

Case Study of UPN Students as NIKI Patients: Music as an Identity Mirror, Escape Room, and Expression Container in the Digital Age

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Abstract

In the digital era, music has transformed into more than just entertainment. It has become a mirror of identity, a space for emotional escape, and a means of self-expression, especially for the younger generation. This research examines the role of the music of NIKI, a globally popular Indonesian singer, in the lives of students at Universitas Pembangunan Nasional (UPN) "Veteran" Jakarta. Using a qualitative approach and in-depth interview method, this study explores how NIKI's songs are used by students as a medium to understand themselves, deal with academic and personal pressures, and express feelings on social media. Results show that NIKI's poetic and thematic lyrics form a strong emotional attachment for some students, creating the phenomenon of "NIKI patients" as a form of collective affective relations in the digital space. Although not all use music as a primary coping tool, NIKI music still plays an important role in students' emotional dynamics and digital communication. This study highlights the potential of music as a medium of emotional communication and its contribution to identity formation among the digital generation.

Keywords: music, NIKI, identity, emotional escape, self-expression, university students, digital era

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, music has undergone a significant transformation in function, going beyond its traditional role as a means of entertainment alone. Today, music is an important medium for identity construction, an emotional escape, and a means of self-expression that is both personal and collective. This phenomenon is particularly evident among students, who as part of the digital generation live amidst fast-paced information flows, social media algorithms, and ever-evolving global music trends. Platforms such as Spotify, Instagram, and TikTok not only influence the way students consume music, but also how they use music to define themselves, manage their emotions, and interact with online communities (Saarikallio, 2019). This transformation makes music a central element in the social and cultural dynamics of the digital age, which is relevant for further study.

One clear example of this phenomenon is the emergence of the term "NIKI patient" among Indonesian students, including students of Universitas Pembangunan Nasional (UPN) "Veteran" Jakarta. This term refers to individuals who feel emotionally connected to the songs of NIKI, an internationally successful Indonesian singer with poetic, narrative and melancholic lyrics. NIKI's songs, which often address themes of love, loss, family relationships and self-discovery, serve as a mirror for listeners to reflect on their personal experiences. Widia's study (2023) shows that music consumption in digital spaces shapes identity through emotional attachment and social interaction, while Arifin and Rahmadani (2023) reveal that music acts as an effective escape from academic pressures, such as coursework or exams, as well as personal issues such as interpersonal conflicts. Activities students, such as sharing lyric excerpts on social media, creating personalised playlists, or discussing in online communities, reflect the communication practices of affective that combine individual expression with social connection.

This research seeks to answer several questions, such as: how does music, especially works from NIKI, play a role in shaping the identity of UPN "Veteran" Jakarta students in the digital era? In what situations does NIKI's music become an emotional escape when students face academic pressure or personal problems? How do students use NIKI music to express their feelings, both in private and when sharing on social media? What does the "NIKI patient" phenomenon mean in terms of how students communicate emotionally?

The purpose of this study is to understand more deeply the role of NIKI music in the lives of students, especially in terms of shaping self-identity, being an emotional escape, and as a medium for expressing feelings. In addition, this research also wants to see how the phenomenon of "NIKI patients" affects the way students communicate and interact in the university digital world, especially in the field of communication and information science. This article is useful in theory and practice. In theory, this article adds insight into communication and information science by looking at music as a means of emotional communication. This research can also complement previous studies such as those conducted by Widia (2023) on digital identity, and Arifin and Rahmadani (2023) on the link between music and mental health.

Practically, this article can be an input for students to be more aware that music can help manage emotions and express themselves. This research can also help campus authorities, such as lecturers or counsellors, to create programmes that are closer to students. For NIKI fans, this article can help them understand more about why NIKI's music means so much to so many people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on the role of music in identity formation and emotional escape have been the focus of various research, especially in the context of the younger generation in the digital age. Music is no longer merely passive entertainment, but also a tool for self-representation and emotional regulation.

