

Commodifying sadness: The role of women as emotional laborers on instagram

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Article information	Abstract
Submitted: 2024-09-10 Revised: 2024-11-13 Published: 2024-12-30	This research problem originates from the phenomenon of commodifying sadness on Instagram, where women often act as emotional laborers through comments on sad songs. This raises questions about how emotions are produced, expressed, and utilized in the context of digital culture and music consumption. The aim of this study is to describe and analyze forms of commodified sadness reflected in comments on Instagram posts featuring Indonesian sad songs. This research applies netnography, using online ethnography to examine Indonesian Instagram users' responses to sad songs. Data were collected from popular posts and comments, then analyzed through thematic analysis. All data were taken from public accounts and anonymized in accordance with ethical research standards. The findings reveal that comments are categorized into three groups positive, negative, and neutral with the majority expressing negative emotions such as regret and emotional outpourings. The analysis also identifies themes of emotional commodification, emotional labor, user engagement, cultural context, gender dynamics, and the impact of Instagram through influencers, algorithms, and digital marketing on music consumption. This study contributes to digital media and popular culture scholarship by demonstrating how Instagram comments on sad songs reflect emotions, gender dynamics, and cultural contexts. The findings broaden understanding of emotional commodification, emotional labor, and the role of social media in shaping music consumption in Indonesia.

Keywords:
commodification,
emotional labour,
Instagram, indonesian sad
songs,



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To cite this article (APA Style):

Hidayati, N. N., & Agoro, S. (2024). Commodifying sadness: The role of women as emotional laborers on instagram. *An-Nisa Journal of Gender Studies*, 17(2), 83–98. <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v17i2.290>

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INTRODUCTION

Social media, particularly Instagram, has transformed the music industry by integrating visual and auditory experiences that enable closer interaction between artists and fans. Helal and Ozuem (2019), Prey (2020), and de-Miguel-Molina et al. (2021) note that Instagram helps artists build personal brands and develop online communities through direct engagement, such as likes, comments, and messages, which increases loyalty. Nwagwu and Akintoye (2024) emphasize that Instagram also facilitates music discovery by dismantling traditional barriers once controlled by industry gatekeepers, using hashtags and algorithmic promotion to reach wider audiences. According to Hesmondhalgh et al. (2019), Arrieta (2020), and Demyen (2024), this shift has significantly reshaped the pathways through which new music circulates. Scholars such as Chen et al. (2022), Murphy and Hume (2023), Carpio-Jimenez et al. (2024), and Zhang (2024) further highlight the visual dimension of Instagram, which enables musicians to construct compelling identities that attract and sustain audiences. Beyond promotion, DeNora (2000), Terranova (2000), and Arcy (2016) argue that the commodification of emotions especially sadness in music shows how social media embeds songs into users' emotional lives, positioning music as both cultural expression and marketable commodity.

Preliminary studies indicate that Instagram has reshaped user interactions with music by integrating visual and audio elements to enhance engagement. Highfield and Leaver (2016) as well as Pearce et al. (2018) argue that the platform fosters active user participation in music consumption through features such as sharing, liking, and commenting, which expand reach and support the commodification of music. Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin (2020) highlight that features like Stories and IGTV enable artists to share music footage and behind-the-scenes content, thereby deepening audience connections. This dynamic, according to Weisser (2012), Wayne (2011), and Krause et al. (2020), encourages the formation of music-centered communities where fans engage emotionally and share personal experiences in comment sections, creating a collective and therapeutic experience. Such interactions also provide artists with valuable insights into the emotional impact of their work, shaping creative decisions. Arrieta (2020) and Harry & Muthusamy (2024) further emphasize that Instagram fosters a participatory culture in which fans act as active contributors to the cultural and emotional value of music, illustrating the evolving relationship between artists and audiences in the digital era.

Although previous studies have highlighted Instagram's role in reshaping user interactions with music through visual-audio integration, participatory culture, and emotional engagement, research has largely focused on general fan artist interactions and community-building. However, little attention has been given to the commodification of emotions, particularly sadness, in the context of Indonesian music on Instagram. Existing studies tend to examine global trends without exploring how cultural contexts shape emotional expressions and user engagement in digital platforms. Moreover, the influence of influencers, algorithms, and digital marketing strategies on music consumption and the emotional labor of users remains underexplored. This gap underscores the need for research that specifically investigates how Indonesian sad songs on Instagram generate emotional work, commodify user expressions, and contribute to new modes of music promotion and consumption in the digital era.

