Commodifying Mental Health: Genre and Commercial Strategy in Sinemaku Pictures' Film Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how mental health operates as both an emotional narrative device and a commercial strategy in three Indonesian films: *Kukira Kau Rumah* (2021), *Ketika Berhenti di Sini* (2023), and *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis* (2024). Intrinsically, the films portray young female protagonists entangled in familial dysfunction and psychological distress, reinforcing popular genre formulas of emotional victimhood and romantic salvation. Drawing on Cawelti's formula theory and Adorno's culture industry critique, the study shows how mental health is stylized into consumable spectacle, balancing originality with familiar tropes to ensure audience identification. Extrinsically, the commodification of mental health is evident in promotional strategies using emotional endorsements, celebrity influence, and outreach programs. Through the lens of Hesmondhalgh's political economy of media and Dyer's star studies, the research argues that mental health becomes emotional capital—marketed through star personas and affective narratives to boost engagement, empathy, and commercial success.

Keywords: Mental Health, Romance, Drama, Formula, Emotional Appeal, Commercial Strategy

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Indonesian cinema has increasingly incorporated mental health as a central narrative theme, particularly in youth-oriented romantic dramas. Numerous production houses emerge with mental health issue starred by prominent young actor/actress. Sinemaku Pictures has gained recognition as a production house that actively advocates for this issue. Since its founding in 2019 by Umay Sahab and Prilly Latuconsina, Sinemaku Pictures stands out for its consistent portrayal of young protagonists struggling with emotional and psychological issues.

Films such as *Kukira Kau Rumah* (2021), *Ketika Berhenti di Sini* (2023), and *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis* (2024) present mental health not merely as a background issue, but as a prominent emotional feature that drives the narrative and affects character development, audience engagement, and commercial strategy.

There is an increasing interest in how mental health issues — depression, trauma, grief, psychological suffering — are represented on screen, and what those representations imply. For example, a recent study by Apriliana and tandiyonomanu (2023) analyzed the

representation of depression in the Indonesian film aftersun, using semiotic analysis (based on signifier–signified logic) to decode how depression is manifested through visual and narrative codes: expressions of emptiness, social withdrawal, behavioral changes, inner conflict, etc.

This trend coincides with a broader cultural shift in Indonesia, where mental health discourse is gaining traction, especially among younger generations through social media, celebrity influence, and digital platforms (Syaif et al., 2024). Sinemaku Pictures, with actress-producer Prilly Latuconsina at its center, has strategically used this shift to attract audience attention and emotional identification. The films often feature characters in their early 20s dealing with grief, trauma, and emotional vulnerability, within the context of disharmonious family dynamics and romantic relationships. These films also blend conventional elements of romance and drama with emotional intensity, stylized cinematography, and melodramatic character arcs.

Mental health as emotional feature is proven to be effective device that these three movies *Kukira Kau Rumah* (2021), *Ketika Berhenti di Sini* (2023), and *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis* (2024) gained success in audience numbers and commercial profit. According to several articles, it is indicated that the three films attracted over millions of viewers, generating an estimated gross profit of approximately 200 billion rupiah.

Several academic studies have examined how mental health issues are presented in Indonesian films, particularly *Kukira Kau Rumah*

(2021) and *Ketika Berhenti di Sini* (2023). Based on online-accessible studies, most of the available research on *Kukira Kau Rumah* explores the psychological condition of the main character, Niskala, and how her mental illness—specifically bipolar disorder—is central to the narrative. Sukamto and Parmin (2025) on his research, *'Konflik batin tokoh Niskala dalam film Kukira Kau Rumah karya Umay Shahab: Kajian psikologi sastra Sigmund Freud'* use Freud's psychoanalytic theory to investigate Niskala's internal conflict, identifying the role of the id, ego, and superego in shaping her actions and emotional responses. Similarly, on *'Representasi gangguan bipolar pada karakter Niskala dalam film Kukira Kau Rumah (Analisis semiotika John Fiske),* Rohmah, Jupriono, and Widiyanto (2023) employ John Fiske's semiotics to show how bipolar disorder is symbolically represented through Niskala's behavior and cinematographic cues.

From a communication perspective, a research by Riski Apriliani, titled *Audience Reception Analysis of Mental Health in the Movie Ku Kira Kau Rumah* examines how the film helps audiences better understand mental health issues. The research is based on the idea that narrative films are engaging and can effectively present new information about mental health. The findings show that the film's emphasis on mental health helps viewers gain a clearer understanding of mental disorders, reduce stigma, and increase empathy toward individuals who experience them. In similar vein, Nurdiawati and Firmansyash (2023) on *'Hubungan antara narasi film dengan pengetahuan penonton mengenai isu kesehatan mental'*

investigates how the film's narrative influences viewers' understanding of mental health, suggesting that films like *Kukira Kau Rumah* can serve as educational media. Meanwhile, Rachim and Wibowo (2023) apply Stuart Hall's reception theory to reveal how audiences interpret the mental health messages in the film, categorizing responses into dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings.

