

Young Women's Reception of Infidelity Representation in the Film *Ipar Adalah Maut: A Stuart Hall Reception Analysis*

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ABSTRACT

Films have evolved beyond entertainment into spaces where audiences construct and negotiate meanings about contemporary social issues. This study examines how young women interpret the representation of infidelity in the film through Stuart Hall's Reception Theory. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study combines in-depth interviews with netnographic observation to capture both individual interpretations and audience interactions within digital environments. A key novelty of this study lies in integrating in-depth interviews and netnographic observation, enabling audience reception to be examined across both personal interpretations and participatory digital discussions. Eight female participants aged 18–25 years who had watched the film and actively used social media were selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using Hall's encoding–decoding framework by classifying audience interpretations into dominant, negotiated, and oppositional reading positions. The findings indicate that most participants occupied the dominant reading position by accepting the film's portrayal of infidelity as a violation of trust, commitment, and family values, while a smaller number demonstrated negotiated readings by incorporating personal experiences and social contexts into their interpretations. No oppositional reading was identified, suggesting a strong alignment between the film's preferred meanings and participant's moral and cultural values. The study contributes to audience reception research by demonstrating how media meanings are shaped through the interaction of cultural values, personal experiences, and participatory digital practices, while extending Hall's Reception Theory to contemporary digital communication environments.



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Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital media has fundamentally transformed the relationship between films and audiences. Films are no longer consumed solely as entertainment products but have become objects of continuous discussion across social media platforms where audiences actively construct, negotiate, and circulate meanings. Digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube enable audiences to publicly express emotional reactions, moral evaluations, and personal interpretations of media texts, creating participatory spaces in which media meanings are collectively produced rather than



individually received. Contemporary communication scholarship further argues that audiences should be understood as active agents who shape public discourse through various forms of digital participation rather than merely responding to media content (Hendrickx, 2023). Likewise, recent studies emphasize that digital media have transformed the relationship between media producers and audiences into a reciprocal process characterized by interaction, participation, and collaborative meaning-making (Uth et al., 2025).

From the perspective of media and communication studies, films function as cultural texts that represent social realities while simultaneously shaping public understandings of social issues. Rather than reflecting reality objectively, films selectively construct meanings through narratives, characters, conflicts, and visual representations that communicate particular ideological and moral perspectives (Hall, 1997; McQuail & Deuze, 2020). However, these encoded meanings are not passively accepted by audiences. Instead, audiences actively decode media messages according to their cultural backgrounds, social experiences, personal values, and everyday realities. This perspective is increasingly relevant within contemporary digital culture, where media interpretation extends beyond individual viewing experiences into participatory online interactions. Pratiwi et al. (2020) argue that digital environments enable individuals to engage more actively in communication processes to fulfill their informational and social interaction needs.

One social issue frequently represented in Indonesian cinema is infidelity. Beyond being portrayed as an interpersonal conflict, infidelity often symbolizes the violation of trust, loyalty, family integrity, and marital commitment. Because these issues closely intersect with cultural expectations, religious values, and family norms, films depicting infidelity frequently provoke emotional responses and public debate. As a social issue closely associated with family values and marital norms, representations of infidelity often evoke emotional responses and moral judgments from audiences (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Within Indonesia's digital media environment, audience discussions surrounding films frequently extend beyond cinema screenings into social media platforms where interpretations are negotiated through comments, reposts, and online interactions. These participatory practices allow audiences to actively contribute to the circulation and reinterpretation of media meanings, making digital platforms important spaces for contemporary audience reception.

Among recent Indonesian films, *Ipar Adalah Maut* attracted significant public attention because it portrays infidelity occurring within the family itself. The story centers on the betrayal committed by Aris against his wife, Nisa, through his relationship with Nisa's younger sister. The presence of social media provides audiences with opportunities to express opinions, moral evaluations, and emotional responses toward the conflict represented in the film (Livingstone, 2005). This narrative generated widespread discussion on digital platforms, particularly among young women who expressed empathy, moral judgment, anger, disappointment, and reflections on interpersonal relationships through online interactions. Recent communication research suggests that audience reactions shared through digital platforms increasingly become media texts in their own right, generating additional layers of interpretation and public engagement beyond the original media content (Bliss & Nansen, 2023).