This study aims to explore the commodification of emotions through music, specifically Indonesian sad songs on Instagram, by exploring the theme of emotions in user comments and how these emotions are marketed. This study will analyze the work of emotions on Instagram, the influence of cultural context on user engagement, and their emotional responses to music content. In addition, the study will assess the impact of Instagram on music consumption, considering the role of influencers, algorithms, and digital marketing strategies. The aim is to provide a deeper understanding of how social media changes music consumption and promotion, making emotions

and personal experiences an important aspect of music marketing in the digital age. The benefits of this study include increasing academic understanding of the commodification of emotions in music and its influence on consumer behavior, more effective user engagement strategies, and support for policies that ethically encourage creative industries' growth. These results will support the music industry and digital marketing in designing effective campaigns to increase fan engagement and loyalty.

This study proposes the primary hypothesis that commodified emotions through Indonesian sad songs on Instagram increase user engagement, with users more actively expressing emotions and personal experiences through comments. As a secondary hypothesis, it is assumed that digital marketing strategies, including influencers and Instagram algorithms, amplify the effects of emotional commodification, thereby increasing the reach and consumption of Indonesian sad music. An additional hypothesis proposes that cultural context influences user responses and interactions to sad music content in Indonesia, with different variations in user engagement based on their cultural background. Exploratively, it is hypothesized that authentic interactions between artists and fans through direct comments on Instagram strengthen fan loyalty and support the formation of a closer community. This hypothesis aims to examine the influence of emotions in music commodification on user interactions and marketing effectiveness on Instagram and to understand the cultural dynamics that influence these interactions in the Indonesian social and cultural context.

METHOD

The method employed in this study is netnography, an adaptation of ethnography designed for digital contexts. Kozinets (2015) and Kerley (2024) emphasize that this approach is particularly suitable for analyzing behaviors and interactions within online communities, making it relevant to research on social and cultural dynamics in digital spaces. This method is also considered effective for understanding how Instagram users in Indonesia respond to sad songs through their comments. The data collection process was conducted in two stages. First, the researcher identified and selected Instagram posts related to popular Indonesian sad songs. To achieve this, Instagram's search and discovery tools were utilized to locate posts with high engagement levels measured by the number of comments, likes, and shares. According to Gobo (2008) and Bengtsson (2016), such a strategy ensures that the collected data reflects broad and significant reactions from the user community.

In the second stage, the researcher collected comments from the selected Instagram posts. The sampling process sought to include a diverse range of comments representing various artists, song themes, and user demographics. This diversity, as suggested by Hesmondhalgh et al. (2021), is crucial for capturing broader perspectives and understanding the multiple ways audiences engage with music. To analyze the data, thematic analysis was employed. Darvish and Bick (2023) argue that this method is effective for identifying recurring patterns and meanings within qualitative data. Following their approach, the researcher categorized and coded the comments, grouping them according to similarities in content or sentiment. This enabled the identification of dominant themes and recurring emotional expressions. Through this process, it became possible to draw conclusions regarding common reactions to Indonesian sad songs and to explore how these emotional responses are commodified within online discussions.

Ethically, the use of ethnography in online contexts raises important concerns regarding privacy and consent, since it typically involves data from publicly available sources. Kozinets (2015) emphasizes that researchers must prioritize protecting participants by safeguarding their identities and ensuring responsible data use. Similarly, Kerley (2024) argues that anonymizing user information is a necessary step to uphold ethical standards in digital ethnography. Following these

principles, this study only used data from public Instagram profiles and posts, with all identifiable information anonymized. By adhering to these ethical guidelines, the research maintains scientific integrity while respecting the rights and privacy of participants.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