In contrast, research on *Ketika Berhenti di Sini* (2023) is more focused on trauma rather than mental illness labels. Jayanti, Purnomo, and Fadilah (2024) examine how the main character, Anandita Semesta, experiences trauma and loss. Using psychological literary theory and referencing DSM-V criteria and Lazarus and Folkman's coping theory, the study identifies various sources of trauma and analyzes the character's emotional responses and coping mechanisms

A. Genre and Formula Theory

The literary and entertainment industries have created an interdependent relationship between production companies and audiences. Production houses consistently explore areas of potential audience appeal in order to attract viewership and generate profit. While audiences freely choose the type of content they wish to consume—romance for those interested in intimate relationships, drama for those drawn to familial or social conflicts—production houses design films that cater to these preferences. In this context, genre films function as categories that provide both creative structure for producers and recognizable options for audiences (Octafia & Noris, 2023).

Cawelti (1976) defines genre as a set of effective generalizations about large groups of literary works, useful for tracing historical trends or examining how cultural patterns shape literary production. Accordingly, genre functions as a classification system in which particular works share common characteristics within a recognizable artistic framework.

The construction of genre is governed by a formula, which typically includes recurrent characters, narrative structures, settings, atmospheres, and symbolic conventions that appeal to particular societies. As Cawelti (1976) explains, formulas reflect both cultural conventions and more universal story patterns. For instance, even without referring to a specific work, one can predict that a typical romance story centres on a love relationship between a man and a woman. However, the way the male or female protagonists are depicted—such as a young, black-haired woman with unstable mental health—can vary based on local cultural norms. These differences in characterization, narrative structure, or symbolism reflect how the formula adapts to different sociocultural contexts.

Cawelti (1976) further emphasizes that formula plays a central role as a mechanism of "essential standardization." This standardization creates a shared ground between producers and audiences, allowing for what he calls "artistic communication." Audiences find satisfaction in familiar patterns, while production studios reduce financial risk and increase the potential for large-scale commercial success. As Schatz (1981) notes, "production houses must protect their

investments by relying—at least partially—on established conventions that have been proven effective through repetition and prior exposure."

This repetition becomes essential in the realm of popular culture, as it encourages film studios to replicate prior commercial successes. While each film may offer unique elements, filmmakers often work within established patterns rather than producing entirely original works. It is important to recognize that we are not referring to identical films, but rather to recurring structures and recognizable narrative or stylistic patterns. Genre, along with its underlying formula, imposes a kind of framework or standard that guides the creation of a film—requiring it to adhere to a particular set of artistic conventions. As Schatz (1981) observes, "the filmmaker's inventive impulse is tempered by his or her practical recognition of certain conventions." This balancing act between creativity and convention lies at the heart of genre filmmaking, where innovation emerges within the boundaries of familiar forms.

B. Romance and Melodrama Formula

Romance serves as a universal story pattern by narrating a love relationship between a man and a woman. While many genre films feature female protagonists, the central narrative structure of romance lies not in gender representation, but in the unfolding of romantic development. As Cawelti (1976) states, "the crucial defining characteristic of romance is not that it stars a female but that its organizing action is the development of a love relationship, usually between a man and a woman." Most romantic formulas center on the couple's struggle to overcome a combination of social or psychological barriers, with the moral fantasy being that love is triumphant and enduring. This does not exclude love stories that end in loss or death; rather, the focus remains on the emotional and transformative impact of the love itself, which leaves a lasting impression on the characters and audience alike.

Melodrama, on the other hand, operates according to a different yet equally recognizable formula. Cawelti (1976) defines melodrama as a narrative mode that presents a world filled with hardship, suffering, and moral conflict, yet governed by a higher moral order. The core of melodramatic structure lies in its emotional intensity, moral polarization, and sensational conflict. Music (the 'melos') and heightened dramatic effects are integral to enhancing the emotional engagement of the audience. As Cawelti (1976) explains, "The drama of intensified effects (i.e., music, 'melos') added to the play to increase its emotional power and intensify its hold on the audience… revolves around malevolent intrigue and violent action, while credibility both of character and plot is sacrificed for violent effect and emotional opportunism." Unlike the more linear structure of romance, melodrama typically presents a complex narrative with multiple characters and intersecting storylines. Suffering and violence are not ends in themselves but serve as mechanisms to test and affirm the 'rightness' of the moral order.

