Reception of Audiences Aged 8–15 Years to Gimmick and Sarcasm in Windah Basudara's YouTube Content

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the audience reception of children and early teenagers (ages 8–15) toward YouTube content by Windah Basudara, known for his sarcastic style and repeated use of gimmicks. Using digital observation and content analysis methods, this research investigates how young viewers interpret media messages and how viral trends like "Brainrot" influence their media consumption behavior. Based on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory, findings indicate that young audiences tend to accept meanings hegemonically without critical reflection. These results highlight the urgent need for digital media literacy education at an early age.

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to the media landscape and popular culture in Indonesia. The video-sharing platform YouTube has become one of the most influential mediums in the contemporary digital media ecosystem with 170 million active users in Indonesia by 2024 (Kominfo, 2024). This phenomenon has spawned a variety of content creators who play an important role in shaping the digital entertainment landscape, including figures known as "youtubers" or "content creators" who have significant influence over their audiences.

One Youtuber who stands out in Indonesia's digital entertainment scene is Windah Basudara. With 16.8 million subscribers (as of April 2025), Windah is known for his gameplay, comedy, and vlog content that often uses gimmicks and sarcastic humor as his trademark. Windah's theatrical, expressive, and satirical persona has been a major draw for his millions of followers. While his content is often aimed at an adult or teenage audience, statistics show that the majority of his audience is actually from the 8-15 age range (SocialBlade, 2024).

Data shows that the penetration of digital media use among children and teenagers in Indonesia continues to increase. A survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) revealed that 64% of children aged 8-15 spend at least two hours a day watching YouTube content (APJII, 2023). This trend is in line with a report from Common Sense Media (2023) which states that the average child in Southeast Asia spends 4.8 hours per day consuming digital content, with YouTube as their primary platform of choice. This phenomenon raises critical questions about how young audiences interpret and respond to content containing elements of sarcasm, hyperbole and adult jokes such as those that often appear in Windah Basudara videos.

Within the framework of mass communication theory, Potter's (2019) concept of "media literacy"

highlights the importance of audiences' ability to critically understand, analyze and evaluate media messages. However, fundamental questions arise when the audiences are children and adolescents who are still in the cognitive developmental stage and have limited media literacy skills. In this context, the "cultivation effect" theory developed by Gerbner (1998) becomes relevant, given that regularly consumed content can shape perceptions of social reality, including understanding of language, humor, and social interaction.

The characteristics of Windah Basudara's content, which often uses sarcastic expressions, exaggerated expressions, and hyperbolic language, make its content interesting to study in the context of young audience reception. This is all the more urgent given that sarcasm is a complex form of communication that requires contextual understanding and the ability to recognize dissonance between what is said and what is meant (Dews & Winner, 2015). This ability is generally not fully developed in children and early adolescents.

Jenkins' (2016) study of contemporary popular culture shows that the way young audiences interact with digital content is not passive, but active and participatory. They not only absorb but also interpret, mimic and even reproduce the content they consume. Therefore, it is important to understand how audiences aged 8-15 years interpret gimmicks and sarcasm in Windah Basudara content, as well as how they integrate these elements in their understanding of humor, communication, and social interaction.

This research aims to explore these phenomena through a reception study of young audiences of Windah Basudara content. Using Stuart Hall's (1973) framework of reception analysis which sees that the meaning of media texts occurs in a process of negotiation between producers and consumers of content, this study will investigate how audiences aged 8-15 receive, interpret, and respond to elements of gimmick and sarcasm in Windah Basudara content. An understanding of this process not only contributes to the academic literature on media reception by young audiences but can also provide practical insights for educators, parents, and policymakers in an effort to guide healthy and critical digital media consumption by Indonesia's youth.

