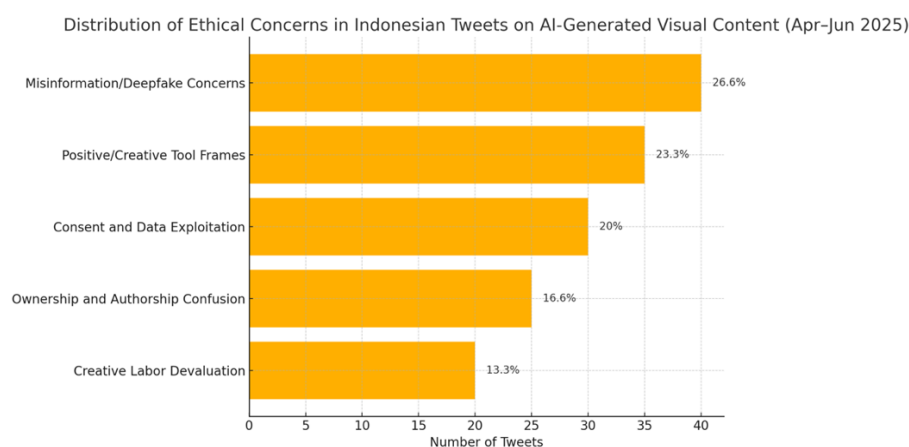
Overall, this paper contributes to growing scholarship on social media crisis communication by examining ethical, slow-burning crises in a non-Western digital context. Combining Framing Theory with Crisis Informatics provides a robust lens for understanding how Indonesian publics negotiate emerging technologies in ways that blur the boundaries between crisis, culture, and communication.

Discussion and Conclusion

While this study is grounded in qualitative discourse analysis informed by Framing Theory, it includes descriptive frequency data to contextualize thematic prevalence within the dataset. These numerical references are derived from a purposive sample of 150 Indonesian-language tweets posted by users on X (formerly Twitter) between April and June 2025. We do not aim for statistical generalization, instead, they serve as anchors indicating the relative dominance of specific discursive frames. Across this period, five dominant themes emerged and are presented here from the most to the least frequent: manipulation/misinformation and deepfakes (26.6%), optimistic or utilitarian framings of AI tools (23.3%), consent and data exploitation (20%), ownership and authorship confusion (16.6%), and creative labor devaluation (13.3%).

Figure 1

Distribution of Ethical Concerns in Indonesian Tweets on AI-Generated Visual Content (April–June 2025)



These frames reflect public anxieties and aspirations coalescing around the ethical implications of generative AI technologies in Indonesia's digital public sphere. They are articulated through both horizontal (citizen-to-citizen, C2C) and vertical (citizen-to-authority, C2A) interactions that together illuminate the dynamics of a slow-burning ethical crisis. One not characterized by a single triggering event but by cumulative experiences of injustice, displacement, and perceived regulatory inadequacy. In line with Entman's (1993) definition of framing as

selection and salience, the tweets show users actively defining problems, assigning causes, issuing moral judgments, and proposing remedies in near-real time; and consistent with Crisis Informatics and SMCC (Jin & Austin, 2017), these frames travel across hybrid networks where publics co-construct, contest, and recirculate meaning.

Manipulation, Deepfakes, and Misinformation (26.6%)

The most dominant theme in the dataset pertains to the threat of AI-driven misinformation and manipulation—particularly via deepfake technologies. Users repeatedly express alarm about AI in political misinformation, scams, and reputational sabotage. Tweets frequently cite incidents where AI-generated voices or videos deceive, defraud, or harass, framing the phenomenon as a systemic vulnerability rather than a collection of isolated bad actors.

An illustrative example comes from @Leslie_Halina (June 25, 2025):

“Ada serangan deepfake, ada penipuan berbasis suara AI, ada peretasan SIM card. Tapi UUnya? Gak ada yang jalan. Indonesia darurat keamanan siber, jangan ketinggalan zaman.”