However, because formula is both a universal and culturally adaptive structure, it is essential to

view it through the lens of Indonesian cinema. The formulas of romance and melodrama in Indonesian cinema are deeply rooted in the cultural and industrial landscape of popular storytelling. Romance films in Indonesia typically revolve around young protagonists navigating emotional relationships that are often challenged by societal or familial pressures. As Karl G. Heider (1991) notes, Indonesian romantic narratives are characteristically driven more by emotion than logic, often favoring affective identification through sentimental visuals and musical inserts.

These stories frequently feature conflict between personal desires and external expectations, with resolutions that either affirm societal norms or highlight emotional sacrifice. Krishna Sen (1994) further explains that romantic narratives, particularly during the New Order period, reinforced state ideals by portraying women as moral figures caught between love and duty, typically concluding in marriage or moral closure. Maman S. Ardan (2008), applying Cawelti's theory of formula, emphasizes that Indonesian romance formulas consistently feature cultural conventions such as idealized protagonists, family conflicts, and emotional resolution, shaped by local values and gender expectations.

In parallel, melodrama serves as a dominant mode in Indonesian drama films, offering heightened emotional expression and moral polarization. As Barker and Setijadi-Dunn (2010) highlight, melodramatic formulas center on the victim figure—often a young woman—whose suffering is made visible through visual exaggeration, musical

accompaniment, and narrative repetition. Melodramatic themes commonly include mental illness, familial neglect, and terminal loss, creating a strong emotional connection with audiences. Heider (1991) also observes that melodrama in Indonesian cinema externalizes emotion, often through crying, shouting, and symbolic gestures, with the maternal figure frequently central to the narrative. This emotional intensity, as Philip Yampolsky (2001) argues, resonates with broader affective traditions in Indonesian popular culture, including music and television dramas. Together, the romance and melodrama formulas serve not only as narrative blueprints but also as marketable conventions that align emotional appeal with cultural familiarity and commercial viability.

C. Culture Industry

Raymond Williams (1983) defines *culture* in several ways. First, it can refer to "a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development"; second, to "a particular way of life"; and third, to "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity." In contrast, *industry* is commonly defined as the production of goods and services within an economy, typically for the purpose of generating profit (*Oxford Dictionary of Economics*, 2017). Combining these concepts, *culture industry* refers to the process through which mass-produced cultural goods—such as films, music, television, and literature—are created, marketed, and distributed to maximize profit.

From this definition, it becomes clear that the culture industry involves the commercialization of creative

content. Adorno (1979) argues that the culture industry is marked by *sameness*, where cultural products are standardized and stripped of originality. Business enterprises, according to Adorno, shape creative output to fit pre-established formulas, prioritizing financial return over artistic authenticity. He stresses that while cultural products may appear different on the surface, this variation is "fundamentally illusory." The need to meet market expectations means that creativity must operate within existing conventions and commercial boundaries.

Adorno's notion of *standardization* aligns with John Cawelti's (1976) theory of *convention* in popular culture. Cawelti emphasizes that cultural products must conform to recognizable patterns in order to be accepted by audiences. In an industrial context, this acceptability becomes even more critical. While individual artists may attempt to introduce innovation or peculiarity in their work, these efforts are often constrained by market logic. Adorno (1979) refers to this dynamic as the creation of "new effects which yet remain bound to the old schema." In other words, the illusion of novelty is preserved, but within rigid structural limits. Moreover, Adorno emphasizes that the creative process is not autonomous; rather, it is subject to industrial control. Cultural industry companies are interdependent—one company relies on others for promotion, distribution, or exhibition—making collaboration essential for bringing products to audiences and shaping how these products are perceived and consumed.

Expanding on Adorno's analysis, Hesmondhalgh (2013; 2016) highlights that the cultural industries are not solely concerned with production but also deeply involved in marketing and promotion. Business enterprises must find ways to "communicate" their cultural products to the public. With the rise of digital technologies, this process has become increasingly complex and pervasive. As Hesmondhalgh (2016) notes, "The development of the internet and the web, and the entry of IT firms into cultural markets, has certainly brought about considerable change in the everyday cultural experiences of billions of people." Marketing strategies now often employ affective techniques, using emotional storytelling and branding to create bonds between consumers and cultural products. This emotional engagement transforms symbolic goods into commodities with heightened appeal and market value (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

The rise of digital platforms and social media has further intensified the role of marketing in cultural industries. Hesmondhalgh (2016) notes that platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become indispensable for cultural producers, not just for promotion, but for cultivating affective engagement and participatory culture. In the case of these Indonesian films, social media campaigns often include teaser trailers, actor interviews, and interactive content that encourage users to share, comment, and emotionally invest. This user interaction serves as unpaid promotion and increases the films' visibility through digital word-of-mouth. Social media also allows for more targeted marketing, especially toward young people who may relate to the issues portrayed. Thus,

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emotional narratives around mental health are not only embedded in the films themselves but are also strategically extended into the marketing apparatus.