Figure 1. Poster of *Ipar Adalah Maut*

Source: Instagram account @manojpunjabimd

Young women were selected because they are actively engaged in processes of identity formation and interpersonal relationship development. Issues represented in the film, such as trust, loyalty, commitment, and infidelity, are therefore highly relevant to their social experiences. In addition, as active social media users, young women frequently participate in online discussions surrounding films and social issues, making them an important audience group for understanding meaning-making processes within contemporary participatory media environments. Within the context of digital media, audiences are no longer viewed as passive recipients of messages but as active individuals who interpret media content based on their social backgrounds and lived experiences (Hall, 2007). This active role of audiences is consistent with the findings of Pratiwi et al. (2020) who argue that in the digital era, audiences possess greater agency in optimizing media consumption to fulfill their interpretive and cognitive information needs.

Recent communication studies increasingly employ netnography to investigate naturally occurring audience interactions within digital communities. Compared with conventional interview-based approaches, netnography enables researchers to observe how audiences collectively negotiate meanings through online discussions, emotional expressions, and participatory practices (Kozinets, 2019).

This study adopts Stuart Hall's Reception Theory to understand how audiences interpret media representations. Hall (2007) argues that communication operates through encoding and decoding processes in which media producers encode preferred meanings into media texts, while audiences actively decode those meanings according to their social experiences and cultural contexts. Stuart Hall's Reception Theory provides an appropriate framework because it conceptualizes audiences as active interpreters who construct meanings according to their social experiences and cultural contexts. Such a perspective is particularly relevant within participatory digital environments, where audience interpretations continue to evolve through online interactions beyond the initial act of media consumption. Hall further proposes three possible reading positions: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. Within today's participatory digital culture, these decoding

processes no longer occur solely at the individual level but are increasingly shaped by collective interactions occurring through social media. Digital participation enables audiences not only to consume media but also to collaboratively negotiate meanings and publicly articulate their interpretations (Hendrickx, 2023)

Previous studies have extensively examined audience reception of social issues portrayed in films. Research on the television series *Layangan Putus* conducted by Chevadina et al. (2022) found that female audiences generated diverse interpretations of infidelity-related conflicts based on their social experiences and moral values. Similarly, a study by Pawestry (2024) of the film *Like & Share* demonstrated that female audiences developed varied interpretations of social conflicts and gender-based violence represented in cinematic narratives. Studies investigating audience responses to controversial messages and sensitive issues in Indonesian films have also been conducted by several scholars. The findings of Lestari et al. (2025) regarding audience reception of the film *Laura* revealed that viewers actively constructed resistance and alternative interpretations when film representations were perceived as overly dramatized or inconsistent with social reality. Another study conducted by Maulani & Nanda (2024) on the series *Gadis Kretek* found that social media functioned as an important space where audiences expressed opinions, moral evaluations, and emotional responses toward media conflicts.

International audience reception research similarly demonstrates that media meanings are shaped by viewers' cultural backgrounds and digital participation. Chen & Chang (2024) found that audience interpretations of television dramas distributed through digital platforms were strongly influenced by cultural values and online engagement. Likewise, Wang et al. (2023) reported that audience meaning-making increasingly occurs through participatory interactions on social media, where interpretations are negotiated collectively rather than individually. Rather than treating audience reception as static, Boxman-Shabtai (2024) conceptualizes digital media spaces as a "marketplace of interpretations," where multiple and even competing meanings coexist.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that audience interpretations are shaped by personal experiences, cultural values, and social contexts. However, existing studies have largely focused on controversial films, gender issues, or television dramas and predominantly relied on interview-based approaches. As a result, limited attention has been given to how audience meanings are collectively negotiated within participatory digital environments through ongoing interactions on social media. Furthermore, while Stuart Hall's reception theory has been widely applied to examine audience interpretation, most studies conceptualize decoding as an individual interpretive process. Limited attention has been paid to how decoding evolves through participatory digital interactions where meanings are collectively negotiated, reinforced, and circulated across social media platforms. Consequently, relatively little is known about how audience meanings evolve, are reinforced, or are contested through participatory digital interactions after media consumption.