[There are deepfake attacks, AI-based voice scams, SIM card hacks. But the laws? None of them are working. Indonesia is facing a cybersecurity emergency, don't fall behind the times.]

Problem definition in this frame is stark: AI is cast as an amplifier of deception capable of eroding informational integrity. Causal attribution is dual—aimed both at the rapid deployment of generative systems (developmental overreach) and at regulatory lag (policy underreach). Moral evaluation is unambiguous (dangerous, unethical, corrosive to trust), while treatment recommendations tilt strongly toward state intervention: stronger cybersecurity law, clearer liability regimes, rapid response units, remedies for victims (e.g., notice-and-takedown with due process), and public-facing verification infrastructure.

From a Crisis Informatics perspective (Reuter et al., 2018), this theme epitomizes a slow-burning crisis: no single rupture point, but an accretion of harms that culminate in collective alarm. The networked flows are high along both axes of Reuter's matrix: C2C (alerts, examples, warnings) and C2A (direct tagging of DPR/Kominfo/BSSN). In SMCC terms (Jin & Austin, 2017), publics do not wait for institutional frames; they pre-frame the crisis and pressure authorities to respond, evidencing a bottom-up logic of crisis narration where moral vocabularies (“darurat,” “penipuan,” “bahaya”) scaffold urgency.

Optimism and Normalization Frames (23.3%)

Against this backdrop of risk, a countervailing optimism casts AI as useful, democratizing, and pragmatic. Users highlight improvements in productivity, creativity, and entrepreneurship, commonly sharing quick wins (drafting lesson plans, composing lyrics, summarizing readings). The tone is practical rather than celebratory, and many posts carry implicit caveats about responsible use.

For example, @nawabinekanews (June 17, 2025) notes:

“Belakangan, media sosial ramai dengan eksperimen unik mengenai ChatGPT yang bisa menulis lagu. Netizen Indonesia pun tidak ketinggalan, dan berbagai lirik lagu hasil karya AI ini mulai mencuri perhatian.”

[Lately, social media has been buzzing with unique experiments using ChatGPT to write songs... AI-generated lyrics are starting to catch attention.]

In Entman's terms, these posts define the problem not as AI itself but as how it is used. Causal attribution falls on misusers or on gaps in guidance. Moral evaluation is cautiously positive (AI as *enabler*), and treatment recommendations emphasize ethical integration: transparency labels, consent-respecting prompts, skill-building, and shared norms to discourage plagiarism or deception. The utilitarian calculus flips: net benefits (speed, access, ideation) can outweigh risks if guardrails exist.

Communication flows here are predominantly C2C: peer-to-peer tips, tutorials, and moral suasion ("gunakan dengan etis"). C2A is muted, which itself is telling: optimism often thrives where state discourse is absent, implying publics take up the slack of digital literacy provisioning. In post-broadcast environments (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2017), normalization proceeds via viral pedagogy—snackable know-how that routinizes new tools while implicitly delimiting ethical boundaries ("AI untuk ide awal, hasil akhir tetap manusia").

Consent and Data Exploitation (20%)

A third, strongly normative frame revolves around consent and data exploitation, extending beyond creative works to voice, biometrics, and likeness. Users worry about unauthorized scraping and the downstream production of deepfakes, impersonations, and malicious edits. The gravitational center here is bodily autonomy and digital dignity—not merely IP rights.

A pointed thread by @angelicass99 (June 16, 2025) exemplifies this emphasis:

"Deepfake bukan cuma soal tipu-tipu, tapi bisa rusak mental dan nama baik orang. Indonesia Darurat Dasar Hukum Keamanan Siber. @DPR_RI jangan tunggu korban terus berjatuhan!"

[Deepfake isn't just about trickery; it can ruin mental health and reputations. Indonesia urgently needs a legal framework for cybersecurity. @DPR_RI don't wait for more victims!]

