

**EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON TIKTOK CONTENT CREATED
BY NIAS CREATORS THAT WEAKENS THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE NIAS
COMMUNITY**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore students' perspectives on TikTok content created by Nias creators that has the potential to weaken the public image of the Nias community. This study uses a qualitative approach with a qualitative descriptive design. The research participants consisted of 15 fifth-semester students from the English Education Study Program at Nias University, who were purposively selected from a total of 37 students. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews and supported by analysis of relevant TikTok content. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively by presenting the results in the form of descriptive narratives. The results showed that students viewed the TikTok content studied as containing elements of inappropriate conversation, coarse language, and violations of social norms that had the potential to form negative perceptions of Nias cultural identity. Students also emphasized the importance of creators' responsibility in representing regional culture and language in the digital space.

Keywords: tiktok content, students' perspectives, social media ethics

A. introduction

In the digital era, social media has become an important space for shaping cultural identity and public perception. It is no longer used solely for entertainment, but also functions as a medium through which the image of a cultural group is constructed and recognized. Through

rapidly circulating visual content, social media plays a significant role in influencing how cultures are understood by wider audiences. Tiktok, in particular, has emerged as a powerful platform in this process. With its short and highly shareable content, tiktok often serves as a "digital face" for various ethnic communities, including the Nias

community. Media representations on this platform are not neutral; they actively shape cultural meaning and may reinforce stereotypes. As noted by Wheatley (2024), repeated media representations can significantly influence cultural identity, especially within digital environments.

At the same time, the popularity-driven nature of TikTok has encouraged the spread of controversial content, including self-deprecating humor and the use of negative stereotypes to attract attention. This trend can be explained through the concept of the *attention economy*. Fuchs (2021) argues that digital platforms prioritize emotionally engaging content because user attention has become a valuable commodity, while Bruineberg (2025) highlights that human attention is cognitively vulnerable to constant digital stimulation. Together, these factors help explain why sensational content often dominates social media.

This situation has raised concerns among university students, who view such representations as potentially harmful to the image and dignity of Nias culture. Therefore, a

critical examination of how Nias culture is represented on TikTok is necessary to understand its impact on public perception and to promote more responsible cultural representation in digital spaces.

In platform society, digital platforms not only reflect social reality, but also actively shape cultural narratives through algorithmic curation. As Seotan and Mark (2023) explain, algorithms determine which cultural stories receive attention and which are marginalized. This process is reinforced by the political-economic logic of digital platforms, where algorithmic systems prioritize profitable and potentially viral content, thereby risking the marginalization of minority cultures (Fuchs, 2021).

Ideally, the presence of Nias creators on TikTok should function as a digital bridge for promoting cultural values, local wisdom, and the “Ono Niha” identity to a global audience. A community’s ontological security, understood as a sense of continuity and stable collective identity, is closely linked to how its cultural symbols are represented in the public sphere. Building on Giddens’ concept

of ontological security, Couldry and Hepp (2021) argue that mediated representations play a crucial role in sustaining collective existence and shared meaning. When cultural symbols are presented with dignity and respect, they contribute to communal recognition and reinforce identity continuity (Mihelj, 2021). In digital environments, this representational responsibility increasingly falls on younger generations of content creators, who function as cultural mediators and narrative agents (Papacharissi, 2020). Consequently, there is a collective expectation that young digital creators act as *digital ambassadors*, enhancing their community's visibility and standing in both national and international contexts (Fuchs, 2021).

However, the current reality presents a starkly different and troubling picture. A growing number of Nias content creators have gravitated toward producing content that thrives on "Cringe Culture." (Zulli 2020), define this as the intentional production of embarrassing, awkward, or self-deprecating content designed to trigger immediate viral

reactions. In the Nias context, this often manifests as creators mocking their own dialect, exaggerating negative stereotypes, or performing uncivilized behaviors for the sake of "likes." This creates what (Goffman 2022) calls a "Digital Stigma," where the actions of a few individuals tarnish the reputation of the collective group, leading to a public perception that the Nias community lacks the sophistication or intellectual depth that it actually possesses.

While existing literature, such as the work of Miller et al. (2021), has extensively covered how social media allows for "cultural performance," there is a significant research gap regarding the internal backlash from within the community itself. Most studies focus on the creators' motivations or the audience's consumption patterns, but they largely ignore the perspectives of the "Informed Stakeholders" specifically the students. There is a lack of theoretical understanding regarding how the educated youth of an ethnic minority navigates the tension between digital freedom of expression and the preservation of communal honor. Tufekci (2018)

highlights that media can be a tool for "digital disenfranchisement," yet we have not fully explored how this disenfranchisement is felt and resisted by the intellectual members of the affected community.

