

Commodification of sadness in digital spaces: A study of women as emotional labourers on Instagram

Niswatin Nurul Hidayati^{1*}, Samira Agoro²

¹ Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis Tuban, East Java, Indonesia

² University of Lomé, Togo

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Abstract:

In the postmodern era, commodification refers to the transformation of art, culture, and individual identity into tradable commodities, shifting emotional and social value into economic value and digital consumption. This study analyzes women's engagement in the commodification of sadness on Instagram through melancholic music preferences, emotional labour in comment sections, and the influence of algorithms, influencers, and digital marketing on music consumption. The study employs netnography and thematic analysis to examine Instagram comments on Indonesian sad songs, using data from popular posts, sentiment coding, and ethical handling of public digital data. Findings show: (1) women predominantly prefer melancholic music, especially sad to very sad songs reflecting loss, waiting, and life pressure, indicating active emotional engagement as listeners; (2) women perform emotional labour by expressing heartbreak and regret in comment sections, turning private emotions into public spectacle that generates interaction and digital economic value; and (3) women are affected by music homogenization and commercialization shaped by influencers, algorithms, and digital marketing, positioning them as both agents and victims of commodified sadness. The study concludes that commodification of sadness on Instagram involves women as listeners and emotional labour actors, reinforced by algorithmic and influencer systems, transforming private emotions into publicly consumed content with economic value through engagement. This study contributes to postmodern commodification theory, gender studies, and Indonesian collectivist cultural perspectives, while encouraging critical digital awareness, algorithmic transparency, and stronger regulation of emotional data monetization in social media ecosystems.



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*Corresponding author: Niswatin Nurul Hidayati, Retail Management Study Program, Institute of Technology and Business, Tuban, East Java, Indonesia e-mail: niswatin.nurul.hidayati@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Instagram has transformed the music industry by combining visual and audio elements, while also creating new issues such as the commodification of sadness in music. The platform enables artists to develop personal branding and communities through direct interactions like likes, comments, and DMs, which strengthen fan loyalty (Helal & Ozuem, 2019; Prey, 2020; de-Miguel-Molina et al., 2021; Nwagwu & Akintoye, 2024). It also reduces traditional industry barriers through hashtags and algorithmic promotion, allowing music to reach wider audiences (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019; Arrieta, 2020; Demyen, 2024), while visual culture plays a key role in constructing strong and engaging artist identities (Chen et al., 2022; Murphy & Hume, 2023; Carpio-Jimenez et al., 2024; Zhang, 2024). Commodification of emotion in sad songs draws on universal feelings such as heartbreak, making them highly marketable. Music functions as a “technology of the self,” enabling individuals to regulate and express emotions and integrate songs into daily emotional life (DeNora, 2000; Terranova, 2000; Arcy, 2016). Overall, social media reshapes cultural and economic life by turning personal emotions into digital commodities.

Previous studies show that media platforms, including Instagram, have significantly transformed how users interact with music and categorize this research into three main strands. The platform facilitates active participation through sharing, liking, and commenting on posts, which expands reach and supports the commodification of music (Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Pearce et al., 2018). Features such as Stories, IGTV, polls, and live streaming enable artists to share behind-the-scenes content, deepen relationships with audiences, and build fan communities (Leaver, Highfield, & Abidin, 2020). Comment sections also function as spaces for emotional expression and collective experience, highlighting the therapeutic dimension of music and fostering participatory cultures in which fans contribute to the emotional value of music (Weisser, 2012; Wayne, 2011; Krause et al., 2020; Khanom, 2023; Harry & Muthusamy, 2024). Although previous studies have examined music interaction on Instagram, limited research has specifically addressed gender dimensions and the commodification of sadness; this study contributes novelty by focusing on women as both agents and subjects of emotional labour within the digital music ecosystem.

Based on the study's gap analysis, this research aims to analyze women's involvement in the commodification of sadness on Instagram through their preference for melancholic music, the practice of emotional labor in the comment section, and the influence of algorithms, influencers, and digital marketing on music consumption. From these objectives, three research questions were formulated: (1) How do women demonstrate emotional engagement as active listeners in their preference for melancholic music? (2) How do women practice emotional labor by expressing private emotions that subsequently become economically valuable digital interactions? (3) How do algorithms, influencers, and digital marketing shape women's music consumption experiences on Instagram? This study contributes to enriching social media and music studies with a gender perspective, affirming women as both actors and victims of the commodification of emotion, and extending the literature on emotional labor by demonstrating that emotional work also occurs in digital interactions that are voluntary yet economically exploited by social media platforms within the contemporary digital culture ecosystem.