Addressing these gaps, this study offers three contributions. Unlike previous audience reception studies that primarily relied on interview-based approaches, this study combines in-depth interviews with netnographic observation to capture both individual and collective meaning-making processes. It also extends reception research by examining young women's interpretations of infidelity representations in Indonesian cinema, a topic that remains underexplored in the literature. Finally, the study contributes to Stuart Hall's



reception theory by demonstrating how audience decoding continues through participatory digital interactions beyond the initial act of media consumption. First, it extends audience reception research by specifically examining young women's interpretations of infidelity representations in Indonesian cinema, a topic that remains underexplored in reception studies. Second, it combines in-depth interviews with digital observation (netnography), enabling audience reception to be examined through both individual experiences and collective meaning-making processes occurring across social media platforms. Third, it contributes to the development of Stuart Hall's reception theory by demonstrating that audience decoding continues beyond media consumption through participatory digital interactions, where cultural values, social experiences, and online engagement collectively shape media interpretation. This contribution is particularly relevant in the context of contemporary digital communication, in which audiences increasingly participate in producing, negotiating, and circulating meanings through social media interactions (Ariestyani & Ramadhanty, 2022).

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore how young women construct meanings of the representation of infidelity in the film *Ipar Adalah Maut*. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' subjective interpretations, lived experiences, and meaning-making processes rather than to measure causal relationships or test hypotheses (Creswell & Poth 2018; Triyono 2021). The study adopted Stuart Hall's Reception Theory, particularly the encoding-decoding model, as the analytical framework to understand how audiences construct meanings based on their social experiences, cultural backgrounds, and personal values (Hall, 2007).

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all informants possessed experiences relevant to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2021). The inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) be women aged between 18 and 25 years; (2) have watched the film *Ipar Adalah Maut* in its entirety; (3) actively use social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube; and (4) be willing to participate voluntarily in an in-depth interview. A total eight participants were recruited through the researcher's personal and academic networks. All selected participants met the inclusion criteria; no participants were excluded during the screening process. This sample size was deemed sufficient as data saturation was achieved by the seventh interview, where responses regarding the decoding types (dominant, negotiated, and oppositional) became repetitive and no new conceptual insights emerged, while the eighth interview was conducted to confirm data stability.

Although all participants were undergraduate students, they varied in age, intensity and pattern of social media use, as well as personal experiences related to interpersonal relationship and romantic contexts. Some participants reported high engagement with TikTok commentary content, while others were more active on Instagram discussions or passive viewers of film-related content. These variations were important for capturing differences in interpretive frameworks, particularly in how participants evaluated moral responsibility, emotional dynamics, and relational boundaries in the film. Such heterogeneity contributed to a richer and more nuanced understanding of audience reception rather than uniform interpretations. In qualitative research, sample adequacy is determined by the richness of information rather than statistical representation (Creswell



& Poth 2018). Data saturation was reached after the seventh interview when no new codes or significant thematic patterns emerged. The eighth interview was conducted to confirm the stability and consistency of the existing categories and interpretations. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

Name	Age	Status	Active Social Media Platforms
WL	22	Undergraduate Student	TikTok
EA	22	Undergraduate Student	Instagram, X
MY	22	Undergraduate Student	TikTok, Instagram
HA	22	Undergraduate Student	TikTok, Instagram
AF	21	Undergraduate Student	TikTok, Instagram, X
SA	21	Undergraduate Student	TikTok, Instagram
VY	22	Undergraduate Student	TikTok, Instagram
DA	22	Undergraduate Student	TikTok, Instagram

Source: Researcher's Processed Data, 2026

Data were collected through two complementary techniques: in-depth interviews and digital observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions. The interview guide consisted of five main themes: (1) participants' perceptions of the film, (2) interpretations of the infidelity, (3) emotional responses to the conflict, (4) moral evaluations of the characters, (5) reflections on the film's perceived impact on interpersonal relationships. Each interview lasted approximately 15–30 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or through online communication platforms, depending on participant availability. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants consent and transcribed verbatim. To maintain confidentiality, participants were identified using initials only. Key interview questions included: (1) "How do you interpret the main conflict in the film?", (2) "What do you think about the characters' actions?", (3) "Do you think the film reflects real-life relationships?", and (4) "Has the film influenced your perception of trust and relationships in real life?"

