

Building digital engagement through archipelagic horror narratives: The “*wawak*” community’s responses to Nadia Omara’s storytelling content

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Abstract

Horror narrative content on YouTube has developed into a space that fosters audience engagement and community identity. The *Kisah Horror Wawak (KHW)* program hosted by Nadia Omara demonstrates active involvement from the “*Wawak*” community in both enjoying and sharing horror stories. This can be seen in Nadia Omara’s achievement of 9.76 million subscribers and more than 2 million viewers. This study examines how the “*Wawak*” community responds in building engagement with Nadia Omara’s horror storytelling content. This research uses a case study approach. The findings show that Nadia Omara’s success in building viewer engagement is supported by several strategies: (1) a unique and interactive storytelling style, the use of an Acehnese dialect in narrating Indonesian horror stories, and the habit of addressing viewers as “*Wawak*”; (2) active feedback through likes, comments, expressions of gratitude during video openings, and cross-platform promotion; and (3) the diversity of Indonesian horror stories that effectively entertain viewers. In conclusion, the *KHW* program hosted by Nadia Omara has successfully built audience community engagement through a form of horror storytelling that is unique, interactive, and rooted in local cultural contexts. This study contributes by clarifying how digital engagement can be constructed through the integration of personal narratives, audience participation, and local cultural identity within new media environments.

Keywords:

audience response; storytelling; Nadia Omara; engagement; content creator.

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Abstrak

Konten narasi horor di YouTube telah berkembang menjadi ruang interaksi yang menunjukkan engagement dan identitas komunitas audiens. Program Kisah Horor Wawak (KHW) yang dibawakan oleh Nadia Omara menampilkan keterlibatan aktif komunitas “Wawak” dalam menikmati sekaligus berbagi cerita horor. Hal ini terlihat dari keberhasilan Nadia Omara dalam meraih 9,76 juta subscriber dan lebih dari 2 juta penonton. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana respon komunitas “Wawak” dalam membangun engagement terhadap konten storytelling horror Nadia Omara. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus. Penelitian ini menunjukkan, bahwa keberhasilan Nadia Omara dalam meraih viewers engagement didasarkan pada beberapa strategi yaitu; (1) cara ber-*storytelling* yang unik dan interaktif, penggunaan logat Aceh dalam bercerita kisah horor nusantara dan kebiasaan menyapa “wawak” pada para *viewers*-nya, (2) aktif memberi feedback dalam bentuk pemberian simbol like, komentar dan ucapan terima kasih saat opening video, serta *cross platform promotion*, dan (3) keberagaman cerita horor Nusantara serta mampu menghibur viewers. Kesimpulannya, program KHW yang dibawakan oleh Nadia Omara berhasil membangun engagement komunitas audiens melalui *storytelling* horor yang unik dan interaktif dan berakar pada lokalitas. Studi ini berkontribusi dengan memperjelas bagaimana keterlibatan digital dapat dibangun melalui perpaduan narasi personal, partisipasi audiens, dan identitas budaya lokal di ruang media baru.

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INTRODUCTION

In the current digital era, social media platforms such as YouTube have become primary tools for both individuals and institutions to reach wider audiences. Kemp Simon, in February 2024, on the website datareportal.com, reported that the number of YouTube users in Indonesia reached 139.0 million. Nadia Omara is one of the YouTubers who has successfully utilized this platform. Through her storytelling content titled “*Kisah Horor Wawak*,” Nadia Omara has succeeded in building a fairly large fan base. More than two million viewers are frequently achieved by Nadia Omara for each video she uploads.

The horror stories delivered by Nadia Omara have attracted significant public attention. This occurs due to her skillful storytelling, which is unique and different from that of other YouTubers. Through the YouTube platform, the YouTuber, whose real name is Nadia Fairuz Omara, conveys horror stories using various communication elements such as body language, voice intonation, and visual appeal. Another distinctive feature of Nadia Omara’s storytelling is her use of an Acehnese accent, consistently uttering the word “*wawak*” while narrating horror stories. With this unique linguistic style, Nadia Omara can captivate viewers. Her language style, which includes personification, metaphor, synecdoche, simile, association, and others, successfully attracts viewers’ attention because of its effective and easily understood delivery (Trie et al., 2024).

Panuju, as cited in Santika and Fitrananda (2023), states that communication becomes effective when it pays attention to five aspects, namely clarity, accuracy, context, flow, and culture, which require communicators to adapt to the communicants’ environment both verbally and nonverbally in order to avoid misunderstandings in communication. In addition, uniqueness in communication is an important aspect that must be maintained, as expressed by Maeskina and Hidayat (2022), who argue that every content creator has their own way of utilizing digital media in creating content. In other words, each content creator possesses distinctive characteristics, styles, and identities in producing content.