This study is based on the argument that the commodification of emotion in music consumption on Instagram cannot be separated from the interconnection between user expression, platform infrastructure, and the logic of the digital economy. Sad songs function as a primary medium for emotional release, particularly through comment sections that reflect women's emotional labour while simultaneously reinforcing engagement as an

economic value. At the same time, algorithms, influencers, and digital marketing strategies shape music preferences that tend to become increasingly homogenised, thereby narrowing opportunities for musical exploration and diversity. This condition indicates that users' emotional experiences are not merely personal but are constructed and exploited within the platform ecosystem. Consequently, Instagram operates as a site for the circulation of commodified emotions, where sadness is transformed into publicly consumed and economically productive content. These implications highlight the importance of critically examining power relations in digital culture, which blur the boundaries between authentic emotional expression and the production of capitalist value based on data and user interaction.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study employs a netnographic approach. Netnography, a term coined by Kozinets (2015) and further developed by Kerley (2024), is an online research method adapted from traditional ethnography to analyze individuals' behaviours and interactions within digital communities. In this study, netnography is particularly appropriate as it focuses on understanding social and cultural dynamics in online spaces, making it well-suited for analyzing comments on Instagram posts related to Indonesian sad songs. The study aims to examine women's engagement in the commodification of sadness on Instagram through melancholic music preferences, emotional labour practices in comment sections, and the influence of algorithms, influencers, and digital marketing on music consumption.

Data Collection

The researcher identified Instagram posts featuring popular Indonesian sad songs using the search and explore features. Posts were selected based on high engagement levels (i.e., a large number of comments, likes, and shares) to ensure that the data reflected significant user responses within the community (Gobo, 2008; Bengtsson, 2016). The researcher randomly selected sad songs, including original excerpts (e.g., Meiska), cover versions, and content using songs as background music. Subsequently, comments were collected from selected posts, such as the account @storymusik082, which recorded 1.6 million views and 382 comments. Data collection was conducted systematically without researcher intervention, covering a range of artists, themes, and user demographics.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2021; Darvish & Bick, 2023). The researcher categorised and coded the comment data to identify recurring themes and patterns. This process involved grouping comments based on similar content or sentiment, such as negative comments (regret, heartbreak), positive comments (acceptance, emotional growth), and neutral comments (tagging, brief expressions). Through this approach, the researcher was able to draw conclusions regarding general responses to sad songs and how these emotions are commodified within online discussions, including how women emerge as key agents of emotional labour in digital spaces.

Research Ethics

From an ethical perspective, as digital ethnography generally relies on publicly available data, researchers must primarily consider the privacy and consent of the individuals involved. In this study, all collected data were obtained from public profiles and posts. The researcher also anonymised user information by removing account names and replacing them with codes to protect individual identities during analysis, in accordance with established research ethics

standards (Kozinets, 2015; Kerley, 2024). This practice ensures that the study meets scientific standards while respecting the rights and privacy of participants within digital communities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The commodification of emotion in comments on Indonesian sad songs

Music is a medium of emotional expression that is closely embedded in everyday social life. Sad songs are often used to represent experiences of loss, heartbreak, longing, and life pressures. Listeners do not merely engage with melodies and lyrics, but also respond emotionally through comments and interactions on digital media platforms. Variations in emotional intensity across songs can be observed through valence categories, which indicate the overall emotional tendency of a song.

