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Instagram Affordances and Audience Engagement in A Cultural Festival: A Case Study of the Golo Koe Festival in Labuan Bajo

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Abstract – This study explores how Instagram affordances shape audience engagement with the Golo Koe Festival (FGK), a cultural and religious festival in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia. Situated in a tourism destination undergoing rapid development, FGK brings together Manggarai cultural traditions and Catholic spirituality within the broader context of contemporary tourism. Using a descriptive qualitative case study approach, the research draws on interviews with six informants and content analysis of three Instagram Reels published by the festival's official account during the pre-event period. The analysis examines audience experiences, content performance, cultural narratives, and forms of digital participation. The findings suggest that Instagram provides opportunities for audiences to encounter festival information, interpret cultural representations, express emotional responses, and participate in festival-related communication. Interview accounts illustrate how exposure to content shared by personal networks may stimulate further information-seeking and interest in attending, while practices such as Story sharing, reposting, tagging, and content collaboration provide opportunities for audience participation. The three Reels also show varying patterns of reach and interaction, although these descriptive metrics do not establish the causes of audience responses or directly measure cognitive and emotional engagement. Drawing on multidimensional engagement perspectives, the study offers a case-grounded conceptual synthesis of cognitive, emotional, and active engagement in a cultural festival context. The findings provide practical insights for festival organizers seeking to develop culturally meaningful and participatory digital communication strategies.

Keywords: Instagram affordances, audience engagement, digital participation, cultural festival, user-generated content.

Abstrak *– Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana fitur dan karakteristik Instagram membentuk keterlibatan audiens dalam Festival Golo Koe (FGK), sebuah festival budaya dan keagamaan di Labuan Bajo, Indonesia. Berada di destinasi pariwisata yang mengalami perkembangan pesat, FGK menghadirkan tradisi budaya Manggarai dan spiritualitas Katolik dalam konteks perkembangan pariwisata kontemporer. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif deskriptif dengan data yang diperoleh melalui wawancara terhadap enam informan dan analisis konten terhadap tiga Instagram Reels yang dipublikasikan melalui akun resmi festival selama periode promosi sebelum acara. Analisis berfokus pada pengalaman audiens, performa konten, narasi budaya, dan bentuk partisipasi digital. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Instagram menyediakan peluang bagi audiens untuk memperoleh informasi tentang festival, memaknai representasi budaya, mengekspresikan respons emosional, dan berpartisipasi dalam komunikasi terkait festival. Pengalaman informan mengindikasikan bahwa paparan konten yang dibagikan melalui jejaring personal dapat mendorong pencarian informasi lebih lanjut dan ketertarikan untuk menghadiri festival. Sementara itu, praktik berbagi Instagram Stories, mengunggah ulang konten, menandai akun resmi, dan kolaborasi konten membuka peluang bagi partisipasi audiens. Ketiga Reels yang dianalisis juga memperlihatkan variasi pola jangkauan dan interaksi. Namun, metrik tersebut bersifat deskriptif dan tidak dapat memastikan penyebab respons audiens ataupun mengukur keterlibatan kognitif dan emosional secara langsung. Dengan mengacu pada perspektif multidimensional tentang keterlibatan, penelitian ini menawarkan sintesis konseptual berbasis kasus mengenai keterlibatan kognitif, emosional, dan aktif dalam konteks festival budaya. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan praktis bagi penyelenggara festival dalam mengembangkan strategi komunikasi digital yang partisipatif dan bermakna secara budaya.*

Kata kunci: *fitur Instagram, keterlibatan audiens, festival budaya, partisipasi digital, konten buatan pengguna*.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has reshaped how cultural events communicate with audiences and how audiences encounter, interpret, and share cultural experiences. Social media platforms

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have expanded communication beyond the one-way dissemination of promotional information by enabling users to respond to, circulate, and contribute to digital content. In this environment, audiences are not simply recipients of messages; they may also participate in the circulation and interpretation of cultural narratives through their own interactions and content contributions. Audience engagement, therefore, involves more than exposure to information or observable online interactions. It can also include how individuals process information, develop personal or emotional connections, and choose to respond through sharing, commenting, content creation, or participation in an event. These different forms of engagement provide a useful perspective for understanding how cultural events communicate with audiences in increasingly digital environments.

Instagram provides a relevant context for examining these developments because its features support visual storytelling, content circulation, and interaction between organizations and users. Features such as Reels, Stories, mentions, sharing, and collaborative posts allow event organizers to distribute information while creating opportunities for audiences to encounter and circulate content through their own social networks. The concept of platform affordances is useful here because it draws attention to the possibilities for action that platform features make available, while recognizing that these possibilities do not automatically produce particular user responses (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). From this perspective, Instagram should not be understood merely as a promotional channel. Its features may also support different forms of audience engagement, including information-seeking, emotional responses to visual narratives, and active participation in digital conversations surrounding an event. However, the presence of interactive features alone does not establish the extent or nature of audience engagement. Understanding engagement also requires attention to how audiences encounter content, interpret its meaning, and respond within their particular social and cultural contexts.

These considerations are particularly relevant to cultural festivals, where communication serves purposes beyond attracting visitors. Cultural events can provide spaces for representing local traditions, expressing collective identity, and communicating cultural values to audiences with different backgrounds. Social media can extend these representations beyond the physical event by allowing images, videos, and personal accounts to circulate before, during, and after festival activities. Research on consumer engagement emphasizes its multidimensional nature, while studies of social media participation highlight the roles of interaction and user-generated content (Brodie et al., 2013; Schivinski et al., 2016). More specifically, Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) conceptualize consumer brand engagement in social media through three dimensions: cognitive processing, affection, and activation. Although their framework was developed in a consumer-brand context, these dimensions provide a useful conceptual starting point for examining how audiences process festival-related information, develop emotional responses to cultural narratives, and engage in forms of participation. In the present study, they are adapted as interpretive dimensions of cognitive, emotional, and active engagement rather than applied as a validated measurement scale. This distinction is important because metrics such as views, reach, likes, comments, shares, and saves indicate aspects of online content performance but cannot independently explain audiences' cognitive interpretations or emotional responses. Combining content metrics with qualitative accounts can therefore provide a more nuanced understanding of how festival communication is encountered and interpreted.