D. Star Studies

The creative industry is inextricably linked to the concept of stardom. Actors and actresses serve functions that go far beyond their roles within a film; they act as powerful marketing tools that attract audiences and shape expectations about a movie. According to Dyer (1979), this influence arises because stars function as cultural texts—complex images constructed by the entertainment industry to serve both ideological and economic purposes. Dyer (1979) further explains that a star is not a singular entity but a product of a representational system that includes films, interviews, advertisements, social media appearances, and gossip columns, all of which contribute to the ongoing construction of the star image.

This image is carefully crafted and consistently circulated, creating a persona that audiences recognize and emotionally invest in. For example, a star may be promoted as "relatable," "troubled," or "inspiring"—images that are often aligned with public tastes or cultural values at a given time. Importantly, Dyer (1979) notes that stars function as commodities. They are used by film producers and marketers as a way to reduce financial risk and guarantee audience interest. A well-known actor can attract viewers to a film, boost its promotional reach, and increase its chances of commercial success, regardless of the film's originality or quality. Thus, star power is central to

the political economy of media—a tool of capital investment and return.

Celebrity culture as Dyer (1979) points out, plays a crucial role in shaping both audience expectation and marketing strategy. These films often feature young, popular actors who already have significant social media followings and fan bases. Their involvement not only adds emotional depth to the narrative (especially when mental health themes are explored), but also becomes a part of the film's promotional discourse. The actors' real-life personas—whether seen as vulnerable, strong, or misunderstood—are often aligned with their roles, creating a blurring of image and character that deepens audience engagement. For example, if an actor has publicly discussed mental health struggles or is perceived as a sensitive, introspective figure, casting them in a film about trauma or depression adds a layer of authenticity and relatability. Fans are then more likely to feel connected to the story and share the film through word-of-mouth or social media. This demonstrates what Dyer (1979) calls the intertextual nature of star images—they don't just exist in films but across media platforms, contributing to a film's emotional appeal and economic reach.

Despite this commercial success and widespread visibility, the ways in which mental health functions within the narrative formula of these films and how this contributes to their marketability remain underexplored. Existing scholarship on Indonesian cinema has focused primarily on political, historical, or gender perspectives (Sen,1994; Haryanto, 2006; Paramaditha, 2014), leaving a gap in the study of genre formula, affective appeal, and

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commercialization strategies within the context of mental health representation. This research seeks to address that gap by investigating two key questions: *1) How is mental health used as an emerging emotional feature in the three selected Sinemaku Pictures films? 2) How does the strategic use of mental health themes contribute to the commercial success of these films?*

To answer the first question, this study applies intrinsic analysis by closely examining the narrative elements of the selected films, including character development, dialogue, and visual structure. Drawing on genre theory particularly the approaches of John G. Cawelti, Thomas Schatz, and Theodor Adorno's notion of standardization, this analysis explores how mental health functions as a recurring emotional formula within the conventions of romance and melodrama. These theoretical perspectives help reveal how recurring patterns and character dynamics are used to evoke emotional engagement and reflect recurring tropes in contemporary storytelling around psychological and emotional struggles.

To address the second question, the study employs extrinsic analysis through David Hesmondhalgh's political economy of media and Richard Dyer's star studies to examine how mental health themes are transformed into promotional strategies. By analyzing marketing tactics, digital engagement, and celebrity driven outreach, this analysis investigates how emotional narratives are packaged and circulated to build audience connection and drive commercial outcomes. Mental health thus emerges not only as a key narrative element but also as a strategic tool for audience outreach and industry profit.

Ultimately, this study aims to show how mental health issue in Indonesian youth dramas functions as both an emotional formula and a commercial device. By examining these films through both intrinsic and extrinsic perspectives, the research provides insight into how affective storytelling intersects with cultural discourse and market strategies in contemporary Indonesian cinema.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach using textual analysis to examine how mental health is constructed both narratively and commercially in contemporary Indonesian cinema. The analysis focuses on three films produced by Sinemaku Pictures: *Kukira Kau Rumah* (2021), *Ketika Berhenti di Sini* (2023), and *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis* (2024). These films are selected due to their shared narrative structures, thematic emphasis on mental health, and notable presence within digital and popular culture discourses.

The research is structured around two analytical dimensions: intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic analysis investigates how mental health is constructed within the films through narrative elements such as characterization, dialogue, and emotional structure. It focuses on the portrayal of emotionally vulnerable protagonists who rely on savior figures and express psychological distress through passive behavior and heightened melodrama. This approach draws on Cawelti's (1976) theory of genre formulas, which interprets recurring patterns as

cultural tools that evoke familiar emotional responses. Additionally, Adorno's concept of the culture industry informs the reading of these elements as standardized narratives shaped for mass appeal, where mental health becomes part of a commodified emotional spectacle.