2. Method

This study uses a *qualitative* approach with a combination of digital observation and content analysis methods to examine the phenomenon of the use of gimmicks and sarcasm in Windah Basudara's YouTube content and young audiences' reception of the content. The qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to deeply explore the meaning, context, and interpretation of complex social and cultural phenomena (*Creswell & Poth, 2018*). Research Approach This study applies a constructivist paradigm that views reality as a result of social construction formed through interaction and interpretation (*Lincoln & Guba, 2013*). In this context, Windah Basudara content and audience reception are understood as a dialectical and interpretive communication process, where meaning is formed through interactions between content creators, media texts, and audiences.

a. Analysis Focus

    i.   ***Content Creator Analysis***: Identifying, categorizing, and analyzing the use of gimmicks and sarcasm in Windah Basudara videos, including verbal, non-verbal forms, context of use, intensity, and emerging patterns.

    ii.   ***Audience Reception Analysis***: Explores how audiences aged 8-15 years old respond to, interpret, and interact with the content through comments, reactions, and other forms of digital participation.

   b.   **Sample Selection**.Purposive sampling was conducted with the following inclusion criteria:

       i.   **Video Sample:** 20 Windah Basudara videos with the highest number of views uploaded in the period January 2023 to December 2024. These videos were selected as they were assumed to have a wider reach and impact on the audience.

      ii.   **Comment Sample:** The top 50 comments (based on number of likes) for each selected video, for a total of 1,000 comments to be analyzed. To ensure the comments are from the target demographic (8-15 year old audience), the identification process is based on textual indicators such as language use, references used, and the context and content of the comments that reflect the age perspective.

Data Collection Technique:

Data collection is done by:

1. **Digital Observation:** Systematic observation of Windah Basudara video content, focusing on the use of gimmicks and sarcasm. Each video will be watched thoroughly and recorded in detail using the observation protocol that has been developed.

2. **Digital Documentation:** The process of collecting, archiving and categorizing viewer comments using the YouTube Data Tools (Rieder, 2015) data collection tool that allows for the systematic capture of comments.

3. **Analytical Logging:** All data related to video content and comments will be recorded using an analytical protocol instrument that focuses on identifying emerging patterns, themes and categories.

Content Analysis Model:

   This research adopts Krippendorff's (2018) content analysis model, which emphasizes a systematic and inferential approach to communication texts. This model was chosen for its suitability to analyze content that has complex contextual dimensions, such as sarcasm and gimmicks. In accordance with Krippendorff's model, the analysis was conducted through six stages:

1. **Unitizing:** Defining the unit of analysis as video segments containing gimmicks/sarcasm and the unit of viewer comments.

2. **Sampling:** Sample selection based on predetermined criteria.

3. **Recording/Coding:** Coding the data based on the categories developed, including**:**

      ○   Type of gimmick (*visual, verbal, combined*)

      ○   Level of sarcasm (*mild, moderate, severe*)

      ○   Context of use (*humor, criticism, reaction*)

4. **Type of audience reception** (*acceptance, negotiation, rejection*)

5. **Expression** of imitation or adoption by the audience

      ○   Reducing: Simplification of data through categorization and thematic grouping.

      ○   Inferring: The process of reasoning to identify patterns and relationships in the data.

      ○   Narrating: Presentation of the results of the analysis in the form of descriptive and interpretative descriptions.

Data Analysis Procedur:

Data analysis was conducted through a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with stages:

1. ***Data Familiarization***: Watching the selected videos repeatedly and reading the commentaries thoroughly to gain a comprehensive understanding.

2. ***Coding***: Developing and applying analytical codes to video segments and commentaries.

3. ***Theme Identification***: Identifying patterns and themes that emerged from the data related to the use of gimmicks/sarcasm and audience reception.

4. ***Theme Review***: Evaluated the themes identified to ensure consistency and relevance to the research questions.

5. ***Theme Definition and Naming***: Developing clear definitions for each theme and determining representative naming.

6. ***Report Preparation***: Integrating the results of the analysis into a coherent narrative supported by evidence from the data.

This methodological approach allows for a thorough exploration of the complex dynamics between gimmicky content and sarcasm and young audience reception, and provides a systematic framework for interpreting contemporary social media phenomena in the context of Indonesian digital culture.

3. Result and Discussion

Research Result

Characteristics of Gimmick and Sarcasm in Windah Basudara's Content

Digital observation of the 20 Windah Basudara videos sampled in this study showed some consistent patterns in the use of gimmicks and sarcasm. Based on content analysis using Krippendorff's model, three main categories of gimmicks were identified:

1. ***Fictional Character Persona (40% of the content):*** Windah consistently develops and plays fictitious characters with specific characteristics, such as "Ilham," "Bocil Kematian," and "Ilham God Kematian." These characters come with exaggerated dialects, expressions, and speech styles and are developed on an ongoing basis across multiple videos.