The relationship between digital communication and cultural representation is particularly important in Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. As one of Indonesia's designated Super-Priority Tourism Destinations, Labuan Bajo has experienced tourism development that creates opportunities for local economic activity while also raising questions about cultural representation and the continuity of local identity. Destination communication in such a context needs to address more than the promotion of attractions and visitor experiences. It also provides an opportunity to communicate the cultural meanings, traditions, and community identities that contribute to the distinctiveness of a destination. Within this context, the Golo Koe Festival (FGK) represents a relevant case because it brings together Manggarai cultural identity and Catholic spirituality in a public cultural-religious celebration. The festival's digital communication offers a setting in which these cultural and religious narratives can be presented to audiences through visual content and shared experiences. Its participation in the Ministry of Tourism's Kharisma Event Nusantara (KEN) program also places the festival within a broader national context of cultural-event promotion. Examining FGK's Instagram communication can therefore provide insight into how a locally grounded festival presents its cultural identity in a tourism destination undergoing broader change.

Research has also begun to examine the digital channels used to promote FGK. Ciptosari et al. (2026) evaluated the festival's website as a digital awareness tool using Google Analytics data, examining website

performance and sources of traffic. Their study found that Instagram referrals accounted for 16% of website traffic during the period examined. This finding indicates that Instagram formed part of the festival's wider digital communication environment and directed users to its website. However, website analytics and Instagram audience engagement address different analytical questions. Website analytics can describe traffic and browsing behaviour, while examining Instagram content alongside audience accounts can provide insight into how festival narratives circulate, how audiences encounter content through official and personal networks, and how they interpret or respond to these encounters. The website study thus provides a foundation for further investigation, while leaving open questions about the experiences and forms of engagement associated with FGK's Instagram communication.

Although previous research has examined the cultural and religious significance of FGK and its digital promotion, the relationship between Instagram features, content performance, and audience experiences remains insufficiently explored in this specific context. Berybe and Rudianto (2023) discuss the festival in relation to holistic tourism and religious moderation, while Ciptosari et al. (2026) examine its website performance as a digital awareness tool. These studies provide important contextual foundations but do not address how audiences encounter and respond to festival-related Instagram content or how such experiences relate to different dimensions of engagement. Audiences may discover festival content through the official account, through posts shared by friends or other users, or through subsequent information-seeking. They may also respond differently to cultural and religious representations depending on their interests and experiences. These responses should not be assumed to follow a fixed sequence or to result directly from particular platform features. Rather, they need to be examined through evidence that considers both observable content performance and the accounts of people who encounter it. This study addresses this gap by exploring Instagram engagement at FGK, with attention to platform affordances, cultural narratives, content performance, and audience experiences.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how Instagram features and content practices may enable different forms of audience engagement with the Golo Koe Festival. Engagement is considered through three interpretive dimensions: cognitive engagement, referring to information-seeking and interpretation; emotional engagement, referring to personal responses and meanings attached to cultural or religious narratives; and active engagement, referring to forms of participation such as interaction, sharing, and attendance. These dimensions serve as complementary analytical perspectives rather than sequential stages of audience development. The study adopts a descriptive qualitative case-study approach, drawing on interviews with six informants and an analysis of three Instagram Reels published during the festival's pre-event promotional period. The content analysis considers views, reach, total interactions, and engagement rate, while the interviews provide additional insight into how audiences encountered and interpreted festival-related content. This combination allows the study to examine content performance alongside audience experiences, while recognizing that platform metrics do not directly measure every dimension of engagement.

The study contributes a case-grounded conceptual synthesis of digital audience engagement in a local cultural-festival context. Rather than proposing a new theory or a validated causal model, it brings together Instagram affordances, cultural and religious narratives, content performance, and the cognitive, emotional, and active dimensions of engagement to interpret the empirical findings. By adapting the conceptual dimensions discussed by Hollebeek et al. (2014) to a cultural-festival setting, the study offers a context-specific interpretation of engagement beyond the consumer-brand context in which those dimensions were originally developed. This approach highlights why audience engagement should not be assessed solely through views, reach, or interaction metrics, but should also be understood through audiences' interpretations and experiences. Practically, the findings may inform festival organizers and cultural tourism stakeholders seeking to combine event information, cultural storytelling, and opportunities for audience contribution in their digital communication strategies. By focusing on FGK in Labuan Bajo, the study offers context-specific insights into social media engagement and cultural-event communication without claiming statistical generalizability to other festivals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Affordances and Audience Engagement

Social media platforms have reshaped how audiences encounter, interpret, and participate in cultural communication. Instagram, in particular, provides a visual and interactive environment in which images,

short-form videos, collaborative posts, and user-generated content can circulate across interconnected audiences. Leaver et al. (2020) conceptualize Instagram within the broader culture of visual social media, emphasizing the significance of visual practices in shaping online communication and social interaction. However, the possibilities for participation are not determined by visual content alone. Platform affordances—the action possibilities emerging from the relationship between platform features and user practices—also shape how content is produced, circulated, and engaged with (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). In a cultural festival context, these affordances provide opportunities for audiences to encounter festival narratives, share personal interpretations, and contribute to the circulation of cultural representations.

Audience engagement provides an analytical perspective for examining these interactions. Brodie et al. (2013) conceptualize consumer engagement as a context-dependent process involving interactive experiences within relationships and communities. Dessart et al. (2016) further examine engagement in social media contexts through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. More specifically, Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) conceptualize consumer brand engagement in social media through three dimensions: cognitive processing, affection, and activation. Cognitive processing concerns the mental attention and processing directed toward the engagement object; affection concerns the emotional responses associated with engagement; and activation concerns the energy and effort invested in engagement-related activities. Together, these dimensions provide a conceptual basis for examining engagement beyond visible interactions alone.