Problem definitions stress violations of personhood and coercive asymmetries of data power. Causal attributions are joint: corporations (training on public data without consent, opacity in data provenance) and the state (regulatory vacuum) are co-blamed. Moral evaluations are deontic: non-consensual use is wrong, regardless of output quality. Remedies concentrate on data governance—consent protocols, opt-out registries, watermarking/provenance, biometric protections, and accessible complaint pathways.

From the vantage of Crisis Informatics, these are the ethics of a creeping disaster—not headline-grabbing, yet psychologically and socially erosive. The C2C strand amplifies lived accounts and micro-advice (privacy settings, reporting procedures); the C2A strand explicitly summons regulators ("jangan tunggu korban"). The frame's normative hardness—centered on consent—helps stabilize claims across diverse cases, making it a powerful mobilizing script even in fragmented attention economies.

Ownership and Authorship Confusion (16.6%)

Closely allied to consent, but trained on cultural production, is the frame of authorship/ownership confusion. Users question the legitimacy of outputs from models like Midjourney, DALL·E, and ChatGPT when these are trained on human-made datasets without permission or attribution. The emphasis is on moral economies of creativity—credit, acknowledgment, and the line between inspiration and appropriation.

A representative post by @PerempuanWaos (April 3, 2025) reads:

“Bahkan cuma buat sekedar profil picture akun X aku aja aku cari artis yang open commission gak mau pakek AI atau ChatGPT itu... Krn pas aku belajar Computational Linguistics aku tahu bgmn kerja AI. Dia ‘mencuri’ dri data yg ada.”

[Even for a simple X profile picture, I look for an artist who takes commissions rather than using AI or ChatGPT... When I studied Computational Linguistics, I learned how AI works. It ‘steals’ from existing data.]

Here, problem definition centers on systemic exploitation; cause is assigned to unregulated data pipelines and corporate opacity; moral evaluation frames AI outputs as derivative or stolen; and solutions range from consumer ethics (commission human artists) to legal reform (clearer derivative-work standards, training-data disclosures). Notably, the debate carries culturalist undertones: anxiety about losing authenticity and local sensibilities to homogenizing model priors.

In network terms, this theme activates C2C solidarity (amplifying human artists, sharing commission lists) more than C2A. The frame personalizes ethical choice (vote with your wallet) while keeping the collective dimension alive (demand transparency), showcasing the layered nature of bottom-up governance in a post-broadcast media ecology.

Devaluation of Creative Labor (13.3%)

The least frequent but still salient theme is the devaluation of creative labor. Users worry that AI saturates markets with cheap, instant content, undercutting livelihoods in illustration, design, music, and writing. The mood here is weary irony and economic realism—not that AI makes “bad art,” but that it reprices human craft to near-zero at the low end while platform algorithms reward volume over originality.

As @jurnalismetis (April 2, 2025) quipped:

“Udah cari duit dari Ghibli chatGPT, dikasih watermark pula. Indonesia banget.”

[Already making money from Ghibli-style ChatGPT art, and they even slapped on a watermark. Typical Indonesia.]

The problem is labor displacement and market dilution; causes include consumer appetite for low-cost novelty, the efficiency of generative systems, and platform incentives. Moral evaluation laments cultural cheapening and unfair competition. Remedies proposed by users include consumer boycotts, commission culture, and calls for industry standards (e.g., provenance tags, ethical marketplaces, fair-use guardrails adaptive to the generative era).

Although C2A appeals exist (e.g., grant schemes, cultural labor protections), this frame remains chiefly C2C, emphasizing mutual aid and community patronage as buffers.

Across the five frames, publics enact Entman's four functions with impressive granularity, evidencing lay issue entrepreneurship: defining harms (deception, exploitation, appropriation, displacement), assigning blame (corporations, lax governance, misusers), evaluating morality ("curang," "tidak etis," "darurat"), and proposing remedies (law, literacy, labels, livelihoods). Importantly, frames often co-occur: a deepfake case (1) invokes consent (3), folds into authorship debates (4), and concludes with calls for law (1 or 3) or norms (2). This braiding is characteristic of slow-burning crises: publics build multi-layered narratives that compress technical, legal, and cultural concerns into mobilizing storylines.