The extrinsic analysis explores the commercial strategies that support and reinforce the films' narratives. Drawing on the political economy of media (Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Schatz, 1981), this analysis examines how market structures, institutional practices, and media platforms shape the production, promotion, and distribution of these films. Specific focus is given to the use of social media, influencer marketing, and celebrity branding as tools for commercial engagement. Informed by Richard Dyer's theory of star studies, the role of actress-producer Prilly Latuconsina is analyzed as a central figure whose public persona enhances both the films' visibility and emotional resonance with audiences. Paratextual materials—such as Instagram campaigns, YouTube interviews, and promotional content—are also examined to understand how mental health is strategically framed for market consumption and audience connection.

Data sources for this research include: (1) Primary data: The three selected films, which were viewed multiple times to code narrative, visual, and character elements. Marketing and promotional content were also collected from verified social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube). Online content and audience reception: Public responses, testimonials, and influencer

endorsements featured in promotional materials. (2) Secondary sources: Scholarly literature on genre theory and formula studies (Cawelti, 1976; Adorno, 1979; Schatz, 1981), Indonesian media and cultural production (Sen, 1994; Heryanto, 2008), and film marketing and star theory (Dyer, 1998; Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The three films portray young female protagonists from dysfunctional families, often lacking a strong father figure and supported by passive mothers. These characters are emotionally stagnant and portrayed as passive, with personal growth sparked not by their own agency but through the arrival of male co-stars who act as emotional saviors. Dialogue and narrative reinforce this helplessness, presenting change as incidental rather than intentional, reflecting intergenerational emotional passivity.

Externally, the films leverage strong digital engagement. Prilly Latuconsina's vast social media influence is used to share emotional audience reactions, boosting visibility. YouTube and Instagram promotions feature viral content with unrelated celebrities, while school visits and public events with influencers and psychologists deepen audience connection and broaden outreach.

A. Intrinsic Elements
1. Mental Health as a Narrative Tool to Intensify Character Complexity

Across all three films, mental health functions as a narrative device to deepen character complexity, particularly in the portrayal of young female protagonists. These

characters; Niskala (*Kukira Kau Rumah*), Dita (*Ketika Berhenti di Sini*), and Tari (*Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis*) are constructed as emotionally overwhelmed and passive individuals emerging from dysfunctional family environments. Each character exhibits signs of psychological distress: Niskala is portrayed as struggling with bipolar disorder, Dita grapples with unresolved grief, and Tari suffers from emotional suppression linked to her people-pleasing tendencies.

In *Kukira Kau Rumah*, Niskala's mental condition is marked by sudden bursts of anger triggered by auditory hallucinations, such as buzzing sounds in her ears. These episodes position her as lacking control over herself, necessitating constant care and supervision from family and friends. When these symptoms emerge, the character is portrayed as helpless and emotionally volatile. Her reactions to others' attempt to help are consistently negative, as seen in her confrontational lines which reinforce her inner turmoil and the emotional distance between her and her caregivers:

"Apa lo? Lo nggak pernah ngerti apa yang gue rasain. Lo sama aja."
"Apa mah apa? Mamah nggak pernah ngerti apa yang Kala rasain. Mama cuma nyuruh Kala minum obat." (45:55)
"Kenapa papa nggak pernah bangga punya Niskala? Kenapa papa cuma bisa ngurung Niskala di rumah?"

("What do you want? You never understand what I feel. You're just the same."

"What, Mom? You never understand what Kala feels. You just keep telling Kala to take the meds."

"Why has Dad never been proud of having Niskala? Why does he only know how to lock Niskala up at home?")

This sense of helplessness is also prominent in *Ketika Berhenti di Sini*. The protagonist, Dita, is haunted by compounded trauma—first from her father's death and then from the sudden loss of her boyfriend, Ed. The film opens with a phone call informing her of Ed's death, setting the tone for a narrative shaped entirely by grief. Dita's inability to confront her past is illustrated through her refusal to visit her father's grave and her aversion to discussing him. When explaining her relationship with her father, she self-identifies as a burden which emphasizes her internalized guilt and emotional fragility, both of which contribute to the complexity of her character:

"Aku tuh cuma beban sebenarnya buat dia. Kamu tuh nggak ngerti rasanya kehilangan orang." (71:30)

("I was just a burden to him, really. You don't understand what it feels like to lose someone.")

In *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis*, Tari is portrayed as a self-effacing figure who suppresses her emotions in favor of fulfilling the demands of her family and workplace. Her passive demeanor allows both her father and coworkers to exploit her emotionally and professionally. Her father communicates with her through aggression, while her colleagues routinely assign her their tasks. Tari's self-perception as a "yes-man"

reflects her internal conflict and the toll of chronic emotional labor.