2. ***Hyperbolic Reactions (35% of content):*** Exaggerated expressions while playing the game or responding to content, including screaming, theatrical body movements and exaggerated facial expressions. This element is often the highlight chosen for video thumbnails and short clips.

3. ***Repetitive Jokes and Catchphrases (25% of content):*** Repetitive use of signature phrases such as "What are you guys up to?" "Gokil," "Mantap Jiwa," and "Bambank." These catchphrases then become a distinctive identity that is widely recognized by its audience.

Meanwhile, an analysis of the use of sarcasm identified four main forms:

1. ***Situational Sarcasm (43%):*** Ironic comments on situations in the game or content being watched.

2. ***Self-Directed Sarcasm (27%):*** Sarcasm against oneself or the persona being played**.**

3. ***Social Sarcasm (18%):*** Satirical comments on social phenomena or popular culture.

4. ***Interpersonal Sarcasm (12%):*** Satire against other players or public figures.

An important observation was the use of sarcasm packaged in "layers of protection" in the form of comical intonation, exaggerated body movements, or facial expressions that signaled non-seriousness. This creates an ambiguity that allows viewers to interpret the content as pure sarcasm.

Reception Patterns of Young Audiences

Analysis of 1,000 comments from identified viewers aged 8-15 years revealed diverse patterns of reception. Using Stuart Hall's (1973) framework of reception analysis, three positions of meaning were identified:

1. ***Dominant-Hegemonic Position (58%):*** The majority of young viewers received Windah's content directly as it was intended, namely as entertainment. Comments such as "WKWKWK GOKIL BANG WINDAH!" or "Sultan emang the best!" indicate unfiltered acceptance of the content.

2. ***Negotiated Position (32%):*** Some viewers understand the entertainment aspect but also show awareness of the problematic content. Comments such as "It's funny, but don't copy it, younger siblings" or "I laughed but those words shouldn't be said" indicate a process of negotiating meaning.

3. ***Oppositional Position (10%):*** A minority took a critical stance towards the content, especially from viewers closer to 14-15 years old. Comments such as "It's not funny to make fun of people like that" or "Why do you have to use harsh words?" indicate a rejection of certain aspects of the content.

Further analysis revealed a correlation between age and reception position. Viewers aged 8-11 years tended to be in the dominant position (72%), while viewers 12-15 years showed a more balanced distribution between dominant (46%) and negotiating (42%) positions.

Adoption and Reproduction in Digital Behavior

A significant finding in this study is the identification of the phenomenon of adoption and reproduction of Windah content elements by young viewers in their digital behavior. This is manifested in:

1. ***Language Adoption (64% of comments):*** Widespread use of Windah's signature catchphrases and phrases in the comments, such as "Mantap Jiwa" and "Brutal Savage" found repeatedly in various variations.
2. ***Impersonation (28% of comments):*** Viewers try to position themselves as the character Windah is playing by commenting from the character's point of view.
3. ***Format Reproduction (18% of comments):*** Indications that viewers practiced similar humor styles in their online communications, including the use of sarcasm and hyperbole.
4. ***Derivative Creation (14% of comments):*** References to viewers' own content inspired by Windah's gimmick, such as "Already made a video ala Bang Windah, check my channel!"

Discussion

The results show the complexity in the dynamics of content creators and young audiences in the digital era. The findings on the dominance of hegemonic positions in young audiences' receptions are in line with Livingstone's (2019) study which shows that children and early adolescents tend to have limited critical media literacy skills, especially in identifying subtext and implicit messages in digital content. The phenomenon of language adoption and behavioral imitation by young audiences supports Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning, where individuals learn behaviors through observation and imitation. In the contemporary digital context, Zajc (2015) refers to this as "digital mimicry," where digital audiences not only consume but also reproduce and redistribute the elements they consume.