In Reuter's Crisis Communication Matrix, we observe:

1. C2C dominance in awareness, pedagogy, and solidarity (frames 2, 4, and 5);
2. C2A activation strongest in mistrust/misinformation and consent (frames 1 and 3), where moral stakes and perceived state failures are highest;
3. A2C remains relatively faint in the sampled period, contributing to a perception of regulatory latency.
4. A2A (institutional coordination) is opaque to publics, which itself becomes evidence for claims of inadequacy.

Analytic reliability was assessed with Holsti's intercoder reliability, yielding 100% agreement on the identification of Entman's four framing functions across sampled tweets supporting the dependability and confirmability of coding judgments. Nevertheless, a key limitation persists: the Boolean string used in data collection is necessarily constrained by the researcher's algorithmic construction. Any keyword-based approach risks omitting relevant posts that use slang, memes, images without text, or emergent terms outside the query. In addition, prioritizing the "Top" tab means the dataset skews toward higher-engagement posts, potentially favoring more salient or polarized framings. The purposive nature of the 150-tweet sample also precludes claims of statistical representativeness across Indonesian X.

Taken together, these constraints counsel caution in generalizing beyond the sampled discourse; however, they do not negate the internal coherence of the observed patterns nor the analytic utility of applying theory-driven codes to high-salience conversations. The combination of perfect intercoder agreement and clear recurrence of thematic signals across months supports moving from methodological qualifications to a substantive synthesis of how publics narrate AI's risks and benefits. In that spirit, the following section consolidates the dataset's most persistent frames, treating the frequencies as contextual indicators of salience, not population estimates, to illuminate how Indonesian users articulate ethical boundaries, attribute responsibility, and propose remedies in a slow-burning crisis.

This study explored how Indonesian users on X (formerly Twitter) frame ethical concerns surrounding AI-generated visual content, with particular attention to the transition from image-based outputs to video and voice modalities. Drawing on Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) and Crisis Informatics (Palen et al., 2009; Reuter et al., 2018), and informed by Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (Jin & Austin, 2017), the analysis mapped five dominant frames within 150 purposively sampled tweets posted between April and June 2025. Presented from the most to the least prevalent, these were: manipulation/misinformation and deepfakes (26.6%), optimism/utilitarianism (23.3%), consent and data exploitation (20%), ownership/authorship confusion (16.6%), and creative labor devaluation (13.3%).

First, the predominance of manipulation and deepfakes underscores a trust crisis at the core of Indonesia's AI discourse. Publics perceive a deteriorating information environment where synthetic media can be weaponized to deceive, defraud, or humiliate. This theme fuses C2C vigilance (peer warnings, case amplification) with C2A pressure (tagging DPR/Kominfo/BSSN), narrating AI not as a neutral tool but as a threat multiplier in an under-regulated ecosystem. In policy terms, this points to urgent needs for forensic capacity, clear remedial pathways, and harm-reduction infrastructures (e.g., provenance systems compatible with privacy rights and due process).

Second, the substantial share of optimistic/normalization frames reminds us that publics are not uniformly alarmed. Users also leverage AI for productivity, ideation, education, and creative play, often crafting peer pedagogy for ethical use. This strand suggests the feasibility of co-regulation models that blend baseline law (to address deception and exploitation) with community standards and platform design (labels, friction for risky uses, defaults that privilege consent). Put differently, optimism shows that agency persists: with context-appropriate scaffolding, publics can domesticate generative tools without capitulating to their worst affordances.