To complement the interview findings, digital observation was conducted using a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2019). The observation was carried out from March to April 2026 by examining publicly accessible audience discussions related to *Ipar Adalah Maut* on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Comments were selected based on three criteria: (1) relevance to themes of infidelity, trust, and family values; (2) level of engagement (highly liked or replied comments); and (3) interpretive content reflecting audience evaluation or emotional response. Irrelevant, spam, or purely promotional comments were excluded from analysis. The observation focused on highly engaged posts with substantial audience interaction to capture naturally occurring public discussions. During this period, the researcher systematically observed highly engaged posts and publicly comments sections discussing infidelity, family values, betrayal, trust, and moral judgments. Posts and comments were purposively selected based on their relevance to the research objectives and their ability to illustrate audience interpretations within participatory digital environments. The scope of the digital observation is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Scope of Digital Observation

Platform	Account	Content Type	Views	Likes	Number of Comments	Main Findings
TikTok	@tanpasusui99_	Film scene clip	3.7 million	40,000	1,955	Numerous comments discussed betrayal and infidelity
TikTok	@gandhifernando	Film review	129,000	7,305	144	Audience discussions predominantly focused on betrayal and infidelity.
Instagram	@iparalahmautmovie	Promotional post	196,000	1,299	41	Comments reflected moral judgments toward the characters.
YouTube	@mdpictures	Official trailer	4.1 million	19,000	1,200	Audience comments predominantly contained moral evaluations of the characters.

Source: Researcher’s Processed Data, 2026

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by [Miles et al. \(2018\)](#), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The coding process began with open coding to identify meaningful statements related to participants' interpretations of the film. Codes with similar meanings were then clustered into broader categories representing recurring patterns across participants.

The classification of reading positions was guided by interpretive indicators. Dominant readings were identified when participants fully accepted the film’s moral message. Negotiated readings were identified when participants accepted the message but modified its meaning based on contextual factors. Oppositional readings were identified when participants rejected the film’s preferred meaning and constructed alternative interpretations. Finally, these categories were interpreted and mapped onto [Hall’s \(2007\)](#) dominant, negotiated, and oppositional reading positions. Based on this framework, audience interpretations were classified into three reading positions, namely dominant, negotiated, and oppositional, according to the extent to which participants accepted, modified, or rejected the preferred meanings encoded in the film. Participants were categorized as dominant readers when they largely accepted the moral messages and interpretations promoted by the film. Negotiated readers generally accepted the film's preferred meanings while simultaneously modifying certain aspects based on their personal experiences or social contexts. Oppositional readers rejected or challenged the film's preferred interpretations and proposed alternative understandings of the conflict. To enhance coding reliability, the researcher maintained an audit trail of coding decisions and engaged in peer debriefing with the research supervisor throughout the analytical process. Emerging codes and categories were reviewed and refined through iterative discussions until agreement was reached regarding their interpretation and placement within Hall’s reading positions. Disagreements regarding code interpretation were resolved through repeated examination of the transcripts until consensus was reached.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation was employed by integrating interview data with digital observation (Creswell & Poth 2018). Ethical principles were carefully observed throughout the research process by applying strict confidentiality standards to both individual interviews and netnographic digital observation. In addition, ethical considerations were applied to digital observation. Only publicly available comments were analyzed, and no attempts were made to identify or contact users. All usernames were excluded or anonymized in reporting findings to ensure ethical use of digital data in accordance with netnographic research guidelines. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. All participants received an explanation regarding the objectives of the study and voluntarily provided informed consent prior to the interviews. No private accounts or restricted online communities were accessed during the digital observation. Participants' identities were anonymized through the use of initials, and all personal information was treated confidentially. For the digital observation, only publicly accessible comments sections were analyzed, and all data were used exclusively for academic purposes.

Findings

The analysis revealed four major themes concerning how young women interpreted the representation of infidelity in *Ipar Adalah Maut*. These themes consisted of: (1) dominant reading of the representation of infidelity, (2) negotiated reading of domestic conflict, (3) social media as a space for audience meaning-making, and (4) behavioral and real-life impact. Interview findings indicated that audience interpretations were primarily concentrated within dominant and negotiated reading positions, while no participant demonstrated a fully oppositional reading.

This study identified two audience reception positions toward the representation of infidelity in *Ipar Adalah Maut*. As presented in Table 3, six participants occupied the dominant reading position, while two participants demonstrated negotiated readings. No participant exhibited an oppositional reading.