Although Hollebeek et al. (2014) developed their framework in a consumer-brand context, its three dimensions offer a useful starting point for examining audience engagement with cultural festivals. In the present study, cognitive engagement refers to how audiences seek, process, and interpret information about the festival; emotional engagement refers to their personal and emotional responses to cultural and religious narratives; and active engagement refers to observable forms of participation, including interacting with, sharing, or creating festival-related content and attending the event. These categories represent a contextual adaptation of the literature rather than a direct application of the original measurement scale. They are used as complementary interpretive dimensions, not as sequential stages through which all audiences necessarily progress.

Instagram affordances provide a link between these dimensions and observable digital practices. Reels and other visual formats create opportunities to encounter and interpret festival content; collaborative posts can connect the official festival account with partner accounts and their audiences; and tagging, reposting, and user-generated content enable audiences to circulate their own representations of the event. Schivinski et al. (2016) provide an additional perspective for distinguishing social media activities associated with consuming, contributing to, and creating brand-related content. These activities help describe observable forms of participation, but they should not be equated directly with cognitive processing, affection, or activation. Moreover, the availability of platform features does not establish that audiences experience deeper engagement or that specific features independently cause particular outcomes. Examining engagement therefore requires attention to both observable content performance and the meanings and experiences reported by audiences.

Cultural Resonance, Emotional Responses, and Festival Narratives

The cultural context in which audiences encounter digital content is important for understanding how they interpret festival narratives and develop emotional responses. Schudson (1989) examines how cultural symbols acquire efficacy within social and cultural contexts, while Giorgi (2017) discusses the relationship between cognition, emotion, and resonance in the effectiveness of frames. Together, these perspectives provide a basis for examining why particular cultural representations may be meaningful to audiences. Content that draws on recognizable symbols, shared memories, religious meanings, or local identities may invite interpretations and emotional responses that differ from those elicited by generic promotional messages.

This perspective is relevant to the Golo Koe Festival (FGK), where Catholic religious practices intersect with Manggarai cultural expressions. Visual representations of traditional attire, cultural performances, and religious processions can communicate meanings extending beyond the immediate promotion of festival activities. Such representations may provide information about the event while also inviting audiences to connect its content with their cultural knowledge, personal interests, or religious experiences. However, the cultural significance of a representation should not be assumed solely from its

visual characteristics. Audience interpretations and interview accounts are necessary to understand how particular narratives are perceived and what meanings informants associate with them. This distinction also connects cultural resonance with the cognitive and emotional dimensions of engagement: audiences may interpret the same representation differently and may not necessarily experience the same emotional response.

Emotional branding offers a complementary perspective on the relationship between communication and audience responses. Gobé (2010) emphasizes the role of emotional connections in branding and relationships between brands and people. In the context of cultural festivals, this perspective can help interpret how visual storytelling and symbolic representations may contribute to audiences' perceived connections with an event. It also complements the affection dimension of engagement discussed by Hollebeek et al. (2014), while addressing a different conceptual question: emotional branding concerns the role of emotional connections in branding, whereas affection is a dimension used to conceptualize engagement. Nevertheless, emotional responses reported by individual informants do not, by themselves, establish long-term attachment, audience loyalty, or a sustained emotional relationship with the festival. In this study, cultural resonance and emotional branding therefore serve as interpretive perspectives for examining audience accounts and responses to festival content, rather than as independently tested causal mechanisms.

Participatory Practices, User-Generated Content, and Cultural Representation

Audience engagement on social media also involves the circulation and production of content beyond the official communication of an event. Carah and Angus (2018) examine the relationship between algorithmic processes, participatory labor, and branding on social media, highlighting the interconnected nature of platform infrastructures and cultural production. Their perspective is relevant to understanding how institutional accounts, media partners, and audiences contribute to the circulation of festival narratives. Collaborative posts and cross-account distribution can connect different communication networks, although the extent to which these practices increase visibility or engagement depends on the specific content and context.

User-generated content (UGC) provides another perspective on audience participation. Schivinski et al. (2016) examine engagement with brand-related social media content and provide a basis for distinguishing forms of content and audience engagement. In cultural festival settings, audience-created Stories, tagged posts, and shared experiences can supplement official narratives with personal representations of the event. These practices may broaden the range of perspectives through which a festival is represented and circulated. However, the production or sharing of UGC should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of cultural co-creation, collective ownership, or cultural preservation. Such interpretations require attention to the content produced, the context of participation, and the meanings expressed by participants.

Research on Instagram and cultural institutions also provides a relevant contextual perspective. Nyman (2023), for example, examines Instagram branding in two Nordic opera companies, offering a point of comparison for considering the relationship between cultural institutions, visual communication, and audience accessibility. Although opera companies and the Golo Koe Festival operate in different cultural settings, this research illustrates the relevance of studying digital branding in cultural contexts rather than limiting engagement analysis to conventional commercial brands. Highfield and Leaver (2016) similarly demonstrate the relevance of digital methods for examining visual social media practices and their expressive forms.

Van Dijck's (2013) concept of the culture of connectivity further emphasizes that social media platforms are embedded in wider social practices and relationships. From this perspective, Instagram is not simply a neutral channel for distributing festival information. Its features and networked environment shape the ways in which cultural representations can be shared, encountered, and recontextualized. For FGK, this perspective directs analytical attention to the interaction between official festival narratives, audience-generated representations, and the platform features through which these materials circulate. It also highlights the importance of interpreting digital participation within the cultural and social context of the festival.

Toward a Case-Grounded Conceptual Synthesis

The literature reviewed above provides complementary perspectives for interpreting audience engagement in cultural festival communication. Research on consumer and social media engagement offers

conceptual foundations for examining cognitive processing, emotional responses, and engagement-related activities (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Research on platform affordances explains how Instagram features provide opportunities for interaction and content circulation (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Carah & Angus, 2018). Perspectives on cultural resonance and emotional branding help interpret the meanings and emotional responses associated with festival narratives (Schudson, 1989; Giorgi, 2017; Gobé, 2010). Meanwhile, research on participatory content and digital connectivity provides a basis for examining how audience-generated materials contribute to the circulation and representation of cultural events (Schivinski et al., 2016; van Dijck, 2013).