This research introduces a novel focus by positioning Nias students not just as passive viewers, but as "Cultural Gatekeepers" and "Moral Evaluators" of digital content. Unlike previous studies that treat all TikTok users as a monolith, this study specifically examines the "Intellectual Identity Conflict" faced by Nias students. It explores the concept of "Digital Identity Damage Control," a term adapted from Sloane and Moss (2019) regarding the permanency of digital footprints. The novelty lies in analyzing the "burden of representation" carried by students who must deal with the real-world social consequences of viral content produced by their peers.

Building upon the foundation laid by Buckingham (2019) regarding critical media literacy, which suggests that education changes how individuals interpret media distortions, this study seeks to document the specific grievances and strategic responses

of Nias students. The ultimate objective of this study is to explore the perspectives of Nias students in depth, analyzing how they perceive the degradation of their public image through TikTok and determining the threshold at which "creative expression" becomes "cultural betrayal." By doing so, this research aims to provide a framework for more responsible and dignified digital representation for minority communities in Indonesia.

B. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a qualitative descriptive design. The scope of the study focuses on students' perceptions of TikTok content created by creators from Nias that is considered controversial and has the potential to weaken the public image of the Nias community.

The research focuses on students' views, assessments, and interpretations of the visual elements, language use, and behavior displayed in the TikTok content. This focus forms the basis for the

preparation of interview guidelines and data analysis.

This research was conducted in the English Education Study Program at Nias University. The research population consisted of all 37 fifth-semester students in the English Education Study Program. From this population, 15 students were selected as research informants using purposive sampling, taking into account the informants' relevance to the research focus.

The main material in this study was verbal data obtained from interviews with the informants. The main research tool was a semi-structured interview guide used to explore information in depth in accordance with the focus of the study.

Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews, which aimed to obtain data on students' perceptions and assessments of the phenomenon being studied. All data obtained were then analyzed using descriptive qualitative data analysis by interpreting and presenting the findings narratively.

C. Research Results and Discussion

Results

This section presents the results of research obtained from in-depth interviews with students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Nias. The research population consisted of 37 fifth-semester students, but only 15 participants were directly involved in this study. They were selected purposively based on their relevance and ability to provide critical views on the issues under study. Data collection was conducted on Tuesday, January 13, 2026.

The research results are presented narratively and focus on the students' perspectives on TikTok content created by creators from Nias, particularly a live broadcast by the TFW account with a man with the initials YDW, which was considered to have the potential to weaken the public image of the Nias community.

Student Perceptions of TikTok Live Content by TFW and YDW

The results of the study show that most participants considered the

TikTok live broadcast content produced by TFW and YDW to be inappropriate and in violation of social norms. Students revealed that conversations that led to personal matters and were not suitable for public consumption, especially when broadcast live, showed a lack of ethical awareness in the use of social media.

Participants also highlighted that during the live broadcast, there were conversations with sexual undertones and actions that violated privacy boundaries, which were considered not to reflect the values of decency and culture of the Nias community. The use of the Nias regional language in the context of these conversations further reinforced the students' concerns, as it had the potential to shape negative perceptions of the Nias cultural identity as a whole among viewers.

Aspects of TFW Content that are Considered to Weaken the Public Image of the Nias Community

Students identified several aspects of TFW content that are considered to contribute to the weakening of the public image of the

Nias community. These aspects include the use of profanity, sexually suggestive insults, and creators' responses to negative comments in the form of video replies using rude language.

In addition, participants assessed that provocative body movements and a communication style that tends to be overly joking can lead to misinterpretation by the audience. According to the students, subtle rejection conveyed with smiles and joking expressions in inappropriate situations has the potential to be misinterpreted as a form of consent, thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes about Nias women.

Students' Views on the Impact of TFW Content on the Public Image of Nias

In general, students interpret that TikTok content created by TFW, whether in the form of live broadcasts or other videos, has a negative impact on the public image of the Nias community, especially when the content goes viral and is viewed by a wide audience outside the Nias community.

<p>Students expressed concern that the behavior of individuals in digital content is often generalized as a representation of the character of a particular community or regional culture. Therefore, they emphasized the importance of moral and social responsibility for content creators, especially when bringing cultural identity, regional languages, and representations of women into the digital public sphere.</p>	2	A G	<p>Opines that the interaction between TFW and YDW normalizes unethical behavior in the digital space.</p>
<p>The opinions of students obtained from interviews are presented concisely in tabular form to provide a systematic overview of participants' perspectives on the TikTok content studied.</p>	3	H L	<p>Assesses that the sexual jokes in the live broadcast demean the dignity of Nias women.</p>

The opinions of students obtained from interviews are presented concisely in tabular form to provide a systematic overview of participants' perspectives on the TikTok content studied.