Table 3. Distribution of Audience Reception Positions

Reading Position	Number of Participants	Participant
Dominant Reading	6	WL, MY, HA, AF, SA, DA
Negotiated Reading	2	EA, VA
Oppositional Reading	0	None

Source: Researcher's Processed Data, 2026

The predominance of dominant readings indicates that most participants accepted the preferred moral meanings encoded in the film, particularly the portrayal of infidelity as a violation of trust, commitment, and family values. A smaller number of participants partially accepted these meanings while simultaneously introducing alternative explanations for the conflict, reflecting a negotiated reading position.

This distribution reflects Hall's (2007) proposition that audiences position themselves within dominant, negotiated, or oppositional frameworks depending on how they decode preferred meanings.

Interview Findings

1. Dominant Reading

Interview findings indicate that six participants occupied the dominant reading position by accepting the preferred meaning encoded in the film. Consistent with Hall's (2007) dominant-hegemonic reading, these participants interpreted infidelity as a serious violation of trust, marital commitment, and family integrity. Rather than questioning the moral message presented by the film, participants largely agreed that the actions of Aris and Rani represented a betrayal of both marriage and family values.

WL (22) stated:

"I agree, because the film shows that infidelity has a big impact on many people, not only couples but also families".

WL further explained that the story portrayed in the film closely reflected situations that frequently occur in contemporary society. This response demonstrates a dominant reading because the participant accepted the film's preferred message that infidelity extends beyond a private romantic issue and produces wider consequences for family relationships.

A similar interpretation was expressed by MY (22) stated:

"In my opinion, infidelity is a serious violation, and once trust is broken, it is very difficult to repair. Personally, I think it can never truly be restored".

MY further emphasized:

"Infidelity is not justified and if you are in a relationship with someone you must be loyal to that one partner".

These statements indicate a complete acceptance of the moral values promoted by the film, particularly the importance of loyalty and commitment within intimate relationships. In Hall's framework, such interpretations represent a dominant reading because the audience decodes the message in accordance with the intended meaning encoded by the filmmaker. Similar views were also expressed by HA (22), who regarded the film as a moral lesson for audiences:

"The message that this film wants to convey can be used as a lesson for the audience... couples must maintain their commitment, don't treat each other the same as what happened in the film".

Likewise, DA (22) emphasized the emotional and psychological consequences of betrayal:

"Please love the people around you and take care of them, don't turn to others because that can leave someone with traumatic experiences".

Both participants reinforced the film's preferred moral message by emphasizing commitment, responsibility, and the consequences of violating trust within intimate relationships. Overall, dominant readers internalized the preferred meanings encoded in the film and consistently interpreted infidelity as a violation of family values and marital commitment.

2. Negotiated Reading

Although dominant readings predominated, two participants demonstrated negotiated reading positions. According to [Hall's \(2007\)](#), negotiated readers generally accept the preferred meaning encoded in a media text while simultaneously modifying or reinterpreting certain aspects according to their personal experiences and social contexts.

EA (22) stated:

"I think some parts reflect reality, but the film places too much emphasis on emotion and drama. In real life, these conflicts are not always that intense".

EA further stated:

"I think it is fairly realistic, but some parts are exaggerated to make the story more engaging. If the plot were not amplified in this way, it would not generate the same level of excitement for viewers".

These statements reflect a negotiated reading because EA accepted the film's central moral condemnation of infidelity while simultaneously challenging the way the conflict was represented. Rather than rejecting the preferred meaning entirely, she modified it by interpreting certain narrative elements as products of dramatic storytelling.

A similar interpretation was expressed by VA (22), who emphasized the role of household dynamics and interpersonal boundaries in contributing to the conflict:

"I think both aspects matter. I can understand the situation because they were living together from the beginning. Even if we are family, it is better to live separately so that everyone has their own privacy. At the same time, I still question how they could do something like that without feeling guilty".

VA's response illustrates a negotiated reading because she accepted the film's moral judgment regarding the affair while introducing alternative explanations related to privacy, family arrangements, and domestic boundaries.

Overall, negotiated readers did not reject the film's core message that infidelity constitutes a violation of trust and family values. Instead, they reinterpreted the causes and representation of the conflict through their own social experiences and understandings of interpersonal relationships.

3. Absence of Oppositional Reading

No participant demonstrated a fully oppositional reading position. According to [Hall's \(2007\)](#) encoding-decoding model, oppositional readings occur when audiences understand the preferred meaning encoded in a media text but consciously reject it and construct an alternative interpretive framework. However, all participants accepted the film's central moral message that infidelity constitutes a violation of trust, commitment, and family values. Although negotiated readers questioned the realism of certain scenes and proposed broader explanations for the conflict, they did not reject the film's moral evaluation of infidelity.