Nadia Omara is also very open to her audience in inviting them to submit their personal horror stories, which are later retold by Nadia Omara herself in the program “*Kisah Horor Wawak*.” This initiative even went viral on other social media platforms such as TikTok, with comments reading “send the story to Nadia Omara” appearing from late 2023 to early 2024. This initiative successfully generated highly positive responses from viewers and created strong engagement between Nadia Omara and her audience. This is reflected in the number of Nadia Omara’s subscribers, which reached 9.77 million, and a total of 217 episodes of *KHW* content (accessed on Nadia Omara’s YouTube channel on June 23, 2024). Thus, this phenomenon not only increased viewership numbers but also resulted in a high level of engagement, indicating that Nadia Omara’s external communication approach has successfully built a strong bond between the content creator and her audience. High engagement

and positive audience responses also demonstrate Nadia Omara's success in designing content that is able to foster audience interest and engagement (Trie et al., 2024).



Figure 1. Number of Nadia Omara's subscribers

Source: Nadia Omara's YouTube channel

This success is certainly not only due to the strength of content quality, but also to the implementation of public relations (PR) management. Nadia Omara builds strong interactions through responses in the comment section, liking options, and interactions on other social media platforms. Fundamentally, communication in PR management involves not only internal parties but also external publics. PR activities encompass actions that begin with internal organizational improvement (the PR begins at home) and extend to activities aimed at building image and positive relationships with the public (Ruslan, 2007). PR must be able to manage relationships with internal publics as a prerequisite for building good relationships with external publics. PR must also be able to implement management role strategies to ensure that communication is effectively established (Irwanti et al., 2021). Thus, PR is not merely about image-building, but also about the ability to build and manage effective communication with the public (Nur et al., 2021). In this sense, content creators can also be understood as a form of contemporary PR activity (Sundawa & Trigartanti, 2018).

Research related to YouTube content management in creating engagement has been conducted by several previous scholars. One such study by Herlina et al. (2023)

shows that audience interest in a channel can be created through media identity packaging, the creation of content ideas relevant to public interests, and interactive engagement during live streaming. Another study by Ricko and Junaidi (2019) states that engagement is interpreted with different emphases depending on the research context (community engagement, political engagement, and so forth). Other research focusing on Nadia Omara by Trie et al. (2024) found that content presented with linguistic style, authenticity, and engagement displayed by Nadia Omara on her media platforms can have a significant impact on followers’ experiences. The impacts include increased positive perceptions related to healthy lifestyles, mental health, and happiness.

Based on these previous studies, the present research offers novelty and distinctions from earlier research. Although there are similarities in methods, approaches, and even theories, the research focus, objects, and subjects differ. Moreover, there has been no prior research specifically examining viewers’ responses to Nadia Omara’s external communication in achieving viewer engagement on YouTube. The urgency of this research lies in the need for active and effective external communication management on YouTube social media amid rapid technological development. Therefore, the researchers are interested in conducting this study.

The theory employed in this study is new media theory. This theory was developed by Pierre Lévy and explains the evolution of media. The term new media originates from two words: “media” and “new.” Media refers to a channel that conveys information, while “new” refers to a form of innovation from previous forms. This theory comprises two perspectives: first, the social interaction perspective, which distinguishes media based on their proximity to face-to-face interaction; and second, the social integration perspective, which views media as ritualistic due to habitual use, formality, and values that extend beyond mere media utility, or as tools used to shape society (Feroza & Misnawati, 2020). Based on this theory, the digital medium YouTube is utilized by Nadia Omara as a platform for storing content that can be accessed by other users.

The community of viewers who are fans of this content is referred to as “wawak.” According to Ron Rice, as cited in Munasaroh (2021), new media refers to communication technologies that involve technological networks such as

smartphones, PCs, or notebooks, which facilitate users' ability to communicate and interact with other users. In other words, new media represent a conceptual elaboration of media capabilities supported by digital devices, enabling users and audiences to access content at any time. They actively and creatively interact with media content and feedback, thereby forming new communities or societies (Munasaroh, 2021).