These perspectives address related but distinct aspects of engagement. Hollebeek et al. (2014) provide the conceptual basis for distinguishing cognitive processing, affection, and activation, while Schivinski et al. (2016) help describe different forms of observable social media activity. Platform affordances explain the possibilities for interaction and circulation, whereas cultural resonance helps interpret why particular narratives may carry meaning for audiences. Bringing these perspectives together allows the present study to examine not only what audiences do on Instagram but also how they encounter and interpret festival content. This distinction is particularly important because observable content metrics and participation practices do not, on their own, establish the cognitive or emotional dimensions of engagement.

Building on this synthesis, the study develops a case-grounded conceptual synthesis of Instagram-mediated audience engagement in the Golo Koe Festival. The synthesis uses cognitive, emotional, and active engagement as complementary analytical dimensions, informed by the cognitive processing, affection, and activation dimensions discussed by Hollebeek et al. (2014). It considers Instagram affordances as enabling conditions for digital interaction and draws on cultural resonance and participatory practices to interpret the meanings associated with festival content. Content performance metrics, including views, reach, total interactions, and engagement rate, provide complementary evidence about the observed performance of selected Reels, while interview accounts inform the interpretation of audience experiences. These sources are considered together without assuming that the metrics directly measure all engagement dimensions or that platform features cause particular audience responses. The resulting synthesis is an interpretive framework grounded in the empirical findings and existing literature, not a new theory or a validated causal model. By applying these perspectives to the Golo Koe Festival, the study illustrates how established concepts can be brought together to understand audience engagement in a local cultural-religious festival context.

METHOD

Research Design and Case Selection

This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study design to examine how Instagram affordances may enable different dimensions of audience engagement in the context of the Golo Koe Festival (FGK) in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia. A qualitative case study approach was adopted to explore audience experiences, interpretations of festival-related content, and digital participation practices within their specific cultural and social context. Rather than testing causal relationships between Instagram features and audience behavior, the study examined reported audience experiences and observable patterns of engagement associated with the festival's digital communication.

FGK was selected as the case because it is a cultural-religious festival that combines Catholic traditions with Manggarai cultural expressions and uses social media to communicate festival-related narratives. The official Instagram account, @Festival_Golokoe, served as the primary digital context for examining institutional content and audience interaction. The research was conducted from August to December 2024, covering the period during and after the festival. Instagram content published before the festival was also examined to contextualize the festival's promotional communication and audience engagement.

Informant Selection and Interviews

Six informants were selected through purposive sampling based on the relevance of their experiences to the study of Instagram-mediated audience engagement with the Golo Koe Festival (FGK). The selection focused on individuals who had encountered FGK-related content through Instagram or had experiences relevant to understanding how festival information circulated through the platform and personal networks.

This approach allowed the study to consider different forms of engagement, including direct interaction with the festival's official Instagram account and indirect exposure to content shared by other users. The informants were Ketrin (19, Labuan Bajo), Inna (22, Labuan Bajo), Jessica (25, Manado), Hans (36, West Manggarai), Ning (45, Bekasi), and Anjes (23, Ruteng). Their accounts provided perspectives on how festival-related information was encountered, interpreted, and associated with interest in the festival. The sample was intended to provide context-specific qualitative insights rather than statistical representation of the wider festival audience.

Data were collected through online, semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted by the researcher. The interviews were recorded and explored informants' encounters with FGK-related content, motivations for engaging with the festival, interpretations of cultural and religious representations, emotional responses, and experiences of digital participation. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to explore topics relevant to the research objectives while accommodating differences in informants' experiences.

The selection of six informants was intended to provide contextualized accounts relevant to the qualitative case study rather than a statistically representative sample of festival audiences. Data saturation was not formally assessed; therefore, the study does not claim that saturation was achieved. The findings are interpreted within the scope of the selected informants and the specific context of FGK.

Instagram Content Sampling and Analysis

Instagram content from the official @Festival_Golokoe account was examined to complement the interview data and identify observable patterns in festival communication and audience interaction. The content analysis considered formats and practices including Reels, Stories, collaborative posts, audience tagging, and user-generated content shared through the festival account.

For comparative content-performance analysis, three Reels published on June 3, July 5, and August 3, 2024, were selected to represent the festival's promotional communication during the pre-event period. The selected posts addressed different themes, including the cultural meaning of the festival, youth creativity, and event promotion, and involved collaborations with digital media or institutional partners. The analysis considered each Reel's content theme, duration, recorded views, account reach, and interactions. Engagement rates were calculated using the number of recorded interactions relative to account reach, expressed as a percentage:

$$\text{Engagement rate} = (\text{Total interactions} / \text{Account reach}) \times 100 \quad (1)$$

Total interactions comprised likes, comments, shares, and saves, based on the metrics recorded for the selected Reels. The engagement rate was used as a descriptive indicator of interaction relative to the number of accounts reached. The three Reels were treated as illustrative cases representing the pre-event promotional period, not as a statistically representative sample of all content published by FGK. Consequently, comparisons were used to describe differences in observed performance and explore possible associations with content characteristics and collaboration, rather than to establish causal effects or universal determinants of audience engagement.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Interview data and Instagram content observations were analyzed thematically, drawing on the approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved familiarization with the collected data, identification of initial codes, development of themes, and interpretation in relation to the research objectives and relevant literature. Coding was conducted manually using structured spreadsheets. The analysis focused on four broad areas: participation motivations, cultural representation, emotional resonance, and digital participation and content circulation. These areas provided an analytical focus for examining how informants described their experiences and how their accounts related to the content and participation practices observed on Instagram. All six informants' accounts were considered, including similarities and differences in their experiences.

The interpretation of audience engagement was informed by the multidimensional conceptualization of engagement in social media research, particularly the cognitive processing, affection, and activation dimensions proposed by Hollebeek et al. (2014). In this study, these dimensions were adapted as

interpretive categories of cognitive, emotional, and active engagement, respectively. Cognitive engagement concerned how informants sought, processed, and interpreted festival-related information; emotional engagement concerned their personal and emotional responses to cultural and religious narratives; and active engagement concerned reported or observable forms of participation, such as interacting with, sharing, or creating festival-related content and attending the festival. This adaptation served as a conceptual guide for interpreting the qualitative data rather than as a validated measurement scale. The analysis did not assume that the three dimensions occurred in a fixed sequence or that all informants experienced each dimension in the same way.