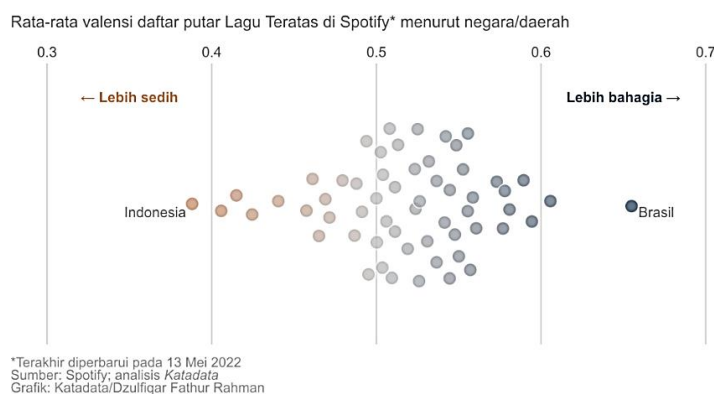
Result

Emotional commodification: Themes identified in comments on Indonesian sad songs

Quoting data from goodstats.id, it was stated that the music preferences of Indonesian society were primarily towards pop music, followed by dangdut, K-pop, religious music, jazz, R&B and hip-hop, rock, classical, indie, and J-pop or J-rock. Furthermore, according to katadata.co.id, it was mentioned that music listeners in Indonesia had a preference for sad, melancholic, or angry songs. Data from Spotify, a Stockholm-based audio streaming platform, indicated this preference. Spotify used an algorithm to determine how positive or happy a song was on a scale between 0 and 1. This perception measure was called valence. The lower the valence, the sadder the song was considered. For instance, the song “Apalah (Arti Menunggu)” by Raisa had a valence as low as 0.29, whereas “Mobil Balap” by Naif scored 0.84. The top playlist or the 50 most popular songs over the past week on Spotify reflected that users in Indonesia tended to listen to sad music. The average valence of the top playlist in Indonesia was estimated to be only 0.38. This valence data, as of May 13, 2022, was the lowest among similar playlists for other countries or regions on Spotify.

Figure 1

Indonesian Listeners' Preference for Sad Songs is Greater



Many Indonesian singers are known for performing sad songs, including Mahalini, Lyodra, Tiara Andini, and Meiska. Mahalini is popular for hits such as Mati-Matian, Sial, Sisa Rasa, and Melawan Restu. Lyodra has performed songs like Tak Selalu Memiliki, Pesan Terakhir, Tak Dianggap, Dibanding Dia, and Jika Bosan. Tiara Andini also released emotional tracks such as Menyesal, Merasa Indah, Usai, and Masih Hatiku. Meanwhile, Meiska gained attention with her song Hilang Tanpa Bilang. For this study, the researcher randomly selected sad songs circulating on Instagram, including original clips from Meiska as well as covers by other singers. Several pieces of user-generated content were also identified where these songs were used as background music. A search using the hashtag #hilangtanpabilang revealed more than 1,000 related posts, reflecting significant engagement.

One of the accounts that featured Meiska's song is @storymusik082, which gained remarkable engagement with 1.6 million views, 200,000 likes, 382 comments, and 15,000 shares. The excerpt used in the post states: "I already love you. If only I knew it would hurt this much, I would never have loved you this deeply." User responses to this post varied significantly, with comments reflecting diverse emotional tendencies, ranging from negative expressions of regret and sadness to positive reflections and more neutral statements.

Table 1
Comments on Indonesian Sad Song on Instagram

Comments	Category		
	Positif	Negative	Neutral
(Tagging someone's account)			√
Ayo balik dong ak gk tau btapa hncur ny ak ktika kmu pergi		√	
Terlalu bodoh sampai lupa klo kamu suman temn		√	
Terlanjur mencintaimu 😊	√		
Yah maaf terlanjur jatuh cinta sedalam iniii	√		
Jangan pernah berharap kepada manusia karena manusia hati dan pikiran nya bisa berubah	√		
Iya aku tau yg km mau bukan aku tpi ya seenganya km ngehargai aku gitu ato kmu bilang aja deh gausah berharap lagi sama aku gitu biarr aku ga berharap terus. Tau ngasij betapa sakitnya aku nangisin kmu smpe sesegukanartinya apa? Aku tulus kann. Ya aku emng gasecantik cewe yg kmu suka tpii dia tulus ga sm kamu? Dia pernah gk berjuang buat kmu? Dia pernah ga nangiss in kmu? Ga kan. Maksihh selama ini udah bikin aku berharap sm kmu.		√	
Peka lah anjggggggg :'(√	
Kapan lu balik gw masih nunggu kok selama apapun kamu masih aku tunggu.		√	
Iri dengan org yang kau gandeng sekarang!!		√	
Bingung mau bilang siapaa kek ngerasa mati rasa ya engga juga gitu, mati rasanya tuh ga pengen suka sama orang tapi org lewat aja dikatain ganteng		√	
Asing – kenalan – ttm- lost contact + bonusnya asing haha		√	
Gk nyangka bakal sehancur ini		√	
Sakit wkww		√	
AKU BODOH BANGETTT!!!!		√	
Jadi sekrang biarin aku tenang okey 😊	√		
Cinta gue abis di masalalu hh ga ngotak banget jadi cwok anj malah balik ke mantan nyaa		√	
Anjrr ngeliat dia dengan cewe lain tuh nyesek bngt katanya teman TPI ko GK bisa berkata-kata lgii		√	
Andai ku tau kan sesakit ini		√	
Kau telah melihat bukan tuan? Kau tau berapa ku mencintai mu, kau tau seberapa hancur nya jika ku kehilangan mu, kau tau seberapa sakit yang akan ku lalui jkika tidak bersama mu. Namun akhir nya? Kau melakukan semua yg membuatku sakit. Berawal dari rasa yang tak pernah ku duga akan jatuh cinta pd dirimu seda;am ini. Hingga akhirnya kau memilih pergi dengan alasan yang tak pernah ku duga. Seharusnya sedari awl kau tak pernah membuatku merasakan kasih syg yang ternyata itu palsu.		√	
Wirrr			√
KORBAN PRIA LUCU BERHATI ASU		√	
Berharap sama manusia emang sesakit ini		√	
Harus kah aku jujur gw kangen lu gw kangen senyum mu ko malah gini yah		√	
Aku ga pernah nyesel pernah mencintai org kek kmu, cma aku kaget aja sih kok bisa endingnya gini		√	
Donlot			√
Salah aku naro perasaan sama teman sendiri :'(√	