Tabel 1. Opinions of Participants

No	Participant Name	Summary of Opinions	No	Participant Name	Summary of Opinions
1	A H	Assessing TFW's live content as inappropriate and potentially reinforcing negative stereotypes about the Nias community.	5	Y Z	Considers TFW's response to negative comments actually worsens its public image.
			6	F G	Views the content as an attempt to seek

		sensation without considering the social impact.	12	M Z	Considers that harsh words weaken the image of Nias women.
7	P W	Concerned that the content does not reflect the values of modesty among Nias women.	13	M W	Assessing that the content emphasizes sensation rather than positive cultural values.
8	Y T	Assesses that there is ambiguity between entertainment and verbal abuse.	14	F H	Stating that subtle rejection has the potential to be misinterpreted as consent.
9	P T W	Believes that responding to insults prolongs conflict in the public sphere.	15	A L	Concluding that TFW content has the potential to weaken the public image of the Nias community.
10	S C	Emphasizes the responsibility of creators when using regional languages.			
11	N M	Assesses that a lack of privacy awareness can trigger negative generalizations.			

C. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that students of the English Education Study Program at Nias University have a critical perception of TikTok content created by a

creator with the initials TFW, particularly in a live broadcast with YDW, which is considered inappropriate and has the potential to weaken the public image of the Nias community. This perception reflects students' awareness of the social impact of digital content, especially when such content brings regional cultural and linguistic identities into the digital public sphere.

These findings can be explained through the Theory of Impression Management in Social Media, as proposed by (Rahman et al., 2023). This theory explains that individuals who are active on social media are consciously or unconsciously managing their self-image (impression) to shape certain perceptions in front of their digital audience. In the context of this study, students assessed that TFW's live content failed to manage a positive impression because it featured vulgar conversations, sexual jokes, and privacy violations that actually created a negative impression. Students perceived this failure in impression management as the main factor causing the weakening of social image, not only for the

individual creators but also for the Nias community at large.

In addition, the results of this study are also in line with the Self-Representation Theory in social media proposed by (Azizah, 2023). This theory states that TikTok users, especially the younger generation, tend to construct certain self-representations through the language, gestures, expressions, and behaviors displayed in videos. The students in this study viewed that the way TFW represented themselves through dancing, using profanity, and responding emotionally to negative comments created a self-representation that was not in line with the cultural values and norms of politeness of the Nias community. This self-representation was then perceived by the audience as a reflection of the creator's character or culture, thereby increasing the risk of negative generalization.

The students' views regarding the use of the Nias language in the context of profanity and inappropriate conversation can also be analyzed through the Theory of Cultural Representation in New Media, as

explained by (Putri et al., 2025). According to this theory, social media functions as a cultural representation apparatus, where local symbols, languages, and identities can be massively produced and reproduced. Students in this study are concerned that the use of the Nias regional language in negative content can shape a false cultural discourse, causing outsiders to associate the Nias language and culture with immoral or unethical behavior.

Furthermore, TFW's response to negative comments, which were replied to with insults via video, also shows a pattern of unhealthy digital interaction. This is in line with the findings of (Rahman et al., 2023), which state that failure to control emotions and communication in the digital space can worsen self-image and trigger ongoing conflicts on social media. Students assessed that such actions do not solve the problem, but rather prolong exposure to negative content and further damage the public image of the creator and the community associated with them.

In addition, students also highlighted the ambiguity of

expression in TFW content, such as subtle rejection accompanied by smiles and joking expressions. These findings are in line with (Azizah., 2023) view that nonverbal expressions in TikTok content are often prone to misinterpretation by the audience. In the context of this study, students are concerned that these expressions could be misinterpreted as a form of consent, thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes about Nias women and weakening the image of women in the community.

Overall, this discussion shows that students view social media, especially TikTok, not merely as a space for entertainment, but as a space for social and cultural representation that has real consequences for the public image of a community. This finding reinforces contemporary theories that assert that digital content that is not managed ethically and reflectively has the potential to shape negative public perceptions. Therefore, students emphasize the importance of content creators' responsibility in representing themselves, their culture, and their regional language

wisely so as not to weaken the public image of the Nias community in the digital space.

D. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussion, it can be concluded that fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Nias have a critical view of TikTok content created by Nias creators, especially content displayed by the account with the initials TFW in a live broadcast with YDW. Students assessed that the content contained inappropriate conversations, the use of foul language, privacy violations, and emotional responses to negative comments that could potentially weaken the public image of the Nias community.

The students believe that the use of the Nias regional language in a negative context can shape the outside public's misperception of the Nias cultural identity as a whole. In addition, ambiguous behavior and expressions in digital content are considered to risk causing negative generalizations, especially towards Nias women. Thus, this study shows

that social media content not only affects individual creators but also the collective image of the community they represent.

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