The absence of oppositional readings may be explained by the strong moral framing embedded within the film. The narrative consistently portrays infidelity as harmful to

family relationships and emphasizes the consequences of broken trust. These representations appear to align closely with participants' existing social values concerning loyalty, commitment, and family integrity.

In addition, the relatively homogeneous characteristics of the participants may have contributed to the consistency of audience interpretations. As young women with similar educational backgrounds and social experiences, participants tended to share comparable perspectives regarding interpersonal relationships and family values. Therefore, the absence of oppositional readings should be understood as an empirical finding demonstrating the strong alignment between the film's preferred meanings and the value systems held by the participants.

4. Behavioral and Real-Life Impact

Beyond evaluations of the film, participants reported that watching *Ipar Adalah Maut* encouraged personal reflection regarding relationships, trust, and interpersonal boundaries.

MY (22) explained:

"Yes, the film made me more aware of the importance of boundaries, even within family relationships. There should still be boundaries between men and women, especially when they are not related by blood".

This statement suggests that the film influenced MY's perception of appropriate interpersonal boundaries and increased her awareness of potential risks associated with excessive familiarity within family environments. Another participant, HA (22) stated:

"It really influenced me and became a lesson. Watching a film like that makes me think about how to find someone who will not cheat, even if they seem like a good person. It also made me prioritize commitment more in a relationship".

HA's response demonstrates that the film encouraged reflection on partner selection, commitment, and trust in romantic relationships. Similarly, DA (22) similarly reflected on the long-term interpersonal consequences of betrayal, noting that the film served as a stark reminder to value and protect loved ones. For her, the narrative highlighted how infidelity can inflict deep psychological trauma on family members, thereby reinforcing the urgency of maintaining commitment and fidelity within close relationships in everyday life.

Overall, the findings suggest that audience reception extended beyond interpretation of the narrative itself. Participants reported increased awareness of interpersonal boundaries, greater consideration of trust and commitment, and reflection on relationship practices in everyday life.

5. Netnographic Findings

Digital observation conducted on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube revealed interpretive patterns that closely resembled those identified in the interviews. Most online audiences accepted the film's moral message and interpreted infidelity as a violation of trust and family values.

One Instagram user commented:

“This film truly reflects real life. There used to be someone in my neighborhood who experienced something like this”.

Similarly, a YouTube user stated: “Besides the fact that Rani and Aris lacked the moral strength to resist temptation, there were actually many other contributing factors, such as unresolved childhood issues and Nisa’s carelessness.”

The first comment reflects a dominant reading because the audience member accepted the realism and moral implications of the film’s representation. In contrast, the second comment illustrates a negotiated reading by accepting the moral message while introducing additional social and psychological explanations for the conflict.

Discussion

The findings reveal that young women construct diverse meanings regarding the representation of infidelity in *Ipar Adalah Maut*. Consistent with Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model, audience interpretations were concentrated within dominant and negotiated reading positions, while no oppositional reading emerged. The findings further suggest that audience reception was shaped not only by individual experiences but also by broader cultural values and digital interactions. The following discussion interprets these findings in relation to audience reception theory, contemporary audience studies, and the Indonesian socio-cultural context.

1. Dominant Reading, Cultural Values, and Moral Consensus

The findings indicate that most participants occupied the dominant reading position by accepting the film’s preferred moral message that infidelity constitutes a violation of trust, commitment, and family values. According to Hall (2007), dominant-hegemonic reading occurs when audiences decode media messages within the same framework of meaning intended by the producer. In this study, participants generally interpreted the actions of Aris and Rani as morally unacceptable and harmful to both marital and family relationships.

The predominance of dominant readings may be explained by the close alignment between the film’s narrative and the socio-cultural values held by the participants. Within Indonesian society, marriage is commonly understood not only as a personal relationship but also as a social institution closely associated with family responsibility, social expectations, religious teachings and collective values. In such a context, infidelity is frequently interpreted not merely as a private matter but also as a violation of moral, familial, and social obligations. Consequently, participants tended to accept the film’s portrayal of infidelity as harmful and morally unacceptable.