The objectives of this research are: (1) to identify viewers' responses to Nadia Omara's method of delivering horror stories through the storytelling program "*Kisah Horor Wawak*"; (2) to examine viewers' responses to the feedback provided by Nadia Omara in replying to viewers' comments; and (3) to analyze the role of Nadia Omara's Acehese accent in fostering viewer engagement. In addition, this research is expected to contribute insights for other content creators regarding the use of social media in achieving audience engagement.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method using a case study approach and a constructivist paradigm. The case study approach is used to examine in depth the interaction of the environment, positions, and field conditions of a particular field unit (such as an educational unit or a social unit) in its natural setting. According to Nurlimah et al. (2020), case studies in research aim to answer the questions of "how" and "why" regarding phenomena that are being examined in depth. The subjects of a case study may include individuals, communities, social groups, or institutions (Suyitno, 2018). Meanwhile, the constructivist paradigm seeks to understand the world through complex experiences from the perspective of individuals who experience them (ibid. in Haryono, 2020). The focus of this study is to explore audience responses to the horror narratives delivered by Nadia Omara.

The objects of this study include: viewers' responses to Nadia Omara's storytelling style, viewers' responses to the feedback provided by Nadia Omara in replying to viewers' comments, and the role of the Acehese accent in fostering viewer engagement. The subjects of this study are those who directly experience engagement, namely the viewers of *Kisah Horor Wawak (KHW)*. In addition to conducting source

triangulation, interviews were also carried out with a social media expert and a content creator.

The data obtained in this study are divided into two types: primary data obtained from in-depth interviews with informants, and secondary data obtained from an analysis of comments on several *KHW* video uploads with the highest number of views. Data collection is a step in the scientific method that involves systematic and logical procedures to obtain valid data, either directly (primary) or indirectly (secondary). This step aims to support the research analysis and discussion process effectively, enabling the researcher to arrive at conclusions, obtain answers (outputs), and assist in solving the problems faced (Ruslan, 2019). The informant data in this study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research’s informants

Informants Code	Category	Status/Occupation	Address
N1	Viewer	8th-semester student	Kp. Leles
N2	Viewer	6th-semester student	Kp. Bugel
N3	Viewer	6th-semester student	Jagabaya
N4	Viewer	8th-semester student	Kp. Andir
N5	Viewer	8th-semester student	Cianjur
N6	Social media expert and content creator	Practitioner, lecturer, and content creator	Kp. Ranca Panjang
N7	Content writer	6th-semester student and content writer in a company	Soreang

Source: Research results, 2024

The data collection techniques used in this study include conducting in-depth interviews with informants from various perspectives. These informants represent the perspectives of viewers, social media experts, and content creators. The interviews were conducted directly, via WhatsApp, telephone, Zoom, and other platforms. In addition to interviews, observations were also carried out by examining several *KHW* video postings with high ratings, analysing viewers’ comments and likes on *KHW* postings, and observing the behaviour of informants at the research location. Another data collection technique employed in this study is documentation, which involves collecting information as evidence, such as images, documents accompanied by

recordings, policy documents, newspapers, biographies, and other related materials (Waruwu, 2023).

The data analysis technique used in this study follows the data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which includes data transcription, data reduction (the selection and simplification of collected data), data display (the organization of data to allow conclusions to be drawn), and conclusion drawing (Rijali, 2018).

The authenticity of the data in this study was ensured through source triangulation. The informants involved in this research totaled seven (7) individuals from various categories. The first category consisted of five (5) viewers. The second category consisted of one (1) social media expert. The third category consisted of one (1) content creator or content writer. Data collection was conducted repeatedly until the required data reached a saturation point.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of the research findings, which serve as answers to the research questions. The focus of the analysis is on viewers' responses to Nadia Omara's storytelling style, viewers' responses to the feedback provided by Nadia Omara on viewers' comments related to the "KHW" content, and the role of the Acehne accent in fostering engagement with viewers.

Viewers' responses to Nadia Omara's storytelling style

The analysis of the interview results shows that all informants provided positive and enthusiastic responses to the external communication carried out by Nadia Omara in the storytelling program *Kisah Horror Wawak*. This external communication can be observed through Nadia Omara's dramatic, interactive, relaxed, and friendly way of narrating horror stories, her nonverbal expressions, as well as the use of the familiar address "wawak" toward viewers, as expressed by N3, N2, N4, N5, and N6 as follows:

"Nadia Omara is dramatic, but not in a cringe way; instead, her dramatic speaking style actually makes us feel carried away by the atmosphere" (N1, face-to-face interview, May 29, 2024).

“It’s dramatic, but I like the way she delivers it because she also tells the story in detail” (N3, face-to-face interview, May 25, 2024).

“She is indirectly interactive with the audience, inviting viewers to truly enter the flow of the story” (N2, face-to-face interview, May 25, 2024).

“It’s relaxed and flows naturally, and in the horror parts, Nadia Omara can make it feel as if we are inside the story” (N4, face-to-face interview, May 21, 2024).