The interview findings were interpreted alongside observations of Instagram content to examine the relationship between reported audience experiences and observable digital communication practices. The analysis of the three selected Reels focused on descriptive performance indicators, including views, reach, total interactions, and engagement rate. These metrics provided contextual evidence about content performance but were not treated as direct measures of cognitive or emotional engagement. Instead, interview accounts were used to explore the meanings, motivations, and responses that could not be established from platform metrics alone. The conceptual synthesis was developed by interpreting these different forms of evidence in relation to established perspectives on social media engagement, platform affordances, cultural resonance, and participatory practices.

To strengthen the credibility of the interpretation, source triangulation was conducted by comparing interview accounts with Instagram content observations and available contextual materials, including festival reports and media coverage. This comparison provided complementary sources of evidence for interpreting the case, although it did not establish causal relationships between platform features and audience behavior. Data saturation was not formally assessed. The findings are therefore interpreted within the scope of the six informants, the three selected Reels, and the specific cultural-religious context of FGK. They are not intended for statistical generalization to other audiences, content formats, or cultural festivals. Rather, the study offers a case-grounded conceptual synthesis of Instagram-mediated audience engagement based on the empirical evidence examined.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the qualitative case study of Instagram-based audience engagement at the Golo Koe Festival (FGK). The discussion is organized into five themes: the festival context, audience interaction and participation, Instagram content performance, cultural branding through visual narratives, and the dimensions of audience engagement. Drawing on interviews with six informants and an analysis of three Reels published by the festival's official Instagram account, @Festival_Golokoe, the analysis examines how Instagram's features and cultural narratives may facilitate different forms of engagement. The findings are interpreted in relation to existing literature on platform affordances, audience engagement, cultural resonance, emotional branding, and user-generated content. Rather than establishing a causal transformation in audience behavior, the study offers a case-grounded interpretation of how digital communication and audience experiences intersect in a cultural-religious festival context.

Contextual Foundation: Golo Koe Festival and Audience Growth

The Golo Koe Festival (FGK) is a distinctive annual cultural-religious event held in Labuan Bajo, West Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, organized by the Diocese of Ruteng. Since its inception, the festival has positioned itself as a spiritual and cultural celebration that blends Catholic liturgic traditions with indigenous Manggarai cultural expressions. It also promotes environmental awareness and sustainable tourism, forming a multidimensional platform that connects religious devotion, local identity, and creative economy.

Held each year from August 10 to 15, FGK presents a series of artistic and liturgic activities including traditional Manggarai dances, processions, cultural exhibitions, and the centerpiece event, the Maria Assumpta Nusantara Procession. This symbolic ritual involves participants walking and sailing with the statue of the Virgin Mary across land and sea, using traditional ketinting boats, culminating in a grand Eucharistic celebration. The ritual not only reinforces Catholic symbolism but also acts as a performative narrative of local spirituality and reverence for nature.

Over the past three years, the festival has shown remarkable growth in public interest and attendance. In 2022, the number of attendees was recorded at approximately 16.000. This figure increased to 20.000 in 2023 and further rose to 24.000 in 2024, indicating a 50% growth within just two festival cycles. This significant increase can be attributed to several factors, including consistent community involvement, diversified programming that appeals to youth and tourists, and the strengthening of partnerships with local institutions and national media.

A major milestone occurred in 2024 when FGK was officially included in the Kharisma Event Nusantara (KEN) list, a prestigious recognition by Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, KEN is a flagship program that curates high-potential events across Indonesia for professional development and international promotion. FGK's inclusion not only elevated its institutional profile but also demanded a more systematic and strategic approach to digital promotion and audience engagement.

In response to the increasing need for visibility and connectivity, the festival began leveraging digital media, particularly social platforms, to reach wider and more diverse audiences. Among the platforms utilized, Instagram emerged as the primary medium for digital outreach, selected for its visual-centric affordances, interactivity, and strong appeal among digitally native users. The official Instagram account, @Festival_Golokoe, functions not only as an announcement board but as a dynamic digital space where festival narratives are crafted, shared, and collectively experienced.

Through curated visuals, collaborative content, and real-time updates, FGK's Instagram presence actively shapes how the festival is perceived and engaged with. It allows the organizers to promote the festival's core themes, spirituality, tradition, ecology, and community empowerment, while enabling audience to interact, reflect, and participate digitally. This strategic move reflects the broader transformation of FGK from a localized celebration into a digitally mediated cultural experience, aligning it with the communicative norms and expectations of contemporary audiences in the age of social media.

In this context, Instagram is relevant not simply as a promotional channel but as a platform through which audiences encounter representations of FGK and potentially connect them with their own interests, cultural knowledge, and social networks. The following analysis examines these possibilities while distinguishing between evidence of content performance, informants' reported experiences, and the broader interpretations drawn from them.

Instagram Affordances and Audience Participation

The findings suggest that Instagram provides multiple points of contact between festival communication and audience participation. Its visual formats, sharing functions, Stories, and collaborative posts allow festival information to circulate through both the official account and users' personal networks. These affordances are consistent with Bucher and Helmond's (2018) argument that platform features shape the possibilities for interaction. However, the presence of these features does not mean that all audiences engage in the same way or progress through a uniform sequence from viewing to active participation.

Jessica (25), an informant from Manado, reported first encountering FGK through a friend's Instagram post. The content prompted her to explore the official account and seek additional information about the festival. As she explained, "The content was interesting, so I started actively looking for more information about the festival." Her account illustrates one possible pathway from exposure to further information-seeking. It does not establish that Instagram's algorithm alone caused this behavior; rather, the experience involved content shared through a personal network and subsequent exploration of the official account.

Jessica also described the value of the account's openness to audience contributions: "Instagram isn't just for the latest updates, it's also where we can share our own stories. What I like about the Golo Koe Fest Instagram admin is that they're always welcoming to repost followers' stories and very open to content collaboration." This account highlights the perceived importance of recognition and inclusion. When an official account reposts audience content or collaborates with other users, it can provide a visible connection between institutional communication and individual expression. In this case, such practices may contribute to a sense that audiences have opportunities to participate in the festival's digital representation.