Table 1

Identification of Emotions and Listener Responses to Indonesian Sad Songs

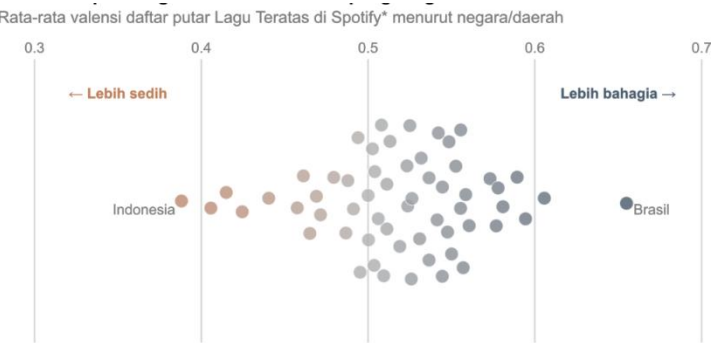
Emotion Category	Valence Range	Song	Artist	Valence Score	Listener Comment Identification
Very Sad	0.20–.30	Runtuh	Feby Putri & Fiersa Besari	0.27	Listeners perceive the song as reflecting mental exhaustion, loneliness, and emotional vulnerability in facing life.
		Apalah (Arti Menunggu)	Raisa	0.29	The song is seen as representing prolonged waiting and uncertain love.
		Celengan Rindu	Fiersa Besari	0.30	Many comments associate the song with long-distance relationships and deep longing.
Sad	0.31– 0.39	Tak Segampang Itu	Anggi Marito	0.31	The song is interpreted as expressing the difficulty of forgetting someone after a breakup.
		Sial	Mahalini	0.33	Listeners describe the song as reflecting disappointment and failure in romantic relationships.
		Hati-Hati di Jalan	Tulus	0.35	Comments often highlight themes of adult separation and acceptance of life circumstances.
		Secukupnya	Hindia	0.36	The song is considered to validate life pressures and youth mental health struggles.
		Bertaut	Nadin Amizah	0.38	Listeners describe the song as emotional and touching, especially regarding mother–child relationships.
Melancholic / Light Sadness	0.40–0.59	Akad	Payung Teduh	0.42	The song is seen as romantic but still carrying a mellow and longing atmosphere.
Happy / Cheerful	0.60–1.00	Mobil Balap	Naif	0.84	Listeners perceive the song as energetic, cheerful, and evoking positive nostalgia.

Source: processed by the researcher, 2024.

Table 1 shows that, based on the data, Indonesian songs are classified into four emotional categories. In the Very Sad category (valence 0.20–0.30), “Runtuh” (Feby Putri & Fiersa Besari) reflects mental exhaustion and loneliness, “Apalah (Arti Menunggu)” (Raisa) represents uncertain waiting, and “Celengan Rindu” (Fiersa Besari) is associated with longing in long-distance relationships. The Sad category (0.31–0.39) includes “Tak Segampang Itu” (Anggi Marito), which describes the difficulty of forgetting someone, “Sial” (Mahalini), which

expresses disappointment, “Hati-Hati di Jalan” (Tulus), which portrays mature separation, “Secukupnya” (Hindia), which reflects the validation of life pressures among young people, and “Bertaut” (Nadin Amizah), which depicts a mother–child relationship. The Mildly Sad/Melancholic category (0.40–0.59) is represented only by “Akad” (Payung Teduh), which is romantic yet mellow. Finally, the Happy/Cheerful category (0.60–1.00) includes “Mobil Balap” (Naif), which is energetic and filled with positive nostalgia.

Figure 1
Indonesian Listeners Show a Stronger Preference for Sad Songs



Source: processed by the researcher, 2024.

Many Indonesian singers perform sad songs, including Mahalini, Lyodra, Tiara Andini, and Meiska. Mahalini has released several tracks such as “Mati-Matian,” “Sial,” “Sisa Rasa,” and “Melawan Restu.” Lyodra’s repertoire includes “Tak Selalu Memiliki,” “Pesan Terakhir,” “Tak Dianggap,” “Dibanding Dia,” and “Kalau Bosan.” Tiara Andini performs songs such as “Menyesal,” “Merasa Indah,” “Usai,” and “Masih Hatiku.” Meanwhile, Meiska is known for the song “Hilang Tanpa Bilang.”

The author randomly selected sad songs appearing on Instagram, including original excerpts by Meiska as well as cover versions performed by various singers. In addition, the author identified several posts using these songs as background music. A search on Instagram using the hashtag #hilangtanpabilang yielded more than 1,000 posts. One of the accounts using Meiska’s song was @storymusik082, which had been viewed 1.6 million times, received 200,000 likes, 382 comments, and was shared 15,000 times. The lyric excerpt used in the post was: “Ku terlanjur mencintaimu. Andai ku tahu kan sesakit ini. Ku takkan mungkin mencintaimu sedalam ini.” The comments on the post varied, indicating negative, positive, and neutral tendencies.