Klo dia baca inii, aku Cuma mau bilang semua yg kamu pikir ttg aku selama ini itu salah	√
Sakitt banget nyampe ngga ada yang jual obat sakiit	√
Sama (versi cowok)	√
Selalu bersyukur kenal sama kamu tapi kalau bisa diputar ulang waktu mungkin lebih baik tidak	√

The findings revealed that comments on Indonesian sad songs on Instagram were divided into three main categories: positive, negative, and neutral. This classification was based on the emotional tone and content of the comments, illustrating how users express and channel their feelings through social media. Most of the comments fell into the negative category, consisting of expressions of regret or complaints directed at individuals who had left or caused emotional pain. These comments often conveyed sentiments of heartbreak, longing, and unresolved emotions. This pattern aligns with previous studies that highlight social media as a space where individuals openly express and share their emotional struggles. Within the framework of commodification theory, such negative expressions circulated and intensified, ultimately contributing to the commodification of sadness as users collectively engaged in emotional discourse.

In contrast to the prevalence of negative comments, positive responses to Indonesian sad songs on Instagram highlighted themes of self-awareness, resilience, and personal growth. Many users framed their emotional experiences as opportunities for learning, often sharing reflections on overcoming hardships and offering encouragement to others. These expressions resonate with the uses and gratifications theory, which emphasizes that individuals engage with media to satisfy particular needs such as emotional support, validation, and coping. Through such comments, it became evident that sad songs could serve as a source of empowerment and collective healing, transforming emotional struggles into narratives of strength. Alongside these, neutral comments were also present, typically characterized by tagging friends, mentioning other accounts, or using generic language without significant emotional weight. Rather than reflecting deep feelings, these comments served functional or social purposes, underscoring that not all interactions on social media are emotionally charged but can also represent casual engagement and content sharing.

User engagement and interaction on instagram

Based on the findings, categorizing comments on Indonesian sad songs into negative, positive, and neutral is closely related to various aspects of user engagement and social interaction on Instagram. There are various types of engagement on Instagram, such as likes or loves, comments, shares, saves, and others. Posts about sad songs usually receive many likes, indicating user appreciation and resonance with the content.

Table 2
Findings on User Engagement & Interaction with Sad Songs on Instagram

Type of Engagement	Form of Interaction	Examples of User Expression	Implications for Emotional Commodification
Likes/Loves	Users liking sad song posts	High number of likes indicates appreciation and emotional resonance	Likes serve as an initial indicator of emotional engagement with the content
Comments	Negative, positive, and neutral comments	- Negative: regret, pain- Positive: awareness, growth- Neutral: tagging friends, casual language	Comments become a space for producing & expressing emotions; highlight users' role as emotional laborers
Shares	Sharing sad song posts with others	Expanding the content's reach and involving others in emotional experiences	Reflects the viral nature of emotionally charged content

Saves	Saving sad song posts	Content perceived as highly emotional or aesthetically valuable	Shows deeper levels of emotional attachment; potential for repeated consumption
Content Creation	Users create related content (stories, reels, covers)	Reposts reflecting personal emotional states	Reinforces the cycle of sadness commodification through content reproduction
Influencer Engagement	Influencers share sad songs	Followers leave negative, positive, or neutral comments	Influencers amplify emotional engagement and commodification
Algorithm Effect	Algorithm promotes high-engagement posts	Sad song posts gain greater visibility due to many likes/comments	Algorithm strengthens emotional visibility and supports the capitalization of engagement

Note: User engagement reflects emotional labor, community building, and commodification of sadness through likes, comments, shares, and saves.