The study's observations also identified the use of Instagram Stories and account mentions to share festival-related experiences. Reposting audience contributions provided a mechanism through which individual posts could become part of the official account's broader presentation of the event. These practices are consistent with the participatory possibilities associated with user-generated content (Schivinski et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the evidence should be interpreted as indicating opportunities for participation rather than demonstrating that all attendees became co-creators of the festival's identity.

The experiences of Ketrin (19) and Inna (22), both from Labuan Bajo, further illustrate the importance of distinguishing between exposure to festival-related content and direct engagement with the official account. Both expressed interest in attending because they wanted to experience the concert, crowds, and atmosphere of the festival. They also indicated that they did not follow the official FGK Instagram account. Instead, content shared by other people contributed to their curiosity about the event. Inna described the influence of Instagram Stories shared by friends and the festival organizers on her motivation to attend.

These accounts suggest that festival-related content may circulate beyond the audience that directly follows the official account. Personal networks can provide an indirect route through which potential visitors encounter information and develop an interest in attending. At the same time, the available interview evidence does not establish how frequently this pathway occurs among the wider festival audience.

Taken together, the findings point to different forms of interaction with Instagram: seeking further information, responding to culturally meaningful content, encountering information through friends, and sharing or reposting festival-related experiences. These forms of engagement can be interpreted through Brodie et al.'s (2013) multidimensional perspective on consumer engagement. They should not, however, be treated as a fixed progression or as evidence that audiences uniformly move from passive spectatorship to active co-creation.

Evaluating Instagram Content Performance

To examine the performance of FGK's digital communication, this study analyzed three Reels published by the official Instagram account, @Festival_Golokoe, on June 3, July 5, and August 3, 2024. The posts were selected to represent different points in the pre-event promotional period and different aspects of festival communication: cultural and spiritual meaning, youth creativity, and event promotion. The posts were not selected based on their engagement rates. Therefore, the analysis provides a descriptive comparison of these three Reels rather than a representative assessment of the account's overall performance.

Tabel 1. Performance of Selected Instagram Reels (June-August 2024)

Date	Content Title	Partners Involved	Duration	Viewers	Account Reach	Interactions	Engagement Rate
June 3, 2024	Story and Meaning of Golo Koe	@labuanbajo_info @bpolbf	1:02	24.000	12.644	930	7,35%
July 5, 2024	Creative Spirit and Youth Expression	@labuanbajo_info @info_mabarkab	0:57	23.000	13.236	687	5,19%
August 3, 2024	One Week to the Golo Koe Festival	@labuanbajo_info @karismaeventnusantara @bpolbf @info_mabarkab	0:29	23.000	9.982	742	7,43%

Source: Author's analysis based on content data from @Festival_Golokoe Instagram Account, 2024
Note: Engagement rate is calculated as total interactions divided by account reach, multiplied by 100. Total interactions comprise likes, comments, shares, and saves.

The three Reels recorded similar view counts, ranging from 23,000 to 24,000, but showed differences in reach, total interactions, and engagement rates. The June 3 Reel generated the highest number of interactions (930), while the August 3 Reel recorded the highest engagement rate (7.43%). The July 5 Reel reached the largest number of accounts (13,236) but had the lowest engagement rate (5.19%). These results show that views, reach, and engagement rate measure different aspects of content performance. A post that reaches more accounts does not necessarily generate a higher proportion of interactions relative to its reach.

The August 3 Reel recorded an engagement rate of 7.43%, despite having the lowest reach among the three posts. It was also the shortest video, at 29 seconds, and featured four collaborating accounts. These

characteristics provide a useful description of the post, but they do not establish why it achieved the highest engagement rate. The result may suggest that short-form content and collaboration are worth examining in future festival campaigns. However, the analysis of three Reels cannot determine the independent effects of video duration, collaboration, or content topic on engagement performance.

Anjes (23), an informant from Ruteng, also commented on the presentation of FGK's Instagram content, noting that "Every content is packaged in a short and clear way. That's why people who watch don't get bored." This observation suggests that concise and clear presentation was perceived by this informant as an appealing feature of the festival's digital communication. However, this individual assessment does not establish that shorter videos necessarily generate higher engagement. As the comparison of the three selected Reels indicates, content performance varies across posts, and the available data do not isolate the effect of video duration from other factors.

The July 5 Reel, which presented youth creativity, reached more accounts than the other two posts but recorded the lowest engagement rate. This difference further illustrates that reach alone does not explain how audiences interact with content. However, the available data do not establish that the topic or the number of collaborating accounts caused the lower rate. Other factors, such as audience interests, content distribution, and the timing of publication, may also be relevant, but these factors were not examined in this study.

The June 3 Reel, which focused on the story and meaning of Golo Koe, recorded the highest total number of interactions and an engagement rate of 7.35%. Its focus on the festival's cultural and spiritual significance provides a relevant context for interpreting the post. Nevertheless, the performance figures alone cannot demonstrate that the cultural theme generated more interest or stronger emotional responses than the other content. The interview findings offer additional insight into this issue: Hans described how FGK's social media content increased his interest in Manggarai culture, while Ning found the digital representation of the Virgin Mary procession particularly memorable. Their accounts indicate that cultural and religious narratives can hold personal meaning for some audiences, but they do not establish a direct relationship between the themes of these three Reels and their engagement rates.

From the perspective of platform affordances, the findings can be discussed in relation to Bucher and Helmond (2018), who explain how platform features shape the possibilities for digital interaction. Instagram's Reels and collaborative features provide ways to present and circulate festival content. However, the present analysis does not measure how Instagram's algorithm distributed the posts or how much each collaborating account contributed to their performance. Therefore, collaboration should be understood as a communication practice that may expand opportunities for content circulation, rather than as a proven cause of higher engagement.