Table 2
Comments on Indonesian Sad Song on Instagram

Comments (Indonesian)	Comments (English Version)	Category		
		Positif	Negative	Neutral
(Tagging someone's account)	(Tagging someone's account)			√
Ayo balik dong ak gk tau btapa hncur ny ak ktika kmu pergi	Come back, I don't know how broken I was when you left me		√	
Terlalu bodoh sampai lupa klo kamu cuma teman	Too stupid to realize that you were just a friend		√	
Terlanjur mencintaimu 😊	I already fell in love with you 😊	√		
Yah maaf terlanjur jatuh cinta sedalam iniii	Sorry, I already fell this deeply in love	√		
Jangan pernah berharap kepada manusia karena manusia hati dan pikiran nya bisa berubah	Never expect from humans because their heart and mind can change	√		

Peka lah anjggggggg:’(	Be sensitive, damn:’(	√
Kapan lu balik gw masih nunggu kok selama apapun kamu masih aku tunggu.	When will you come back? I’m still waiting no matter how long	√
Iri dengan org yang kau gandeng sekarang!!	Jealous of the person you are with now!!	√
Bingung mau bilang siapaa kek ngerasa mati rasa ya engga juga gitu, mati rasanya tuh ga pengen suka sama orang tapi org lewat aja dikatain ganteng	Confused who to tell, feeling numb, not really, just don’t want to like anyone but still call random people handsome	√
Asing – kenalan – ttm- lost contact + bonusnya asing haha	Stranger – acquaintance – situationship – lost contact, ending up as strangers haha	√
Gk nyangka bakal sehancur ini	Didn’t expect to be this broken	√
Sakit wkww	It hurts lol	√
AKU BODOH BANGETTT!!!!	I am so stupid!!!!	√
Jadi sekrang biarin aku tenang okey 😊	So now just let me be at peace okay 😊	√
Cinta gue abis di masalalu hh ga ngotak banget jadi cwok anj malah balik ke mantan nyaa	My love is stuck in the past, crazy, he went back to his ex	√
Anjrr ngeliat dia dengan cewe lain tuh nyesek bngt katanya teman TPI ko GK bisa berkata-kata lgii	Seeing him with another girl hurts so much, they said we were friends but I’m speechless	√
Andai ku tau kan sesakit ini	If I had known, it would hurt this much	√
Kau telah melihat bukan tuan? Kau tau berapa ku mencintai mu...	You have seen it, haven’t you sir? You know how much I love you...	√
Wirrr	(expression/sound)	√
Donlot	Download	√
Salah aku naro perasaan sama teman sendiri:’(	My mistake for falling in love with my own friend:’(	√

Source: processed by the researcher, 2024.

Table 2 shows that comments on sad song posts on social media are predominantly dominated by negative responses expressing feelings of loss, heartbreak, regret, sadness, and disappointment in interpersonal relationships. These comments indicate that sad songs function as a medium for users to express their personal emotions and lived emotional experiences. Meanwhile, some comments fall into the positive category, reflecting acceptance, sincerity in love, and gratitude toward past relationship experiences. In addition, there are also neutral comments, such as account tagging, brief expressions, or responses without clear emotional content. These findings suggest that sad songs in digital spaces do not merely function as entertainment but also serve as a medium for emotional expression and social interaction among social media users.

Emotional labour and the commodification of emotion in music on Instagram

Listening to music is no longer understood merely as an activity of enjoying melodies, but also as a process of reactivating emotional experiences stored in memory. In the digital era, virtual spaces have become media for the open expression of feelings through written posts, uploads, and user interactions. This phenomenon creates a sense of emotional relief, strengthens emotional connectedness, and indicates the emergence of a new culture in music

consumption practices within contemporary society.