A common thread among these characters is their upbringing in dysfunctional families. All three protagonists are fatherless in different ways: the father figure is either dead, emotionally absent, or portrayed as abusive. In *Kukira Kau Rumah (2021)* and *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis (2024)*, the fathers are depicted as angry and controlling, often exercising verbal or emotional violence toward their daughters. In *Ketika Berhenti di Sini (2023)*, the father is deceased and only appears briefly in a flashback, offering no substantial emotional support. The mothers, meanwhile, are passive and ineffective in mitigating familial dysfunction, often tolerating or ignoring the harmful behavior of the fathers.

This emotional background significantly impacts the dynamics of romantic relationships in the films, aligning with Heider's (1991) observation that Indonesian romance narratives often depict love relationships as being strained by familial and societal pressures. In *Kukira Kau Rumah* (2021) and *Ketika Berhenti di Sini (2023)*, the female protagonists' unresolved trauma and emotional instability become obstacles in their romantic journeys. Meanwhile, in *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis (2024)*, Tari's mental health struggles amplify her position as a 'victim figure,' a recurring motif in Indonesian cinema. As Setijadi-Dunn (2010) notes, the victimized woman is a popular formula in the industry, and here, Tari's victimhood—manifested through paternal violence and a lack of workplace empathy—intensifies

audience identification with her internal suffering.

The portrayal of mental health in these characters also aligns with the emotional framework of melodrama, evoking audience empathy through heightened vulnerability and suffering (Elsaesser, 1991). As Cawelti (1976) notes, both melodrama and romance rely on emotional excess that test the characters' resilience. While the mental health theme may appear to offer a fresh angle, its function remains consistent with familiar tropes: female characters enduring emotional turmoil, familial trauma, and personal loss. In this sense, mental health operates as a contemporary variation within established genre patterns—what Adorno (1979) refers to as "new effects which yet remain bound to the old schema." Rather than disrupting the conventional formula, mental health reinforces it through updated emotional cues that resonate with modern audiences while preserving the foundational structures of character suffering and victimhood common in Indonesian popular cinema.

2. Mental Health as a Catalyst for Emotional Spectacle and Dramatic Tension

As established in the character analysis, all three films depict female protagonists emerging from dysfunctional families. The absence of a strong paternal figure, coupled with the emotional passivity of the mother, creates what Thompson (2010) identifies as a psychological void. This emotional emptiness becomes a fertile ground for the entrance of male co-stars, who function as savior figures—offering

emotional support, structure, and symbolic rescue. Although *Kukira Kau Rumah* (2021) and *Ketika Berhenti di Sini* (2023) are framed as romance, and *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis* (2024) leans toward drama, each features a male character who intervenes to help resolve the protagonist's emotional turmoil and identity crisis.

This savior motif significantly shapes the narrative structure. Cawelti (1976) argues that the romance formula is structured around the development of a love relationship, where love is constructed as a transformative force that ultimately leads to resolution or triumph. Within this framework, the female protagonists' mental health struggles become narrative spectacles—emotional roadblocks that must be overcome for the romantic relationship to flourish. In *Kukira Kau Rumah*, Niskala's life is depicted as 'changed' after meeting Pram, who helps her discover her talent as a singer and encourages her to channel emotional instability into musical expression. Similarly, in *Ketika Berhenti di Sini*, Ifan challenges Dita to let go of her emotional dependence on the augmented reality version of her deceased boyfriend, reminding her:

"Ed itu cuma program. Ed itu nggak bisa bereaksi karena dia nggak punya perasaan. Ed itu hidup cuma ada di pikiran elu." (81.50).

("Ed is just a program. He can't respond because he doesn't have feelings. Ed only exists in your mind.")

These instances reflect the protagonists' inability to manage their psychological imbalance independently. They are portrayed as lacking agency and internal clarity, requiring external guidance, usually from the male figure to navigate their emotional instability. This aligns with Heider's (1991) observation that Indonesian romantic narratives are primarily driven by emotion rather than logic. The female characters are not portrayed as rational agents capable of resolving their inner conflict; instead, their emotionality is amplified to serve the dramatic intensity of the narrative. This emotional spectacle is further reinforced through repetitive visual motifs, such as prolonged scenes of the protagonists crying alone or isolating themselves in private spaces.