“It just flows naturally; maybe that’s how she is in her daily life, when she’s with friends, it’s like gossiping, not overly dramatic or anything” (N5, face-to-face interview, June 4, 2024).

“Calling viewers ‘wawak’ makes us feel happy while watching” (N1, face-to-face interview, May 29, 2024).

“She has strong nonverbal gestures, good communication skills, facial expressions that really come through, excuse me for underlining things like how she slightly pouts her lips at certain moments, her eye movements, her head movements, she’s very flexible; Nadia Omara really is” (N6, face-to-face interview, May 24, 2024).

In addition to storytelling style, another attraction that successfully generates engagement with viewers is the diverse and highly entertaining horror material. The variety of stories submitted by viewers also differentiates the KHW program from other horror storytelling programs on social media. This was expressed by N1, N2, N5, and N6 as follows:

“In KHW, they mention which region the story comes from, whether it’s Kalimantan or West Java, whereas in other horror stories it’s usually just general horror stories without mentioning regions” (N1, face-to-face interview, May 29, 2024).

“The difference between KHW and other horror programs is that KHW tells archipelagic stories originating from the ‘wawak’” (N2, face-to-face interview, May 29, 2024).

“My motivation for watching KHW is to seek entertainment. Even though there is some educational value in the stories, I also like Nadia Omara, so I watch her other programs as well” (N5, face-to-face interview, May 29, 2024).

“It’s not very educational; it’s more entertainment. I believe Nadia Omara set her content from the beginning to be entertaining, with a little bit of education, mainly related to mystical matters” (N6, face-to-face interview, May 24, 2024).

Based on the data presented above, Nadia Omara’s storytelling strategy can be summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Viewers’ responses to Nadia Omara’s storytelling through horror storytelling

Informants	Aspect	Response	Statement
N1, N3, N6	Nadia Omara’s storytelling style	Positive	Expressive delivery while storytelling
N2, N4, N5			Nadia Omara tells stories interactively, enabling viewers to feel as if they are inside the story
N1, N2, N3, N4, N5, N6, N7	KHW Program	Positive	KHW differs from other programs because it features stories from across the Indonesian archipelago
N1, N2, N3, N4, N5, N6, N7			Consumed purely for entertainment

Source: Research findings, 2024

The research findings indicate that nearly all informants provided positive responses to Nadia Omara’s storytelling style. These responses are primarily related to her expressive, relaxed, friendly, and interactive narration style, as well as the diversity of horror material presented. Nadia Omara narrates horror stories in a dramatic yet light manner, with a distinctive Acehnese accent, creating an atmosphere that feels intimate and entertaining. The *Kisah Horror Wawak* (KHW) program itself features mystical stories from various regions across the Indonesian archipelago, packaged in an engaging and easily consumable format for audiences.

Consistently, Nadia Omara utilizes her storytelling skills by adapting to the characteristics and needs of viewers. Audiences do not merely seek horror sensations, but also entertainment that does not induce excessive fear. Therefore, horror packaged in an entertainment-oriented format becomes a relevant alternative for digital audiences. This finding aligns with the Uses and Gratifications theory, which explains

that internet-based media audiences tend to choose and repeatedly consume content that fulfills their needs, particularly the need for entertainment (Wibowo, 2022). High-quality content presentation makes viewers feel satisfied and continue to anticipate subsequent episodes of *KHW*. The program even shapes new habits in audiences’ daily lives, where *KHW* is not only watched during leisure time but also accompanies everyday activities.

Nadia Omara’s success in attracting and maintaining viewers’ attention can also be understood through the theory of interpersonal attraction. Byrne and Griffitt (1973), as cited in Mahmudah (2021), argue that interpersonal attraction refers to an individual’s positive attitude toward others, which can emerge through contact experiences, emotional responses, shared characteristics, and engaging interactions. In the context of *KHW*, Nadia Omara’s warm, expressive, and interactive communication style builds emotional closeness with the audience, making viewers feel a personal bond with the content creator.

Moreover, audience engagement is further strengthened through participatory strategies, particularly by producing horror content derived directly from stories submitted by viewers from various regions in Indonesia. This strategy reflects two-way communication practices consistent with James E. Grunig’s Two-Way Symmetrical Communication theory (AlReshaid et al., 2024). Through dialogic and participatory communication, viewers are not merely passive consumers but become part of the content production process. This condition encourages the formation of audience loyalty toward Nadia Omara’s channel and contributes to increased engagement.