This cultural alignment also helps explain why dominant readings were considerably more common than negotiated readings. Most participants shared similar assumptions regarding loyalty, commitment, family harmony, and marital responsibility. As a result, variation emerged primarily in participants’ explanations of why the affair occurred rather than in their evaluation of whether the affair was morally acceptable. The strong convergence of audience interpretations suggests that the preferred meanings encoded in the film resonated closely with participants’ existing value systems.

These findings are also consistent with [Chevadina et al. \(2022\)](#), who found that female audiences tended to accept media representations emphasizing loyalty, commitment, and family values in intimate relationships. Similar to the present study, audience interpretations were strongly influenced by pre-existing moral frameworks regarding fidelity and family responsibility. For example, [Chen & Chang \(2024\)](#) found that audiences interpreting family-centered television dramas frequently relied on pre-existing cultural values when evaluating interpersonal conflicts and family relationships. Similarly, [Lee et al. \(2023\)](#) reported that audiences were more likely to reproduce dominant meanings when media narratives aligned with prevailing social and moral norms.

Taken together, these findings suggest that audience interpretations are shaped not only by media texts themselves but also by the cultural frameworks audiences bring to the viewing experience. While Hall's model emphasizes the possibility of multiple interpretations, the present study demonstrates that interpretive diversity may become more limited when media representations strongly resonate with widely shared social, familial, and religious values.

2. Negotiated Reading and Active Audience Meaning-Making

Although dominant readings predominated, two participants demonstrated negotiated reading positions. [Hall \(2007\)](#) argues that negotiated readings occur when audiences generally accept a media text's preferred meaning while simultaneously modifying certain aspects according to their own experiences and social realities. In the present study, negotiated readers agreed that infidelity was morally wrong but argued that the conflict should not be understood solely through individual blame.

Participants occupying this position emphasized additional factors such as family communication, emotional vulnerability, domestic arrangements, and interpersonal boundaries. Rather than rejecting the film's moral message, they expanded its meaning by incorporating broader social and situational explanations. This finding demonstrates that audiences actively construct meanings by connecting media representations with their lived experiences. The negotiated interpretations identified in this study are consistent with international reception research emphasizing the active role of audiences in meaning construction. [Boxman-Shabtai \(2024\)](#) found that audiences in digital media environments frequently combined acceptance and critique when interpreting media texts.

A similar pattern emerged in the present study. Negotiated readers accepted the film's condemnation of infidelity but questioned the realism of certain scenes and considered additional social factors contributing to the conflict. Their interpretations therefore illustrate Hall's proposition that meaning is produced through negotiation rather than passive acceptance of media messages.

The findings also support [Morley's \(1980\)](#) argument that audiences actively construct meanings based on their social experiences and positions rather than simply reproducing media messages. Negotiated readers in this study accepted the film's moral stance while simultaneously adapting its meaning to fit their own understanding of family relationships and domestic conflict. The findings also correspond with [Maulani & Nanda \(2024\)](#), who reported that female audiences frequently reinterpret media conflicts through the lens of their personal experiences and cultural backgrounds, resulting in negotiated forms of meaning-making rather than complete acceptance or rejection of media messages.

3. Digital Participation, Moral Discourse, and Social Media Dynamics

The findings further reveal that audience reception extended beyond individual viewing experiences and continued within digital environments. Through comments, reposts, reaction videos, and online discussions, audiences actively interpreted and evaluated the representation of infidelity portrayed in the film. This finding supports perspectives on participatory culture, which view audiences as active contributors to meaning production rather than passive consumers of media content.

Recent international studies have similarly demonstrated that social media platforms function as digital spaces where audiences collectively construct meanings through interaction and participation. Studies indicate that audience participation in social media has evolved into a form of mundane participation in which meaning-making is shaped by social and contextual conditions rather than isolated individual interpretation (Chu, 2023). In this process, audience engagement is not merely reactive but contributes to the construction of social meaning within digital environments. Likewise, engagement features such as commenting, sharing, and liking function as value affordances that structure participatory practices on social media, enabling users to negotiate meanings while simultaneously extending media discourse beyond its original context (Rebecca & Blake Hallinan, 2023).

The netnographic findings indicate that discussions surrounding *Ipar Adalah Maut* frequently centered on themes of loyalty, betrayal, trust, family responsibility, and relationship boundaries. Many users connected the events depicted in the film with personal experiences or situations observed in their social environments. These interactions illustrate how media texts become resources for broader social and moral discussions within digital spaces.