Female protagonists' passivity is most clearly evident in *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis*, where Baskara, the male co-star, becomes the one who teaches Tari to assert herself against exploitative coworkers. Her eventual empowerment is thus framed not as an internal evolution but as a result of emotional guidance from an external figure. This lack of narrative autonomy is a deliberate melodramatic device that places the protagonist within a cycle of suffering—one that can only be interrupted through another's intervention (Williams, 1998). Within this structure, mental health is not treated as a subject of psychological depth or realism; rather, it becomes what Altman (1999) terms a "generic catalyst"; a symbolic feature used to heighten dramatic tension and evoke emotional audience engagement. Though it may appear to signal greater psychological complexity, it ultimately adheres to established genre conventions, using emotional distress as a familiar narrative

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mechanism that resonates with viewers while maintaining formulaic integrity.

B. Extrinsic Elements
1. Promotion and Digital Engagement: Emotional Capital and Commercial Strategy

Mental health discussions in the three films; *Kukira Kau Rumah (2021)*, *Ketika Berhenti di Sini (2023)*, and *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis (2024)* are not confined to their intrinsic narratives but are strategically extended into their marketing approaches. Promotion plays a crucial role in influencing the commercial success of these movies, particularly through digital platforms like Instagram and YouTube. These platforms serve not only as promotional tools but also as emotional bridges that connect films with their target audience. Through curated content, these platforms shape the audience's perception, inviting them to engage emotionally even before watching the films.

One of the most significant promotional assets is the celebrity status of Prilly Latuconsina, who serves both as the producer and the main actress in all three films. Her dual role amplifies her visibility and control over promotional narratives. As of 2025, she ranks among the top three most-followed Indonesian public figures on Instagram, alongside Raffi Ahmad-Nagita Slavina and Ayu Tingting, with over 56 million followers. This immense social media reach becomes a powerful marketing channel, as Prilly functions not merely as an actor but as a communicative text herself—a commodity, as Richard Dyer (1979) posits in his *Stars* theory. Her persona is instrumental in shaping the public's reception of the film, as her identity and visibility are leveraged to generate trust, curiosity, and emotional engagement.

Prilly frequently posts audience testimonials and influencers' reactions, blurring the boundaries between star, audience, and promotional media. On Instagram, several reels highlight emotional responses from influencers and general viewers. For example, Keanu AGL, a prominent content creator, is featured in a reel expressing his emotional overwhelm after watching *Kukira Kau Rumah*, saying, "Recommended banget, aku bingung karena masih overwhelmed gitu."/("Highly recommended, I am confused because I am still feeling overwhelmed.") Other viewers also shared their reactions, such as @sirir.auliyah18, who wrote, *"Nggak tau mau ngomong apa, masih kerasa nyeseknya sampe sekarang. Teriakan Niskala masih terngiang-ngiang banget,"*/ ("I don't know what to say, the pain still lingers even now. Niskala's screams are still echoing in my head.") and @alealee, who commented, *"Filmnya bagus banget inimah dibikin nangis sampe akhir apalagi."*/(The film is really good, it seriously had me crying all the way to the end.) These expressions of emotional vulnerability serve as informal endorsements, strengthening the film's emotional appeal and broadening its commercial reach.

Emotional resonance is also heightened through strategic visual storytelling in other reels. In *Ketika Berhenti di Sini (2023)*, which centers on the theme of grief and the pain of losing a loved one, one promotional reel features a graveyard scene accompanied by a melancholic soundtrack, visually reinforcing the

film's somber tone and emotional depth. Such curated content invites viewers to engage affectively even before watching the film, priming them for a shared emotional journey.

This emotional engagement is also visualized through reels showing audiences crying after watching the films. In promotions for *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis (2024)*, several Instagram reels document audience members before and after watching the movie. The post-viewing clips often show viewers with tear-streaked and swollen faces, accompanied by captions such as *"Bolehkah sekali saja kumenangis 1000/10."* These curated audience reactions create a virtual echo chamber of emotional validation, reinforcing the film's emotional capital and subtly pressuring potential viewers to partake in the collective experience.

The strategic use of celebrity status also extends beyond Instagram into YouTube, where the emotional capital of public figures is further mobilized to support the films' promotional campaigns. Sinemaku Pictures released exclusive YouTube content not only featuring the main cast but also involving unrelated celebrities such as Raffi Ahmad and Fadil Jaidi. These appearances, particularly in emotionally themed segments where celebrities recount personal experiences of grief or loss, attracted millions of views. For instance, in the *Ketika Berhenti di Sini* (2023) YouTube campaign, Raffi Ahmad shares his reflections on losing a loved one and discusses emotional resilience. Similarly, in promotional content for *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis (2024)*, Fadil Jaidi speaks about the fragility of familial bonds. These celebrity

features personalize the films' themes and extend their reach to broader audiences, tapping into the fan bases of these influential figures. In doing so, the films turn stardom into an emotional channel, amplifying viewer engagement and enhancing commercial visibility.