This aligns with the significant number of users who engage with these posts by liking them, which can be seen as an initial level of emotional engagement with the. Furthermore, categorizing comments into negative, positive, and neutral directly corresponds to these types of engagement. Negative comments expressing regret and pain, positive comments focusing on awareness and growth, and neutral comments tagging friends or using neutral language all show the diversity of user interaction through comments. Sharing sad songs or related posts helps to expand their reach. Users who share these posts may do so to spread emotional impact or involve their social circle in an emotional experience, reflecting the viral nature of emotionally charged content. In terms of save engagement, users who save posts about sad songs demonstrate more profound levels of engagement, indicating that the content has significant emotional or aesthetic value that users want to revisit.

Regarding the impact of engagement on user experience, comments on sad songs help build a community of users who share their emotional journeys. Negative comments often find support and empathy from other users, while positive comments may inspire and uplift the community. Users who engage with sad songs often create content that reflects their emotional state. The creation and curation of this content can further spread themes of sadness and emotional growth, contributing to the overall engagement ecosystem on Instagram. Influencers or popular accounts sharing sad songs can also drive significant engagement. Their followers may leave comments that fall into the negative, positive, or neutral categories, indicating these figures' broad influence on emotional engagement. Then, Instagram's algorithm prioritizes posts with high engagement, meaning that posts about sad songs with a lot of comments (negative, positive, or neutral) are more likely to be promoted, thus increasing visibility and further engagement.

Discussion

Emotional commodification in music, emotions as marketable goods

The commodification of emotions in music, especially through sad songs, demonstrates how feelings are transformed into consumable products that resonate with collective human experiences. Music in this sense functions not only as art but also as a commodity that appeals to audiences by packaging sadness into forms that are both relatable and profitable. DeNora (2000) views music as a "technology of the self," emphasizing its role in helping individuals regulate and articulate emotions. This perspective sheds light on why sad songs invite strong engagement on platforms like Instagram, where listeners extend their affective connection by sharing personal struggles. Compared with traditional views of music as mere entertainment, DeNora's analysis highlights its dual role in reflecting and shaping emotional lives. Thus, the commercial success of sad songs illustrates the music industry's recognition of emotion as both cultural capital and market value.

Modern media technologies also intensify the commercialization of emotions in music by shaping how audiences access and experience songs. Digital platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music employ algorithmic systems that curate playlists and recommend tracks based on users' listening patterns, often linked to emotional states. MacAulay (2015) interprets this practice as a form of emotional engineering, where music consumption is actively steered to fit individual moods. Similarly, Prey (2020) argues that algorithms do not merely respond to preferences but restructure them, embedding commercial logics into the very act of listening. Extending this view, de-Miguel-Molina et al. (2021) emphasize that personalization strategies amplify user engagement while transforming emotions into predictable patterns of consumption. Taken together, these perspectives illustrate how algorithmic mediation transforms music into both a personal affective tool and a commercial asset, aligning with the study's findings on the commodification of sadness in digital culture.

On Instagram, comments on Indonesian sad songs illustrate how emotions are commodified through user interaction. The analysis shows that negative, positive, and even neutral expressions contribute to platform activity and, in turn, commercial value. Fuchs (2013) views this process as digital labor exploitation, where user emotions and interactions are transformed into profitable resources. Negative comments often represent emotional labor, as users disclose grief, regret, or resentment. Positive comments, by contrast, reflect resilience and self-growth, showing how platforms frame emotional expression as motivational content that sustains engagement. Neutral comments, such as tagging friends or using casual remarks, may appear insignificant yet still support the circulation of content and reinforce platform connectivity. Together, these findings confirm Fuchs's interpretation that emotional and functional participation online becomes commodified, demonstrating how sadness, personal reflection, and even everyday interactions are subsumed into the broader economic logic of digital platforms.