Tabel 3

Findings on Emotional Labour and the Commodification of Emotion on Instagram

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Sample Data	Interpretation
Expression of Sadness	Heartbreak, loss, regret	"If only I knew it would hurt this much"; "Did not expect it would be this devastating"	Sad music functions as a medium for emotional release and the articulation of experiences of loss.
Emotional Labour	Emotional expression in digital space	"I am sincere, right?"; "Trusting humans is this painful"	Users' emotions are publicly expressed and generate digital interaction within online platforms.
Self-Reflection	Acceptance and relationship evaluation	"Now just let me be at peace"; "It is better not to continue"	Listeners use music as a medium for emotional reflection and self-evaluation.
Digital Social Interaction	Tagging and short comments	"Heyyyy"; "Download it"; account tagging	Neutral comments contribute to content dissemination and engagement activities on the platform.
Commodification of Emotion	Sadness as digital consumption	"I have already fallen in love"; "It is my fault for investing feelings"	Emotional sadness in music becomes a consumable commodity that enhances user engagement and platform interaction.

Source: processed by the researcher, 2024.

Table 3 shows that there are five main themes. Sadness Expression includes heartbreak, loss, and regret, with an example such as "Andai ku tau kan sesakit ini." Emotional Labour refers to the expression of emotions in digital spaces, such as "Berharap sama manusia emang sesakit ini." Self-Reflection involves acceptance and evaluation of relationships, for example "Jadi sekarang biarin aku tenang." Digital Social Interaction is indicated by neutral comments such as "Wirrr" and tagging activities. Emotion Commodification is reflected in "Terlanjur mencintaimu," which illustrates sadness being consumed digitally as a means of increasing engagement.

Based on the findings, sad songs serve a dual function for listeners. First, they act as a medium for the expression of deep emotions such as heartbreak and regret, which are explicitly articulated in comment sections. Second, digital spaces function as arenas of emotional labour, where users publicly disclose personal vulnerability, which in turn generates interaction and social validation. Third, self-reflection emerges in the form of acceptance or evaluation of past relationships. Fourth, digital social interaction through neutral comments (e.g., tagging and exclamations) contributes to content virality. Fifth, these activities collectively demonstrate the commodification of emotion: sadness is packaged, consumed, and leveraged by platforms to enhance user engagement, transforming private feelings into publicly visible and economically valuable content.

Instagram music consumption: Influencers, algorithms, and digital marketing impact

In today's digital era, music is no longer consumed solely as a form of pure artistic expression. Various social media platforms have transformed the ways in which people discover, listen to, and share songs. This process involves multiple actors, ranging from content creators to intelligent technological systems. All of these elements operate within an interconnected ecosystem that mutually influences one another. This phenomenon is therefore worthy of deeper scholarly examination.

Table 4
The Impact of Instagram on Music Consumption

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Brief Interpretation
Influencer Role	Music recommendations, collaboration with artists, audience reach expansion	Influencers play a significant role in facilitating music discovery and shaping followers' music preferences through creative content and collaborations with musicians.
Algorithm Role	Content personalization based on user interactions and demographic data	Instagram's algorithm assists users in discovering music aligned with their interests; however, it may also limit exposure to diverse genres and alternative artists.
Digital Marketing Role	Paid advertisements, sponsored posts, and strategic partnerships	Digital marketing strategies on Instagram are effective in enhancing artist visibility, increasing streaming numbers, and strengthening audience engagement.
Music Homogenization Effect	Dominance of popular artists and reduced musical diversity	Reliance on algorithms and digital promotion contributes to the dominance of mainstream artists, resulting in a more homogenized music consumption experience.
Authenticity Challenges	Over-commercialization and music as a marketing tool	The emphasis on engagement metrics and advertising strategies may reduce artistic authenticity and weaken audience trust in musicians and music-related content.

Source: processed by the researcher, 2024.

Table 4 demonstrates five major themes. First, the Role of Influencers: through music recommendations, collaborations, and audience expansion, influencers encourage the discovery of new music and shape followers' preferences. Second, the Role of Algorithms: content personalization assists users in discovering relevant music; however, it may also limit exploration of alternative genres. Third, the Role of Digital Marketing: paid advertisements, sponsored posts, and strategic partnerships effectively enhance visibility, streaming rates, and audience engagement. Fourth, the Impact of Homogeneity: the dominance of popular artists reduces musical diversity. Fifth, the Challenge of Authenticity: excessive commercialization threatens artistic authenticity and diminishes fans' trust.