The choice of YouTube as the distribution platform also plays a significant role in the success of *KHW*. YouTube enables the presentation of long-duration content, allowing viewers to enjoy horror stories in a complete and immersive manner. This platform is widely used for various purposes, ranging from information dissemination and education to entertainment (Kaloka, 2023). Horror stories packaged as entertainment create a distinct atmosphere that attracts digital audiences. This aligns with the findings of Putra and Febriana (2023), who emphasize that digital media functions not only as an information channel but also as entertainment. Meanwhile, Luik (2020) highlights that the novelty of new media technologies fosters

diverse and interactive content, requiring creators to adapt storytelling approaches to media characteristics, including YouTube's support for long-form content.

Furthermore, the relaxed horror packaging is also relevant to the characteristics of *KHW* viewers, who are predominantly from younger generations. Martini and Larasati (2019) note that a significant portion of young people's time is spent on social media. In this context, digital media becomes a primary entertainment space and may even lead to dependency. Individuals experiencing digital media addiction tend to perceive media use as enjoyable, entertaining, interactive, and relaxed (Ayub & Sulaeman, 2022). This is reflected in informants' statements, indicating that they watch *KHW* to fulfill their entertainment needs. As a result, viewers feel emotionally attached and demonstrate high enthusiasm, including impatience in anticipating subsequent *KHW* episodes, which are perceived as a primary source of entertainment.

Viewers' responses to feedback provided by Nadia Omara in replying to comments

Responses from viewers serve as input for evaluating content quality for content creators. Furthermore, viewer responses must be addressed to achieve engagement. This was expressed by N6 as follows:

"Feedback from a content creator is a response to the reactions given by viewers... viewers' responses are important for content creators, because content creators need input or criticism from viewers to produce better content" (N6, face-to-face interview, May 24, 2024).

Meanwhile, according to N7 as a content writer:

"A writer or content creator must respond positively to audience feedback, especially constructive feedback, even if it is criticism. However, if negative responses are received, it is better to ignore them, especially if they are demeaning" (N7, online interview via Google Meet, June 28, 2024).

All seven informants agreed that Nadia Omara provides feedback, with several informants stating that she frequently responds to viewers or her "wawak." N1, N2,

and N5 noted that Nadia Omara responds through comments, replies, likes, and expressions of gratitude in the opening of KHW videos.

“On several occasions, I’ve seen replies from Nadia Omara, likes in the comment section. In KHW, for example, when there are many comments, Nadia responds to them. In some videos, she also expresses gratitude to viewers” (N1, N2, and N5, face-to-face interviews, May 29, May 25, and June 4, 2024).

Meanwhile, N3 and N4 were less aware of this because they focused solely on watching KHW videos. N6, as a social media expert and content creator, stated that Nadia Omara does engage with viewers, but her responses are still relatively limited.

“Omara has engagement; her videos even reached around 22 million views in a week, which is actually very good. However, Nadia Omara doesn’t really appear to respond extensively; she receives many suggestions or responses, but overall, the feedback is still lacking” (online interview via phone, June 27, 2024).

In addition, N7, who is a content writer and KHW viewer, added that Nadia Omara frequently responds to viewers, and N7 personally has commented on a KHW video, as stated below:

“I personally have never been noticed by Nadia Omara, but I see that there are many comments, and many of them are liked or replied to” (N7, online interview via Google Meet, June 28, 2024).

Furthermore, most informants stated that uploading viewers’ personal stories is also a form of feedback, because such uploads are driven by viewers’ own desires. Nadia Omara intentionally retells stories submitted by her “wawak.” This represents Nadia’s creative effort to win a competition among content creators on social media in gaining engagement. Creativity is a key factor in content creation, as many creators compete creatively to attract audience interest (Ningsih, 2023).

Based on the explanation above, feedback from Nadia Omara in responding to viewers can be summarized in the table 3.

Table 3. Viewers' responses to Nadia Omara's feedback on viewer comments

Informants	Statement
N1, N2, N5	Responds through comments, replies, likes, expressions of gratitude in <i>KHW</i> openings, and retelling viewers' stories
N3, N4	Pay little attention and focus only on watching
N6	Engagement exists, but feedback is still limited
N7	Frequently responds in the comment section and tells viewers' stories

Source: Research findings, 2024

Nadia Omara's feedback is conveyed in several forms. First, through the comment section by liking and replying to viewers' comments. Second, through content uploads by creating videos based on viewers' submitted stories. Third, through expressions of gratitude and story responses on other social media platforms, such as thanking viewers in video openings and reposting viewers' stories while watching *KHW* on other platforms.