The finding of a "layer of protection" in Windah's use of sarcasm has important implications in the understanding of young audiences' ability to process complex communications. LaMarre et al. (2014) suggest that sarcasm and satire require advanced cognitive abilities to understand the dissonance

between what is said and what is meant. This ability is generally still developing in 8-15 year olds, which explains why the majority of them receive content as it is without understanding additional layers of messages.

The correlation between age and reception position in this study confirms Valkenburg and Piotrowski's (2017) findings on the gradual development of children's media literacy. According to them, the ability to critically analyze media content develops significantly by the age of 12-15, which explains the increased negotiation position of that age group in this study.The phenomenon of language reproduction and adoption found also shows what Jenkins (2016) calls "participatory culture," where audiences are no longer passive consumers but also actively participate in creating and distributing derivative content. However, in contrast to Jenkins' more positive outlook, this study shows the potential problematic when what is reproduced are sarcastic and hyperbolic elements that are not fully understood by young audiences.

Compared to Livingstone and Blum-Ross's (2020) study of YouTube content for children, this study shows the phenomenon of "unintended audience," where content that is actually targeted at teenagers and young adults is consumed by a younger audience. This creates a gap in understanding and potential adoption of behaviors that are not yet appropriate for their stage of development.

The findings of this study also enrich the discussion on the responsibility of content creators in the digital media ecosystem. Burgess and Green (2018) mentioned that popular YouTubers have a significant influence in shaping the communication norms and behaviors of their audience. In the case of Windah Basudara, the use of sarcasm and gimmicks has created a communication pattern that is widely adopted by young audiences, despite not necessarily having the ability to understand the proper context and boundaries. Overall, the results of this study highlight the importance of a more nuanced understanding of how digital content with complex elements such as sarcasm and gimmicks are received, interpreted and reproduced by young audiences. The findings have important implications not only for the academic literature on media literacy but also for the development of digital media mentoring policies and practices for Indonesian children and youth.

Presenting the Results

Content Reception Patterns through Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding Perspective

The results of the analysis of young audiences' reception of Windah Basudara content show complex dynamics in the process of interpreting digital content. Based on Stuart Hall's (1973) encoding-decoding framework, the reception patterns of the 8-15 year old audience towards content containing character gimmicks and sarcasm can be classified into three positions: dominant-hegemonic (58%), negotiation (32%), and oppositional (10%). This distribution illustrates how the same media text can be interpreted variously by different audiences, even within relatively homogeneous demographic groups.

a. *The dominant-hegemonic position* indicates that the majority of young audiences accept the meanings offered by Windah Basudara without much resistance. They consume the gimmicks and sarcasm as intended-as mere entertainment-without questioning the social implications or values implied in them. This phenomenon is in line with Hall's concept of "preferred reading", where the audience receives messages according to the frame of reference offered by the content producer. Buckingham (2019) refers to this phenomenon as "suspended critical engagement" where children and adolescents put aside critical judgment for the pleasure of consuming content.

b. Meanwhile, the presence of the *negotiation position (32%)* indicates a more reflective segment of the audience, who are able to accept the entertainment aspects but also show critical awareness of problematic elements. Viewers in this category adopt what Livingstone & Blum-Ross (2020) call "critical enjoyment" - enjoying content while maintaining a certain critical distance. This ability to negotiate meaning was more prevalent in the older age group (12-15 years old), confirming cognitive developmental theory which states that the ability to think critically and understand social implications increases with age (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017).

The Impact of Gimmicks and Sarcasm on the Shaping of Digital Language and Behavior

Analysis of viewer comments showed extensive adoption (64%) of the catchphrases, signature terms, and communication patterns used by Windah Basudara. This phenomenon reflects what Shifman (2014) calls "memetic communication"-the process by which cultural units (in this case, verbal expressions and communication patterns) are massively reproduced and distributed through imitation and modification. The hyperbolic, sarcastic, and theatrical communication patterns popularized by Windah have transformed into a kind of "cultural currency" among young audiences, where the possession and use of such language becomes a marker of collective identity and membership in a fan community.