These results also have implications for how festival organizers evaluate digital communication. Views and reach indicate the extent of content exposure, while total interactions and engagement rate provide additional information about the interactions recorded by the platform. Considering these indicators together offers a more informative assessment of content performance than relying on views alone. However, quantitative metrics cannot explain why audiences interact with a post, what meanings they attach to its content, or whether their responses involve cognitive processing, emotional responses, or subsequent actions. Consistent with Hollebeek et al.'s (2014) distinction between cognitive processing, affection, and activation, these metrics should therefore be interpreted as indicators of content exposure and recorded interactions, rather than as direct measures of all dimensions of audience engagement.

Cultural Branding Through Visual Narratives

The Instagram content examined in this study presents the Golo Koe Festival (FGK) through visual stories that combine Manggarai culture and Catholic spirituality. Cultural elements such as the *bali belo*, a traditional Manggarai headpiece worn by female dancers, and the Maria Assumpta Nusantara Procession are important visual features used to represent the festival's identity. Through Instagram, these cultural and religious elements can be seen by people who may not have attended the festival in person.

The way these elements are presented involves more than the images themselves. The choice of images, captions, music, and video sequences helps shape how audiences see and understand the festival's cultural and religious practices. Instagram provides a visual platform for presenting local traditions in a digital format. This is consistent with Leaver et al. (2020), who discuss how Instagram's visual features shape the way content is presented and shared. In the context of FGK, these features help introduce Manggarai traditions to audiences through social media.

The interviews provide examples of how audiences respond to these visual representations. Hans (36), from West Manggarai, explained that the festival's social media content highlighted distinctive aspects of Manggarai culture and increased his interest in attending the event. Ning (45), from Bekasi, described the content showing the procession of the Virgin Mary as particularly memorable because it presented religious practices together with local cultural traditions in a moving way.

These responses suggest that visual content can help audiences recognize and understand the cultural and spiritual meanings presented by the festival. This finding can be discussed through the concept of cultural resonance (Schudson, 1989; Giorgi, 2017), which emphasizes the relationship between messages and the cultural meanings audiences use to interpret them. In the FGK case, the procession and traditional cultural symbols provided meaningful points of reference for Hans and Ning. However, their experiences do not necessarily reflect how all audiences interpret the content or respond emotionally to it.

Emotional branding (Gobé, 2010) also provides a useful perspective for understanding these responses. Hans and Ning did not describe the content only as a source of information about the event. Their accounts suggest that the content also communicated cultural and spiritual meanings that they found significant. This indicates that Instagram content may help audiences develop an emotional connection with the festival. However, further evidence would be needed to determine whether such responses lead to stronger cultural pride, audience loyalty, or lasting emotional relationships with the festival.

Instagram also allows festival content to remain accessible beyond the event itself. Reels, Stories, and Highlights enable audiences to revisit selected moments and cultural symbols after the original content has been published. In addition, reposts, user mentions, and collaborative posts allow content created by audiences or partner accounts to appear alongside the festival organizer's own content. These features provide opportunities to present different perspectives on the festival through the same digital platform.

From a cultural branding perspective, these practices show how Instagram can support the presentation of a festival's identity through content shared by both organizers and audiences. This interpretation is consistent with research on platform culture and participatory communication (Carah & Angus, 2018; Leaver et al., 2020). However, the findings demonstrate the presence of these communication practices more clearly than they demonstrate shared ownership of the festival's identity or the full co-creation of its cultural representation.

Overall, the FGK case shows how Instagram can be used to present cultural and religious narratives to audiences with different backgrounds and levels of familiarity with the festival. The experiences of Hans and Ning indicate that some audiences find cultural and emotional meaning in this content. These findings suggest that Instagram can serve not only as a channel for event promotion but also as a medium for presenting cultural identity and creating opportunities for cultural resonance. Nevertheless, audience responses may vary depending on their experiences, interests, and cultural backgrounds.

Dimensions of Audience Engagement and Conceptual Synthesis

Across the interviews and the selected Instagram content, audience engagement can be interpreted through three related analytical dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and active engagement. This interpretation draws on Brodie et al.'s (2013) multidimensional perspective on engagement and the conceptualization of consumer brand engagement in social media proposed by Hollebeek et al. (2014), which distinguishes cognitive processing, affection, and activation. In the present study, these dimensions are adapted to the cultural-festival context as cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and active engagement, respectively. They are used as interpretive categories for understanding audience experiences and participation rather than as a validated measurement scale or stages in a linear process.

Cognitive engagement concerns how audiences attend to, process, and interpret festival-related information. This interpretation is informed by the cognitive processing dimension discussed by Hollebeek et al. (2014). Jessica's account of seeking further information after encountering a friend's post illustrates one form of information-seeking. Hans's response to representations of Manggarai culture also indicates that festival content prompted interest in the cultural context of the event. These accounts suggest that Instagram content may encourage further exploration or interpretation. However, the study does not directly measure changes in knowledge or the depth of cognitive processing, and these experiences should not be generalized to all festival audiences.

Emotional engagement concerns the feelings and personal significance audiences associate with festival content. This dimension is conceptually related to affection in Hollebeek et al.'s (2014) framework.

Ning's response to the Maria Assumpta Nusantara Procession illustrates how a digital representation of a religious ritual can be perceived as moving. Hans's appreciation of the presentation of Manggarai culture also indicates that the content held meaning for him beyond its function as event promotion. These accounts can be interpreted through cultural resonance and emotional branding perspectives (Schudson, 1989; Giorgi, 2017; Gobé, 2010), while remaining individual accounts rather than evidence of a uniform audience response. They also do not establish long-term attachment or loyalty to the festival.

Active engagement concerns actions and effort associated with participation in festival-related communication and experiences. This dimension is conceptually related to activation in Hollebeek et al. (2014). In the FGK case, observed practices such as sharing or reposting Stories, tagging the official account, and contributing festival-related content illustrate forms of digital participation. Attendance represents a further form of participation in the festival itself, although it should be distinguished from online activity. The experiences of Ketrin and Inna show that exposure to content shared by other people contributed to their interest in attending, even though they did not follow the official account. Their accounts therefore illustrate a possible connection between indirect content exposure and interest in event attendance, but do not by themselves establish active digital participation or confirm that attendance occurred.