Feedback in the form of likes, expressions of gratitude, and comment replies aligns with the Two-Way Symmetrical Communication theory, in which communicators and viewers engage in interactive dialogue (Vural et al., 2022). Nadia Omara's responses create positive personal relationships with viewers and prevent disappointment. Consequently, engagement increases as viewers continue to interact intensively with her content. Meanwhile, reposting viewers' stories on Instagram and sharing *KHW* content on TikTok serves as a promotional strategy to drive traffic to her channel.

Feedback on existing responses also has the potential to foster closer interactions and form a larger "*wawak*" community. This aligns with Liliweri's statement in Munasaroh (2021) that new media facilitates active communication and interaction with media feedback, thereby forming new communities or societies. Media functions not only as an informational instrument or a medium for self-interest, but also as a space for uniting various forms of society (Feroza & Misnawati, 2020). Moreover, YouTube, like other social media platforms, is designed to facilitate interaction among users, even in online contexts (Putri et al., 2022). Thus, such interaction and communication support the growth and sustainability of the *KHW* program and create new dynamics in broader digital interactions.

The closeness of these relationships is relevant to parasocial interaction theory, which explains how attachment creates a pseudo-relationship in which viewers feel a close connection despite the absence of direct interaction with Nadia Omara. Horton and Wohl (1956) first introduced this concept, describing how idols often communicate with fans as if a real closeness exists (Nopiyanti et al., 2025). Figures 4 and 5 are examples of Nadia Omara’s feedback to viewers in the *Kisah Horor Wawak* program.

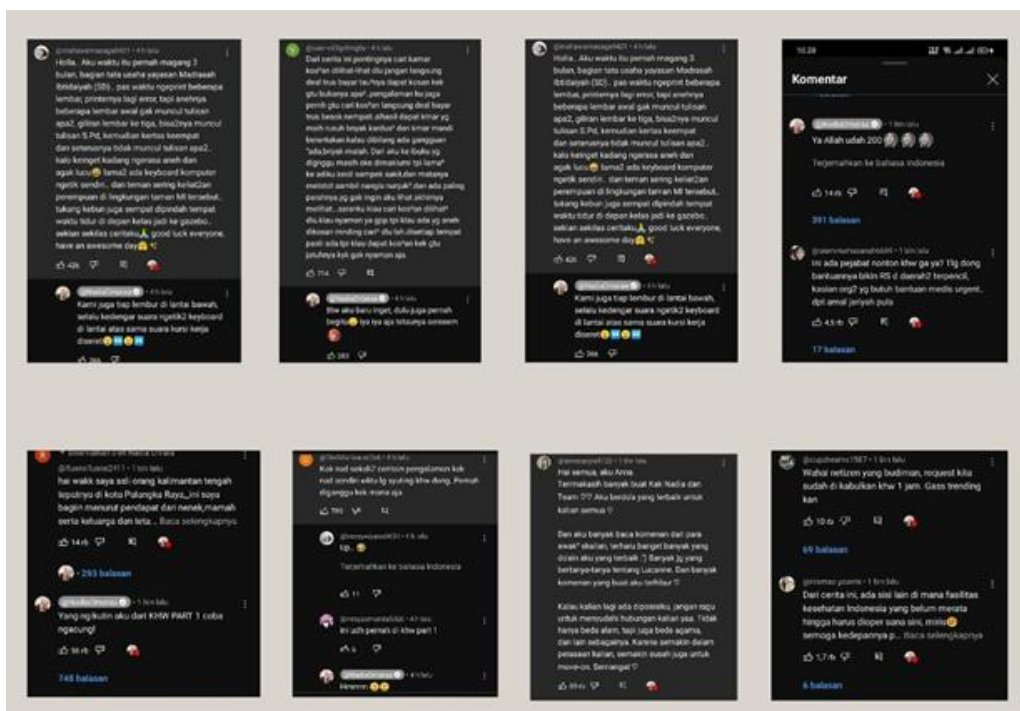


Figure 4. Nadia Omara’s feedback in the comment section of Nadia Omara’s YouTube channel