The commodification of emotions in digital culture: A postmodern analysis of social media

The findings demonstrate the relevance of commodification theory in understanding how Instagram mediates emotional expression as a form of digital labor. Users' engagement with sad songs, through emotionally laden comments, transforms personal sadness into content that can be consumed, shared, and monetized. Graham (2018) interprets this as the conversion of affect into commodities that drive user engagement, while Rosamond (2020) emphasizes that such emotional displays are central to platform profitability, generating continuous cycles of interaction and visibility. The study shows that negative emotions, including grief and heartbreak, are not only expressed but also structured and circulated in ways that serve commercial purposes. These insights extend the discourse on digital culture and emotional labor, illustrating how social media platforms exploit users' intimate feelings. Ultimately, sadness on Instagram becomes both a personal experience and a commodified resource within the economic logic of digital media.

Commodification refers to the transformation of goods, services, ideas, and even people into marketable commodities. Fia and Murray (2023) interpret this process as extending beyond traditional economic exchanges to include cultural and social dimensions, where identities, experiences, and cultural products are embedded within market logics. Foster (2019) emphasizes that popular culture such as music, films, and art is produced and packaged for mass consumption, often blurring the distinction between high art and mainstream entertainment. This perspective aligns with the study's findings, where emotional expressions on Instagram, particularly in response to sad songs, are transformed into consumable content that engages users. Jameson (1991) further highlights that postmodern commodification prioritizes market potential over intrinsic value, illustrating how personal and cultural expressions are not only experienced but also exploited as profitable commodities. These insights demonstrate how capitalist dynamics shape both cultural

production and digital emotional labor.

Identity fragmentation is a key dimension of commodification in the postmodern era. Rubin (2002) interprets postmodern identity as fluid and constantly changing, in contrast to the modernist notion of a stable, coherent self. This fluidity enables identities to be marketed and consumed, as seen in fashion and lifestyle choices, which become tangible expressions of personal identity readily commodified for audiences. Featherstone (2007) emphasizes that individuals are socially encouraged to reshape their identities to align with trends, illustrating how personal and social identities are intertwined with market forces. Baudrillard (1994) further explains this through the concepts of simulacra and hyperreality, where images, brands, and experiences are consumed as if they were real, blurring the line between authentic life and marketed representations. These perspectives help interpret the study's findings, showing how users' emotional and identity expressions on platforms like Instagram are not only performed but also subsumed under commodification in digital culture.

Globalization intensifies commodification by enabling the rapid worldwide distribution and consumption of cultural products and ideas. De Zoysa (1998) interprets this as a process in which cultural trends from one region can be quickly marketed and consumed globally, fostering a homogenized culture of consumption. The rise of digital technology and new media platforms further accelerates this process. Van Dijck (2013) argues that platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok transform personal expression into commodifiable content, where users strategically curate their online personas to attract followers and generate income through advertising and sponsorships. This perspective helps interpret the study's findings, showing that Instagram users' engagement with sad songs is not only an emotional expression but also a form of digital labor. The commodification of personal emotions and interactions demonstrates how market imperatives increasingly shape social behavior, identity performance, and cultural participation in online environments.

The influence of cultural context on user engagement and emotional responses

Cultural context plays a crucial role in shaping how users engage with content and express emotions on social media platforms like Instagram. Hofstede (2001) interprets collectivist cultures as fostering strong community ties and prioritizing group harmony over individual expression, which helps explain behavioral patterns observed in the context of Indonesian sad songs. In Indonesian culture, which emphasizes social cohesion and mutual support, users tend to share emotional struggles in ways that maintain group harmony. This is evident in comments that express empathy, encouragement, or shared experiences, reflecting culturally guided emotional expression. Compared to individualistic cultures where personal expression may dominate, the study's findings suggest that Indonesian users' emotional engagement is shaped by collective values, reinforcing the idea that cultural norms influence not only the content of emotional expression but also the social dynamics and participatory practices on digital platforms.

The cultural and spiritual significance of music in Indonesia shapes how users engage with sad songs on Instagram. Johnson (2015) and Gaunt (2000) interpret music as a cultural medium that reflects and strengthens social and emotional bonds, suggesting that users are more likely to engage with songs resonating with their shared heritage. This aligns with the study's findings, where Indonesian users demonstrated heightened emotional responses and interactive behaviors in comments on culturally meaningful songs. Furthermore, Indonesia's predominantly Muslim population adds a spiritual dimension to emotional expression. Religious teachings emphasizing patience, resilience, and solace through faith influence the content of comments, often resulting in expressions of self-awareness and personal growth. Tarakeshwar et al. (2003) argue that religion provides a framework for understanding and managing emotions, which helps explain why spiritual

and culturally grounded values are evident in social media interactions related to sadness.