Based on the findings, Instagram has transformed the music consumption ecosystem through three main pillars: influencers, algorithms, and digital marketing. Influencers function as trusted curators who actively shape audience preferences, while algorithms create personalized experiences but simultaneously confine users within filter bubbles that limit the exploration of non-mainstream genres. Digital marketing, although effective in increasing visibility and streaming rates, has also accelerated the commodification of music. Consequently, a growing homogenization has emerged in which major artists increasingly dominate the industry, whereas independent musicians face greater challenges in competing. Furthermore, excessive commercialization has shifted the value of music from an artistic expression into merely a marketing instrument. This condition poses the risk of diminishing fans' trust as artistic authenticity becomes neglected. Therefore, a balance is required between promotional strategies and the preservation of musical diversity and artistic integrity.

Discussion

The study on women and the commodification of sadness within Instagram's digital space draws three major conclusions. First, the dominance of women's melancholic preferences is reflected in sad to extremely sad songs that portray themes of loss, longing,

and life pressures, indicating women's emotional engagement as active listeners. Second, women function as agents of emotional labour by expressing regret and heartbreak in comment sections, thereby transforming private emotions into public spectacles that generate interaction and digital economic value. Third, women are affected by the homogenization and commercialization of music, as influencers, algorithms, and digital marketing shape their preferences while simultaneously positioning women as both actors and victims within the commodification of digital sadness. Thus, women play a central role in the commodification of sadness on Instagram, serving as listeners, agents of emotional labour, and parties affected by algorithmic systems and commercialization that transform personal emotions into digital consumption and economic value.

This phenomenon is highly relevant to the social conditions of contemporary digital society, in which mental health and online emotional expression have become increasingly urgent public issues. Amid the rising rates of anxiety and depression, particularly in the post-pandemic period, social media platforms such as Instagram have emerged as alternative spaces for individuals, especially younger generations, to express sadness that cannot be accommodated through face-to-face interactions (Pellegrino et al., 2022). However, these emotional expressions are not neutral; they are managed, disseminated, and even monetized by digital platforms. This condition creates a cycle in which personal sadness is transformed into a public spectacle that stimulates engagement (Graham, 2018; Rosamond, 2020). Within Indonesia's collectivist culture, openly sharing sadness is further reinforced by social norms that emphasize empathy and emotional mutual support (Geert Hofstede, 2001). Nevertheless, the dominance of women's comments also reflects an unequal emotional burden, as women are socially expected to be more emotionally expressive, whereas men continue to face stigma when displaying vulnerability (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008; Eagly & Wood, 1999).

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the theory of postmodern commodification (Fedric Jameson, 1991; Featherstone, 2007), which argues that personal experiences, including emotions, have been transformed into marketable commodities. On Instagram, expressions of sadness conveyed through comment sections are no longer merely forms of personal catharsis but have become content that drives engagement metrics (likes, shares, and saves) that benefit the platform economically (Fuchs, 2013). This finding is consistent with the concept of emotional labour proposed by Arlie Russell Hochschild (2012) and Feng et al. (2022), in which users, particularly women, voluntarily manage their emotions to create a public emotional atmosphere that is ultimately subject to economic exploitation. Furthermore, personalization algorithms (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Rehman et al., 2022) and digital marketing strategies (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019) intensify this process by recommending sad songs based on users' emotional histories, thereby creating filter bubbles that restrict musical exploration and foster homogenization. The perspective of Jean Baudrillard (1994) is also relevant, as emotional hyperreality emerges when sad comments become simulacra that can no longer be distinguished from genuine sadness.

This study provides an understanding that social media is not a neutral space, but rather an arena in which human emotions are managed and commodified. Understanding this process enables individuals to avoid becoming trapped within concealed forms of emotional exploitation. As argued by Bruce Johnson (2015), music functions as a technology of the self a means of managing emotions. However, within Instagram's digital environment, this function has been appropriated for commercial purposes. The study further demonstrates the need for greater critical awareness regarding the impulse to express emotions in public digital spaces, as every upload, comment, or virtual display of sadness contributes to the accumulation of data and the generation of platform profit (van Dijck, 2013). In addition, the dominance of

women's comments highlights the existence of unequal emotional burdens within digital culture. This condition encourages the development of collective awareness so that individuals do not merely become producers of free emotional labour, but are also capable of fostering healthier, more authentic, and less exploitative digital spaces that align with humanitarian values (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003; Stella Ting-Toomey, 1999).