Source: Nadia Omara’s YouTube channel

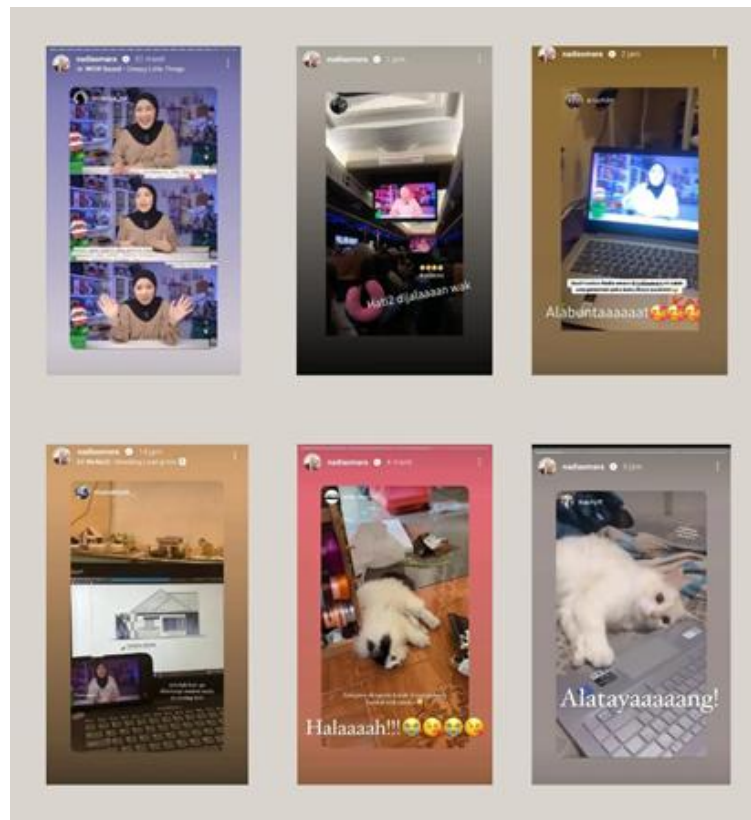


Figure 5. Nadia Omara's feedback through reposted Instagram stories on her personal account

Source: Nadia Omara's Personal Instagram account

The role of the Acehnese accent in viewer engagement

The uniqueness of Nadia Omara's storytelling lies in her strong Acehnese accent. To date, very few content creators, especially storytelling creators, use regional accents in their content delivery. This was expressed by N2, N1, N3, N4, and N5 as follows:

"Nadia's accent not only adds vocal color to the story but also makes the story feel more alive and captivating for us as listeners" (N2, face-to-face interview, May 25, 2024).

"Sometimes the Acehnese accent is funny in a way, it's hard to explain, but it becomes a unique attraction because it's different from others" (N1, face-to-face interview, May 29, 2024).

“It’s rare to find content that uses the Acehnese language” (N3, face-to-face interview, May 25, 2024).

“I personally have never heard other content creators do storytelling with an Acehnese accent” (N4, face-to-face interview, May 21, 2024).

“Her storytelling uses an accent, so it feels new. Other YouTubers might do it, but I’m not aware of them” (N5, face-to-face interview, June 4, 2024).

Furthermore, the strong use of the Acehnese accent in Nadia Omara’s storytelling has its own appeal, encouraging viewers to continuously watch KHW. This was acknowledged by N1, N3, N7, N2, and N4 as follows:

“The Acehnese accent becomes Nadia Omara’s attraction and hallmark” (N1, N3, N7, face-to-face interviews, May 29, May 25, and June 28, 2024).

“It creates a distinct atmosphere and enriches the stories being told” (N2, face-to-face interview, May 25, 2024).

“With the addition of ‘wawak,’ it feels closer, like gossiping” (N4, face-to-face interview, May 21, 2024).

However, according to N5, Nadia Omara’s Acehnese accent is not particularly important in KHW:

“It’s not too important, maybe just for fun, because even without the accent, her storytelling is already good” (N5, face-to-face interview, June 4, 2024).

N6 argued that the Acehnese accent is an attraction that can draw subscribers and enhance viewer engagement in KHW:

“Indirectly, Nadia Omara represents Acehnese people in creative entertainment work. The Acehnese accent should not be removed because it is her hallmark” (N6, online interview, June 27, 2024).

Based on the above explanation, the role of Nadia Omara’s Acehnese accent in fostering viewer engagement can be summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. The role of the Acehnese accent in fostering viewer engagement

Informants	Statement
N1, N3, N4, N6, N7	Serves as an attraction and distinguishing feature
N2	Adds vocal color and makes stories more vivid
N5	Not very important, but still a differentiating factor

Source: Research findings, 2024

Nadia Omara's Acehnese accent is a prominent hallmark rarely found among other content creators. Informant N6 argued that the Acehnese accent enhances viewer engagement, particularly among viewers in Aceh, who indirectly feel represented in digital creative production. This indicates that Nadia Omara maintains her cultural identity as an Acehnese individual by consistently using the Acehnese accent in *KHW* communication, thereby promoting broader cultural diversity in Indonesia.

Although N5 considered the Acehnese accent less important, all seven informants agreed that it possesses unique qualities and would be unfortunate to remove, as it could reduce engagement, albeit not significantly. This suggests that the Acehnese accent plays an important role in the horror program.