Language plays a pivotal role in shaping how emotions are expressed and interpreted on social media. Ting-Toomey (1999) interprets language as a core element of cultural identity, influencing both the articulation and perception of emotions. In the context of Indonesian sad songs on Instagram, the use of Bahasa Indonesia and local dialects adds layers of cultural nuance, idioms, and communication styles that enrich emotional expression. This aligns with the study's findings, where users' choice of words and metaphors reflected culturally specific ways of conveying sadness and empathy. Moreover, the influence of Indonesian media and popular culture, as Boyd and Ellison (2007) argue, shapes user engagement by reinforcing emotional responses. Popular artists and influencers amplify this effect, as their releases trigger heightened interactions, demonstrating how language, culture, and media converge to structure emotional expression and engagement in digital spaces.

Gender dynamics in emotional responses on instagram

The predominance of female comments on sad songs on Instagram highlights how gender dynamics shape emotional expression online. Brescoll and Uhlmann (2008) interpret this pattern as a reflection of socialization processes that encourage women to express and share emotions more openly than men. This aligns with the study's findings, where female users demonstrated higher engagement with emotionally charged content, such as sorrowful songs, compared to their male counterparts. Eagly and Wood (1999) further argue that social expectations construct gender roles, positioning women to prioritize empathy and emotional communication in interpersonal interactions. In comparison, men are often socialized to restrain emotional expression. Together, these perspectives help explain why Instagram comments reveal a gendered pattern in online emotional engagement, illustrating how societal norms and cultural expectations continue to shape digital behaviors.

The predominance of female comments on sad songs on Instagram can be interpreted through the lens of emotional labor. Hochschild (2012) and Feng et al. (2022) define emotional labor as the management of personal feelings to produce a publicly acceptable display aligned with social expectations. In the context of Instagram, users voluntarily express emotions in comments, contributing to the platform's emotional environment and driving engagement. This study's findings suggest that female users are particularly active in performing such labor, consistent with social norms around gendered emotional expression. From a critical perspective, Chakraborty and Jain (2022) and Pellegrino et al. (2022) argue that platforms may indirectly exploit this labor for commercial benefit, raising concerns about the emotional burden placed on users. These insights highlight how online engagement with emotionally charged content can affect users' well-being while sustaining platform profitability.

The dominance of female comments on sad songs on Instagram highlights how gender norms and social expectations shape emotional expression in digital public spaces. Fischer and Manstead (2000) argue that women are socially encouraged to display emotional openness, which aligns with the study's findings showing higher female engagement with grief- and reflection-related content. This pattern reflects cultural norms in Indonesia, where women may feel more comfortable expressing vulnerability and connecting emotionally with music that resonates with their experiences. Jin et al. (2024) and Judijanto et al. (2024) further interpret these behaviors as part of broader gendered communication patterns, suggesting that such engagement both reproduces and negotiates social power dynamics. Compared to male users, women's commenting behavior illustrates the interplay of cultural expectations, emotional labor, and digital participation. These insights help explain how online interactions are culturally and socially mediated, reinforcing gendered norms while contributing to the commodification of emotional expression.

Instagram's impact on music consumption: Influencers, algorithms, and digital marketing

Instagram has transformed music consumption and promotion in the digital era, utilizing influencers, algorithms, and marketing strategies to reshape industry dynamics. Casalo et al. (2020) interpret influencer activity as a critical driver of music discovery, showing that endorsements and recommendations significantly shape follower engagement and listening habits. This aligns with the study's findings, where Instagram users frequently interacted with music content promoted by influencers, indicating the platform's role in guiding emotional and cultural engagement with songs. Boyd and Ellison (2007) further argue that platform algorithms personalize content feeds based on user behavior, ensuring exposure to music aligned with preferences and demographics. This mechanism increases the likelihood of discovering new artists and genres while reinforcing user engagement. Together, these perspectives highlight how Instagram's technological and social structures not only facilitate music consumption but also integrate commercial imperatives with cultural and emotional experiences, reflecting the interplay between digital media, user behavior, and market dynamics.