The findings of this study are consistent with the work of Luis V. Casaló et al. (2020), which demonstrated that influencers effectively encourage the discovery of new music, as well as with Alan M. Rubin's (2002) uses and gratifications theory, which argues that individuals utilize media to fulfill emotional needs. However, the present study extends previous research by explicitly connecting user comments on sad songs with the process of emotional commodification on Instagram, a dimension that has received limited attention within existing literature. Whereas Tim Highfield and Kylie Jarrett Leaver (2016), as well as Pearce et al. (2018), emphasized the diversity of online interactions (active, passive, and functional), this study introduces additional gender and cultural dimensions. In contrast to studies conducted within predominantly individualistic Western contexts (Fischer & Manstead, 2000), the findings demonstrate that Indonesia's collectivist cultural values (Geert Hofstede, 2001) reinforce public emotional expression. Furthermore, unlike the studies of David MacAulay (2015) and de-Miguel-Molina et al. (2021), which primarily focused on Spotify's algorithms, this research concentrates on user interactions within Instagram. Therefore, this study fills an important gap in understanding how emotional commodification operates within a visual and participatory social media ecosystem.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be proposed. First, Instagram users should develop critical digital literacy by recognizing that every emotional expression shared in comment sections has the potential to become commodified. Second, platforms such as Instagram need to improve algorithmic transparency and provide users with greater control over emotionally driven content recommendations. Third, for educators and parents, digital mental health education should incorporate an understanding of emotional exploitation within social media environments. Fourth, policymakers should strengthen regulations concerning personal data protection and the monetization of emotional expression. Fifth, the music industry is encouraged to balance digital marketing strategies with efforts to preserve genre diversity and artistic authenticity, rather than focusing solely on engagement metrics. Finally, online communities can foster healthier emotional support spaces by encouraging interactions that are measured not merely through popularity metrics, but through the quality of mutual understanding and empathy.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the commodification of sadness on Instagram occurs through the active involvement of women as listeners, agents of emotional labour, and parties affected by digital systems. Sad songs function as triggers for the dominance of emotional responses that are openly expressed within comment sections, thereby transforming private experiences into forms of public consumption. This process does not occur independently, but is reinforced by algorithms, influencers, and digital marketing strategies that shape musical preferences while simultaneously encouraging content homogenization. In this context, emotions particularly sadness function not only as forms of personal expression, but also as sources of economic value through the generation of engagement. Thus, Instagram operates as a space that systematically manages, disseminates, and exploits users' emotions, especially those of women, within an increasingly commercialized digital cultural ecosystem.

This study contributes to enriching the discourse on postmodern commodification by

demonstrating that emotions, particularly sadness, are not only commodified but are also reproduced through emotional labour driven by gender norms. The research further integrates the perspective of Indonesia's collectivist culture into digital media studies, a field that has long been dominated by Western individualistic approaches. From a practical perspective, these findings encourage social media users, particularly women, to become more critical in expressing emotions within public digital spaces. For platforms such as Instagram, this study highlights the necessity of algorithmic transparency and policies that protect users from emotional exploitation. For policymakers, regulations concerning the monetization of emotional data have become increasingly urgent.

This study has several limitations. First, the comment data were collected from only a single song upload and one Instagram account, thereby limiting the representation of variations across genres, platforms, and time periods. Second, the analysis did not involve in-depth interviews with female users, meaning that the underlying motives behind emotional expressions have not been fully explored. Third, this research did not examine the long-term impact of the commodification of sadness on women's mental health. Future studies are therefore recommended to employ mixed-method approaches, including surveys and interviews, while also expanding the scope to other platforms such as TikTok. Furthermore, cross-cultural and gender-comparative studies are necessary to determine whether similar dynamics occur in societies characterized by different forms of collectivism or patriarchal values.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Niswatin Nurul Hidayati: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Software; Visualization; Writing Original Draft; Validation; Writing Review & Editing. **Samira Agoro:** Formal Analysis; Visualization; Writing Review & Editing.

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