This strategic commodification of emotion aligns with Hesmondhalgh's (2013) political economy of media, where emotional content becomes a resource to drive engagement, virality, and ultimately revenue. The promotional content is not only emotionally charged but deliberately curated to construct affective resonance, transforming mental health discourse into marketable assets. As Illouz (2007) suggests, emotional experiences become a form of social capital, capable of generating public engagement, social validation, and consumer investment.

Casting celebrities and influencers to display their emotional vulnerability serves as a potent tactic in this emotional economy. When celebrities visibly engage with mental health themes, it reinforces the films' emotional credibility and authenticity. This "emotional endorsement" goes beyond typical marketing; it mobilizes parasocial relationships and fan loyalty to convert emotion into financial success. Mental health, thus, is not merely a narrative theme within the film but it is also externalized, mediatized, and monetized, functioning simultaneously as a social concern and a commercial strategy.

2. Public Events and School Outreach: Building Audience Empathy Through Real-life Parallels

The promotional efforts for these films extended beyond digital platforms, manifesting in direct public engagement through school visits and community events that echoed the emotional themes of the movies. These initiatives were not merely marketing activities but were designed to mirror the psychological struggles depicted in the narratives, thus reinforcing audience empathy through real-life parallels. For instance, in *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis (2024)*, the production team conducted school outreach programs at SMAN 6 Jakarta and SMA 7 Tangerang on October 9, 2024. During these visits, the cast and crew not only introduced the film but also initiated discussions on toxic relationships and the importance of emotional support systems—two major themes in the movie. These events encouraged students to reflect on their own emotional lives, connecting their personal realities to the film's storyline.

A similar effort was evident in the collaboration between the film's cast and Voluntrip, a volunteer program initiated by *Kitabisa*, which hosted a sharing session on November 17, 2024. This session allowed young participants to hear directly from the actors about the emotional challenges their characters faced, and how those challenges reflected broader societal issues. These interactions created a shared emotional space where fiction and reality intersected, making mental health conversations more relatable and grounded. Such events allowed the audience to see beyond the screen, recognizing the emotional authenticity of the characters as extensions of real human experiences, not just scripted performances.

One of the most striking examples of this emotional strategy was a large-scale public event titled *Melepas Luka Bersama – Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis*, held in Jakarta on October 9, 2024. The event, which attracted over 6,000 attendees, featured psychologist-influencer Aziema Rais alongside members of the film's cast. Framed as a collective healing session, the event invited participants to confront their own emotional wounds while witnessing celebrities share personal reflections on emotional fragility and resilience. Aziema Rais guided the audience through psychological insights into toxic relationships and recovery, effectively transforming the film's message into a therapeutic experience. This immersive event offered a communal catharsis, allowing the audience to process emotional pain alongside the figures they admire. Here, the notion of catharsis evolved from a private reaction to a shared experience—a form of mass emotional release facilitated by both star presence and psychological expertise.

These events exemplify what Dyer (1979) calls the intertextuality of star images—celebrities are not confined to fictional roles but live across platforms and public spaces. Their emotional identities are shaped not only by the characters they portray but also by how they engage with real audiences. When these stars appear in therapeutic or educational settings, their public personas acquire additional emotional layers, fostering a deeper bond with viewers. The audience does not merely admire them as performers but connects with them as emotionally accessible figures, enhancing empathy and trust.

Such promotional strategies blur the line between fiction and lived experience, offering emotional narratives that extend beyond the cinematic frame. As Cawelti (1976) emphasizes, the power of popular formulas lies not only in repetition but in their capacity to adapt to and resonate with contemporary cultural concerns. In this context, the public events and outreach programs function as emotional amplifiers that reinforce the films' themes while embedding them in everyday social discourse. By addressing mental health in educational and therapeutic environments, the filmmakers position the audience not just as passive consumers, but as participants in a shared emotional journey. These real-life parallels cultivate a sense of empathy that is both personal and collective—an emotional bond that strengthens audience investment and, ultimately, contributes to the films' cultural and commercial success.

CONCLUSION

Mental health is strategically used in *Kukira Kau Rumah*, *Ketika Berhenti di Sini*, and *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis* as an emotionally compelling yet commercially driven narrative element. Intrinsically, these films employ formulaic conventions centered on female protagonists whose emotional struggles are intertwined with romantic conflicts and ultimately resolved through savior figures, reinforcing both melodramatic and romantic appeal while limiting character agency. Rather than offering nuanced psychological depth, mental health is framed to evoke empathy within familiar genre patterns. Extrinsically, promotional strategies—such as social media campaigns, school outreach and public events—intensify this appeal by commodifying mental health and leveraging celebrity influence, particularly through Prilly Latuconsina, to enhance market credibility. This fusion of emotional spectacle, romantic tension, and marketing reflects how mental health is not only narratively stylized but also monetized in contemporary Indonesian cinema.

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