Digital marketing techniques on Instagram, including sponsored posts, paid advertising, and strategic content partnerships, play a pivotal role in promoting music releases and events. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), Rehman et al. (2022), and Khanom (2023) interpret these strategies as leveraging Instagram's visual and interactive features to enhance engagement and create immersive brand experiences. The study's findings support this view, showing that marketing campaigns can increase music streams and user interaction with emotionally resonant content, such as sad songs. However, excessive reliance on paid promotion may compromise perceptions of authenticity and artistic integrity, suggesting that commercial strategies can overshadow musical quality. Moreover, market saturation may reduce engagement as users grow fatigued by repetitive advertising. These insights highlight the need for a balanced approach, where digital marketing amplifies reach and engagement while preserving the perceived authenticity of music, ensuring that commercial success does not undermine emotional and cultural connections with audiences.

Instagram's influence on music consumption can be analyzed through user interactions and engagement with music-related content. Boyd and Ellison (2007) interpret the platform as a space where algorithm-driven recommendations and influencer endorsements shape discovery patterns, aligning with the study's findings that users frequently engage with music through comments and shared emotional responses. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) further argue that engagement metrics and content visibility amplify trends, demonstrating how Instagram functions as a key medium for music promotion. However, these mechanisms also raise critical concerns. Reliance on influencers and algorithms may reinforce existing preferences, limiting exposure to diverse genres or lesser-known artists, and reducing musical exploration. Additionally, the lack of transparency in algorithmic curation questions user agency over content selection. Collectively, these perspectives highlight both the transformative potential and the limitations of Instagram in shaping music consumption, revealing the interplay between commercial, cultural, and emotional dynamics in digital music engagement.

While effective, aggressive digital marketing strategies on Instagram can also commercialize the music listening experience in a less authentic way, reducing music to a mere marketing tool rather than an art form. This overly sales- and visual-focused approach can diminish music's artistic value and authentic expression. Furthermore, this approach also has significant social implications. While the platform can allow artists to reach a wider audience, it can also increase the gap between big and small artists, with the former dominating users' feeds due to algorithms and well-marketed campaigns. This analysis suggests the need for a more balanced and critical approach to the use of Instagram in music promotion, where consideration is given not only to marketing effectiveness but also to musical integrity and the diversity of listener experiences.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of comments on Indonesian sad songs on Instagram shows how users express and share emotions in a community context, using the platform for emotional labor. Negative comments often reflect regret and pain, providing space for shared catharsis and empathy, while positive comments highlight personal growth and resilience. Neutral comments, while less emotionally charged, play a role in increasing social connectivity and content dissemination. This pattern reflects the commodification of emotion, where user comments are treated as valuable data that increases platform visibility. The findings also reveal how cultural and gender norms influence interactions on social media, with female users more dominant in emotional discussions on Instagram, reflecting social expectations for emotional expression. This research highlights Instagram as a dynamic terrain for cultural exchange and emotional expression through music, providing important insights into how sadness is commodified in digital spaces and how this resonates with users' cultural and emotional contexts.

This study reveals important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it highlights how emotions on Instagram are commodified, with the dominance of female users in emotional discussions reflecting gender norms. It adds to understanding social interactions and emotional expression on social media. Practically, the findings suggest the importance of designing social media platforms that support positive emotional expression, demonstrate the need for music marketing strategies that leverage emotions, and consider the ethics and privacy of the commodification of emotions. This study proposes a more ethical and inclusive approach to harnessing digital interactions and emotional data. It provides insights for platform developers, the music industry, and policymakers to improve user experiences while protecting privacy.

Based on the analysis of engagement on sad songs on Instagram, some recommendations for further research include cross-cultural comparative studies to understand the influence of cultural differences in online emotional expression, deeper analysis of the impact of gender norms on online participation, and longitudinal research to track changes in user engagement trends towards music. It is also important to examine the influence of the economics of emotional engagement on the music industry, the effectiveness of personalization algorithms in music discovery, and the role of influencers in shaping the emotions and culture of their followers. This study is expected to provide new insights into developing more inclusive and effective music marketing strategies in the digital era.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We want to thank the management of Jurnal An Nisa for the opportunity to contribute to this journal. We greatly appreciate the support and guidance of the editorial team, which has improved the quality of my publication. Thank you for providing a platform that allows for collaboration and scientific exchange. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with Jurnal An Nisa.

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