According to Finocchiarno, cited in Amroellah and Khalil (2023), an accent is a linguistic variation of a relatively small group within a specific region or area. Such language is used daily and becomes an identity marker of its speakers (Prihapsari et al., 2019). Each region has its own distinct characteristics (Julianti & Siagian, 2023). This is evident in Nadia Omara's use of Acehnese language and dialect, which naturally emerges in her storytelling and becomes a distinctive feature. The use of the Acehnese accent aligns with Language Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1991), where linguistic adjustment fosters emotional closeness with viewers.

In storytelling, Nadia Omara employs an Acehnese oral tradition style characterized by unique structure and rhythm. This is evident in repetition, distinctive rhythm, and unique delivery of narrative climaxes. Storytelling with familiar narrative structures enhances narrative transportation (Wang et al., 2025), which contributes to viewer engagement.

Nadia Omara's content management strategy represents a combination of storytelling techniques, feedback provision to viewers, and the use of the Acehnese accent in storytelling. This strategy is crucial in fostering viewer engagement, both affectively and conatively. This is evidenced by high levels of emotional sharing and the formation of community culture among viewers. This demonstrates that engaging, authentic content combined with emotional closeness is crucial to the success of entertainment content. Nadia Omara's content success serves as a model for other content creators who often focus solely on visual quality. More importantly, creators should prioritize unique and strong narrative personalization and consistently interact with viewers to build loyal communities.

This study reinforces the understanding that digital engagement is formed through simultaneous interaction between content creators and audiences. Such engagement is realized through three main strategies: storytelling that packages horror in a relaxed and entertaining approach; rapid responses to audience messages and shared horror stories as a form of inclusivity; and the use of regional accents that create a grounded, local, and friendly impression. These strategies highlight the characteristics of new media that emphasize open and dialogic communication (Feroza & Misnawati, 2020), while reinforcing Weidmann's (2025) argument regarding the shift of horror from mere narrative within media spaces toward increasingly immersive and interactive audience experiences.

The findings of this study provide concrete insights into how digital engagement operates in a more contextualized practice. As Johnston (2023) notes regarding the multidimensional nature of digital engagement, what is demonstrated by the "wawak" community is based on a strong immersive dimension between content creators and audiences. Therefore, this study reinforces previous research that conceptualizes engagement as actions taken by users to initiate interactions with other users (Jung et al., 2019). The intense digital engagement of the "Wawak" community also affirms several existing concepts, such as contribution-based engagement (Rishika & Ramaprasad, 2019), participation-based engagement in discussion communities (Bateman et al., 2011), and digital collaboration-based engagement (Faraj et al., 2011). However, what distinguishes this study is the effort to highlight Indonesian diversity and locality in digital horror narratives. This not only contributes

to contemporary horror discourse but also forms the foundation of a distinctive digital engagement, wherein content creators and audiences share the same dimension, allowing them to openly exchange experiences.

CONCLUSION

The success of the storytelling program *Kisah Horor Wawak* on YouTube social media is driven by the intensive external communication conducted by Nadia Omara. There are two forms of external communication in this storytelling program, namely external communication through the uniqueness of horror storytelling and the consistency of providing feedback to viewers' responses. The uniqueness of Nadia Omara's storytelling style in *KHW* includes being dramatic, relaxed, friendly, expressive, and interactive, delivered with a strong Acehnese accent. This personal narrative style is capable of triggering strong emotional engagement with viewers.

The pattern of providing feedback to viewers' responses is manifested in several activities. First, consistently replying in the comment section in the form of sentences or emoticon symbols that indicate appreciation for viewers' responses. Second, delivering expressions of gratitude in the opening of the *KHW* program videos. Third, reposting viewers' stories on other social media platforms, which shows that in those stories, viewers are watching videos from the *KHW* program. Fourth, accommodating various archipelagic horror stories submitted by viewers to be retold in *KHW* content. Nadia Omara's response management toward viewers' comments is able to foster increasingly strong viewer loyalty.

The Acehnese accent, which is a distinctive hallmark of Nadia Omara in storytelling, is demonstrated in several ways, namely the repetition of Acehnese language during narration, the use of an Acehnese oral storytelling style, and consistently addressing viewers as "*wawak*." This form of address not only differentiates Nadia Omara from other content creators but also strengthens parasocial interaction, leading viewers to position Nadia Omara as a friend who is sharing stories. Overall, viewers' responses reflect the presence of strong engagement with Nadia Omara, which is constructed through mechanisms of group identity formation and personal closeness within the digital space.

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