The three dimensions can overlap. For example, encountering a culturally meaningful post may prompt an individual to interpret its significance, experience an emotional response, and seek further information. However, the interviews do not establish that every audience member experiences these dimensions in the same sequence. Nor do the three Reels provide evidence that a particular content feature systematically produces a specific dimension of engagement.

The relationship between Instagram affordances and these dimensions is therefore best understood as enabling and mediating rather than deterministically causing engagement. Reels and other visual formats provide ways to present festival narratives; sharing and collaborative features allow content to circulate through social networks; and audience contributions can make individual experiences visible alongside official communication. Whether these possibilities lead to cognitive, emotional, or active engagement depends on how audiences encounter and interpret the content, as well as on their interests and social contexts.

Based on this interpretation, the study presents a Digital Audience Engagement Model (Figure 1) as a case-grounded conceptual synthesis. The model brings together Instagram affordances, the cultural narratives communicated through the platform, and the cognitive, emotional, and active dimensions identified in the empirical material. It is intended to organize the findings and indicate relationships that may be useful for further investigation, rather than to establish a new engagement theory or a validated causal model.

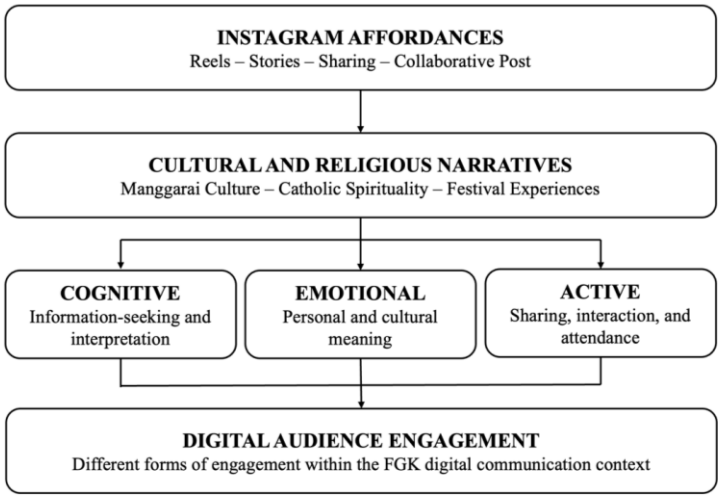


Figure 1. Digital Audience Engagement Model
Source: Author's conceptual synthesis based on the empirical findings and theoretical perspectives discussed in the study, including Brodie et al. (2013), Hollebeek et al. (2014), Schudson (1989), Giorgi (2017), Gobé (2010), Schivinski et al. (2016), and Bucher and Helmond (2018).

The conceptual synthesis highlights three related elements. First, Instagram affordances provide the communication and circulation mechanisms through which audiences encounter festival content. Second, cultural and religious narratives provide meanings that audiences may interpret in relation to their own experiences and values. Third, engagement may be expressed cognitively, emotionally, and through actions such as seeking information, sharing content, or attending the event. These elements are related but not necessarily sequential, and the study does not establish the strength or direction of causal relationships among them.

The findings contribute a context-specific interpretation of audience engagement in a cultural-religious festival setting. They show how platform affordances, culturally meaningful narratives, and audience experiences can be examined together without assuming that digital exposure automatically produces participation. The combination of interview accounts and descriptive data from three Reels also demonstrates the value of distinguishing between reported motivations, observed communication practices, and content-performance metrics.

In summary, the FGK case indicates that Instagram can support several forms of audience engagement through visual storytelling, cultural representation, content circulation, and opportunities for audience contribution. The evidence does not establish a universal shift from passive spectatorship to active co-creation. Instead, it shows that audiences encounter and respond to festival content in different ways, including through personal networks, culturally meaningful representations, and reported interest in attending. The Digital Audience Engagement Model summarizes these relationships as a conceptual synthesis grounded in this case and offers a basis for further research in other cultural festival settings.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Instagram supports audience engagement at the Golo Koe Festival (FGK) through visual communication, cultural narratives, and opportunities for interaction. The findings from six informants and three selected Reels indicate that audience engagement takes different forms, which can be understood through cognitive, emotional, and active dimensions. Cultural and religious representations were meaningful to some informants, while the experiences of Ketrin and Inna showed that interest in attending the festival could also develop through content shared by friends and other users, even without following the official account. The analysis of the three Reels further showed that views, reach, and engagement rate capture different aspects of content performance. Together, these findings suggest that digital audience engagement involves more than content exposure or recorded interactions; it also includes how audiences encounter, interpret, and respond to festival narratives. The proposed Digital Audience Engagement Model brings these elements together as a case-grounded conceptual synthesis, rather than a validated causal model.

For festival organizers, cultural institutions, and tourism stakeholders, the findings highlight the importance of developing digital communication that combines event information with meaningful cultural storytelling. Instagram Reels and Stories can be used to explain the significance of local traditions and religious practices, while reposts, mentions, and collaborative posts can create opportunities for audience contributions and wider content circulation. Organizers should also recognize the role of personal networks in introducing festivals to potential visitors and should not evaluate communication effectiveness solely through the number of views. Instead, views, reach, total interactions, and engagement rate should be assessed together and complemented by qualitative audience feedback to understand the motivations and meanings behind digital responses. These practices may help organizers make more informed communication decisions while presenting cultural identity in ways that remain meaningful to local communities and other audiences.

This study is limited to one cultural-religious festival, six purposively selected informants, and three Reels from the pre-event promotional period. Data saturation was not formally assessed, and the findings do not establish causal relationships between content characteristics and audience engagement or support statistical generalization to other festivals. Future research could compare different cultural festivals and social media platforms to examine how platform features, cultural narratives, and audience backgrounds relate to engagement. Longitudinal studies could also investigate changes in content performance and

audience participation across multiple festival cycles, while larger samples and complementary quantitative methods could provide further insight into audience responses. Such research would help assess the applicability of the proposed conceptual model in other contexts and provide a stronger evidence base for developing digital communication strategies for cultural festivals.

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AI DISCLOSURE

The author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with translating author-written text from Indonesian into English and improving the language clarity and readability of the manuscript. The AI tool was not used to generate or analyze research data. All AI-assisted outputs were reviewed, edited, and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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