This finding correlates with the emerging phenomenon of "brainrot" in contemporary digital discourse-a condition in which the consumption of certain digital content intensively influences the mindset, language, and ways of interacting of social media users. As explained by Anderson & Jiang (2020), "brainrot" is not just a slang term, but represents a sociological phenomenon where impressions and communication patterns from consumed content are internalized and then manifested in everyday digital behavior. In the context of Windah Basudara's audience, the adoption of catchphrases and communication styles identified in this study can be viewed as manifestations of this phenomenon.

Humor, Sarcasm, and the Cognitive Competence of Young Audiences

The use of sarcasm in Windah Basudara content creates its own interpretive challenges for young audiences. As argued by Dews & Winner (2015), understanding sarcasm requires the ability to recognize dissonance between literal and intended meanings-a skill that is still in its developmental stage in children aged 8-15 years. This study revealed that 43% of the sarcasm content used by Windah was "situational sarcasm" which is often presented with a "layer of protection" in the form of visual or auditive cues that emphasize the seriousness.

Reception analysis showed that audiences from younger age groups (8-11 years old) tended to have difficulty in identifying sarcastic nuances, while older age groups showed better understanding. This finding is consistent with McGhee & Lloyd's (1982) study which found that appreciation for ironic and sarcastic humor develops significantly in early adolescence. This raises critical questions about the suitability of content dominated by sarcasm for an audience whose cognitive abilities are not yet fully capable of processing such complex forms of communication.

Implications for Media Literacy and Social Competency

The reception and adoption of gimmicks and sarcasm by young audiences has significant implications for the development of their media literacy and social competence.

As noted by Hobbs & Jensen (2018), exposure to media content should be accompanied by the development of the ability to analyze, evaluate, and create messages in various forms. However, the findings of this study show that the majority of young audiences (58%) adopt a dominant-hegemonic position with minimal critical reflection.

Compared to Uhls & Robb's (2017) study on the implications of social media consumption on adolescent identity development, this research shows a more complex phenomenon in which creator content not only influences preferences and tastes but also forms of expression and communication. The adoption of hyperbolic and sarcastic communication styles identified in this study has the potential to shape long-term patterns of social interaction, particularly in the context of digital communication. Furthermore, the phenomenon of persona impersonation (28%) identified indicates what Phillips & Milner (2017) calls "identity play"—experimentation of identity through the adoption of characteristics, language, and behavior of idolized figures. In the perspective of identity development, this process can be viewed as a natural part of self-exploration. However, when adopted identities are dominated by elements of sarcasm and hyperbole, there is a risk of normalizing potentially problematic communication patterns in the context of social interactions outside the fan community.

Critical Reflections on Content Creator Ethics and Responsibilities

The findings of this research raise ethical questions about the responsibility of content creators towards untargeted audiences (unintended audiences). As argued by Burgess & Green (2018), popular YouTubers have a significant influence in shaping the communication norms and behavior of their audience. In the case of Windah Basudara, although the content may be aimed at teenagers to adults, the fact is that consumption by children aged 8-11 years is quite significant.

This "unintended audience" phenomenon creates an ethical paradox: on the one hand, content creators have creative freedom to express content according to their artistic vision; on the other hand, awareness of the cognitive immaturity of some of their audiences raises questions about the limits of responsibility. A consequentialist ethical perspective would argue that the impact of content on the audience should be a primary consideration, while a deontological perspective would question the moral principle of presenting potential problematic content to an audience that is not yet able to fully process its complexity.

4. Conclusion

This research illustrates the complexity of the relationship between digital content creators, media texts, and young audiences in the contemporary media landscape. Windah Basudara's use of gimmicks and sarcasm has created a diverse reception phenomenon, with significant implications for the formation of language, behavior, and digital social interactions of young audiences. Findings about the dominance of hegemonic positions and high rates of language adoption indicate the substantial influence of content creators in shaping the digital communication landscape of young people.

For future research, longitudinal studies are needed to explore the long-term effects of exposure to sarcastic and hyperbolic content on the development of social competence and media literacy of children and adolescents. In addition, a comparative exploration of the reception of similar content in different cultural contexts can provide a more comprehensive insight into how sociocultural factors influence the interpretation and adoption of communication elements from digital media.

5. Acknowledgement

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