Third, the consent/data exploitation frame centers digital dignity. Beyond copyright, Indonesian users foreground personhood (voice, face, gait, and other biometrics) calling for explicit consent, data provenance, and redress. This deontic orientation strengthens claims even absent concrete damages: non-consensual use is wrong. Policy pathways here include data-protection updates, biometric-specific safeguards, auditability, and user-centric controls (e.g., opt-outs that travel downstream through model life cycles).

Fourth, authorship/ownership confusion reflects a broader cultural politics of creation. Users want acknowledgment and traceability, not only legal certainty. This calls for practical mechanisms, training-data transparency, creator registries, provenance/watermarking, and cultural initiatives that valorize human craft (e.g., commission marketplaces, certification for "human-made," educational campaigns against casual appropriation). The frame's strength lies in its everyday ethics: consumers can act now (commissioning, crediting) even as policy lags.

Fifth, concerns about creative labor devaluation expose the political economy of platformized culture. Generative AI compresses costs and accelerates supply, benefiting aggregators and early adopters while pressuring independent creators. Beyond moral suasion, this invites industry and state to consider supportive infrastructures: funding, training, collective bargaining innovations for digital creatives, discoverability tweaks that reward originality, and procurement or grant programs that prioritize human-in-the-loop creation.

Across frames, publics enact Entman's four functions with striking fluency: they diagnose harms, assign responsibility, evaluate morality, and prescribe remedies. The Crisis Informatics lens clarifies why this matters: AI ethics here is not a one-off controversy but a slow-burning process through which publics learn, coordinate, and pressure. The SMCC perspective further shows that these negotiations occur in hybrid spaces where institutional voice is one among many, and often lagging. Put simply, Indonesian users are governing from below: not waiting for official scripts but authoring the ethical contours of AI through everyday discourse.

Methodologically, the study's Holsti intercoder reliability of 100% on Entman's framing functions supports the dependability and confirmability of coding decisions. Still, we acknowledge constraints: the Boolean query inevitably filters reality through researcher-

chosen terms, potentially missing slang, imagery-only posts, and emergent vocabulary. Focusing the “Top” tab introduces engagement bias, and purposive sampling (150 tweets over three months) means the findings are analytically rich rather than statistically representative.

Implications follow on several levels:

1. Governance: Pair hard law (anti-deepfake statutes with victim-centric remedies, biometric protections, data-provenance requirements) with soft infrastructures (public verification channels, model cards accessible to non-experts, transparency norms for training data within IP/privacy constraints).
2. Platforms: Build friction for high-risk uses (voice cloning, face swapping), invest in user-facing provenance cues, and support creator visibility (signals that privilege originality, provenance-aware ranking).
3. Publics and Education: Leverage existing C2C pedagogy, formalize it via digital literacy modules that address consent, attribution, and misinformation hygiene, amplifying what users already teach one another.
4. Creative Economies: Pilot ethical marketplaces, commission platforms, and funding schemes that stabilize human-centered creation, including co-creation models (human + AI) that preserve authorship clarity and fair value capture.

Future research should broaden both temporal and platform scope: track whether these frames stabilize or mutate during election cycles, major platform policy shifts, or high-profile deepfake cases; compare X with TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube, where video-first affordances may intensify certain harms or, conversely, strengthen creator communities. Mixed-methods designs (e.g., combining digital trace ethnography with interviews of creators, policymakers, and technologists) can triangulate how frames influence practice, from reporting workflows and model governance to creative labor strategies.

In sum, Indonesian discourse on AI-generated visuals is neither uniformly dystopian nor naively celebratory. It is plural, negotiated, and pragmatic, reflecting a public that is at once vigilant about deception and exploitation and resourceful in appropriating tools for everyday value. The five frames detailed here delineate a civic cartography of AI ethics in a Global South context. One where users leverage social media to name harms, set boundaries, and demand accountability, while also domesticating technology to widen participation in cultural and economic life. That dual motion, resistance and adaptation, is the hallmark of a slow-burning crisis managed in public view.

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