However, the findings also raise an important question regarding whether social media encourages interpretive diversity or reinforces moral consensus. Although digital platforms theoretically provide opportunities for multiple viewpoints, both interview and netnographic findings revealed that online discussions largely supported the film's preferred moral message. Comments condemning infidelity overwhelmingly outnumbered interpretations that challenged the narrative.

This finding suggests that participatory media environments do not automatically generate interpretive diversity. When dominant moral values are widely shared among users, online discussions may instead reinforce consensus through repeated moral judgments, collective validation, and social approval. Consequently, oppositional interpretations may become less visible within public discussions, not necessarily because they do not exist, but because dominant viewpoints receive greater engagement and social support. In this context, social media appears to function simultaneously as a space for participation and as a mechanism that strengthens dominant moral discourses.

4. Absence of Oppositional Reading

An important finding of this study is the absence of oppositional readings among both interview participants and online audiences. According to Hall (2007), oppositional readings occur when audiences understand a media text's preferred meaning but consciously reject it and construct an alternative interpretive framework. However, such interpretations were not identified in the present study.



The absence of oppositional readings may be explained by the strong moral framing embedded within the film and its compatibility with participants' existing value systems. The narrative consistently portrays infidelity as harmful and emphasizes its consequences for family relationships, trust, and emotional well-being. Because these representations closely correspond with participants' beliefs concerning loyalty, marriage, family integrity, and religious values, there was little motivation to reject the film's preferred meaning. This tendency may also reflect the influence of Indonesia's collectivist cultural orientation, where social harmony, family cohesion, and adherence to shared moral values are highly emphasized. Within such contexts, media messages that reinforce established family and marital norms are more likely to be accepted than openly contested.

This finding differs from several audience reception studies that identified oppositional readings when audiences perceived media representations as unrealistic, ideologically biased, or inconsistent with their lived experiences. For example, Wang et al. (2023) found that viewers were more likely to construct oppositional interpretations when media narratives conflicted with their social experiences or personal beliefs. In contrast, participants in the present study generally regarded the film's representation of infidelity as realistic, relatable, and socially relevant, reducing the likelihood of oppositional decoding.

Furthermore, the relatively homogeneous characteristics of the participants may have contributed to the consistency of audience interpretations. As young women with similar educational backgrounds and social experiences, participants tended to share comparable perspectives regarding interpersonal relationships and family values. Consequently, variation emerged primarily in how participants explained the causes of the conflict rather than in their moral evaluation of infidelity itself. Therefore, the absence of oppositional readings should not be interpreted as a limitation of the study. Rather, it constitutes an empirical finding demonstrating the strong alignment between the film's preferred meanings and the cultural, familial, and moral frameworks held by the audience.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that young women construct diverse meanings regarding the representation of infidelity in the film *Ipar Adalah Maut*. Drawing upon Stuart Hall's Reception Theory, the study found that audience interpretations were primarily expressed through dominant and negotiated reading positions. Most participants accepted the film's preferred moral message that infidelity constitutes a violation of trust, commitment, and family values, while other reinterpreted the causes of conflict based on personal and social experiences. This indicates strong alignment between the film's preferred meanings and participants' cultural and moral frameworks. Theoretically, this study reinforces Stuart Hall's Reception Theory by showing that audience decoding is shaped not only by media texts but also by cultural values, moral norms, and participatory digital environments. It further extends reception studies by demonstrating how dominant and negotiated meanings are reinforced through social media interactions, where audiences collectively evaluate and negotiate media interpretations.

Contextually, the study contributes to Indonesian audience reception research by focusing on young women's interpretation of infidelity narratives, an area that remains underexplored. The use of combined in-depth interviews and netnographic observation provides a more comprehensive understanding of both individual and digital collective



meaning-making processes. Practically, the findings are for filmmakers in developing morally resonant narratives, for communication scholars in advancing audience-centered analysis, for media practitioners in understanding social media as a space of meaning construction, and for media literacy programs in promoting critical engagement with media representations. The study is limited by its small, homogeneous sample of young women aged 18–25, which restricts generalizability. Future research should include male audiences, married participants, older age groups, and cross-cultural or comparative studies. Further studies are also needed to explore how different digital platforms shape variations in audience interpretation and the extent to which online environments encourage either interpretive diversity or moral consensus.

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