North and Hargreaves (1999) emphasize that music plays a significant role in the formation of adolescent identity. Through the choice of specific genres or artists, listeners convey who they are and how they want to be perceived by others. This is relevant to the phenomenon of "NIKI patients," where students use NIKI music as a mirror of their personal experiences.

Additionally, music is used as a mechanism to escape psychological pressure. Lonsdale and North (2011) note that music can function as a form of self-care, helping listeners regulate emotions, reduce stress, and create a safe psychological space. This function is evident in how students use NIKI songs when facing academic pressure or personal issues.

In the digital space, music also reinforces collective identity expression. Barker and Jane (2016) explain that music consumption on social media fosters the formation of cohesive and expressive fan communities. Through activities such as sharing lyrics, creating personal playlists, or discussing in online forums, students not only express themselves but also build emotional solidarity among listeners.

Greenberg et al. (2016) add that preferences for certain musical characteristics are closely linked to personality types. Music with introspective lyrics and touching melodies, such as NIKI's work, tends to be favored by individuals with reflective and empathetic tendencies.

Finally, Krause, North, and Hewitt (2014) demonstrate that music choices in daily life are often contextual and influenced by emotional states. This reinforces the finding that students choose to listen to NIKI in specific situations such as when feeling sad, nostalgic, or wanting to be alone.

Based on these studies, it can be concluded that music plays a multidimensional role in students' lives, particularly as a medium for self-reflection, emotional regulation, and the formation of personal and social identity in the digital age. This research expands this perspective through a

case study of students at UPN "Veteran" Jakarta in understanding the phenomenon of emotional attachment to NIKI's music.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through an online survey using Google Forms. This approach was chosen to explore students' subjective experiences and personal meanings in making music, especially NIKI's works, part of their identity, emotional escape, and means of expression in the digital age.

The survey was designed in the form of a questionnaire containing open-ended and closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions were used to obtain a general picture of the level of student engagement with NIKI's music, such as listening frequency and related digital activities. Meanwhile, open-ended questions were aimed at capturing personal narratives, emotional experiences, and how students express themselves through music.

The use of surveys in a qualitative approach is intended to give respondents space to reflectively and freely share their experiences. This technique aligns with Sugiyono's (2012) perspective, who states that qualitative methods are not limited to direct interviews but can also utilize written instruments if they can capture in-depth data. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, as explained by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), namely by identifying narrative patterns and meanings that emerged from the respondents' answers.

The participant selection technique was conducted using **purposive sampling**, namely by determining respondents who met the research criteria. The criteria included:

Active student of UPN "Veteran" Jakarta.

Actively listen to NIKI's music and relate the songs to personal emotional states.

Identify yourself as part of a community or individual who relates to the themes in NIKI songs.

Engage or have engaged in digital activities related to NIKI music, such as making posts, comments, or discussions on social media.

Total informant The number of informants was determined based on the principle of **data saturation**, which is a process in which the data obtained begins to show repetitive patterns and no longer provides significant new information.

The semi-structured interview guidelines were designed with three main categories, namely:

1. Identity and Relationship with Music

- a) When did you start listening to NIKI music?
- b) Why do you relate to his music?
- c) Is there a particular song that you think reflects your personal experience?

2. Music as Space Emotional Escape

- a) Under what conditions do you usually listen to NIKI songs?
- b) Does the music help you deal with academic or personal pressures?

3. Self-Expression in the Digital Age

- a) Is have you ever expressed feelings or experiences via social media related to a NIKI song?
- b) How big a role does social media play in strengthening your sense of connection with other NIKI fan communities?

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Timestamp	Nama	Jenis Kelamin	Sejak kapan Anda mulai mendengarkan lagu	Apa alasan Anda merasa relate dengan musik	Adakah lagu tertentu yang menurut Anda menjadi	Dalam kondisi sepe
6/10/2025 15:57:25	adam nusantara	Laki-Laki	Lebih dari 3 tahun	Gaya musiknya unik dan enak didengar	Beberapa lagu terasa dekat dengan pengalaman : Saat sedang santai	
6/3/2025 14:39:28	Adrian	Laki-Laki	1-3 tahun terakhir	Suasana lagunya sesuai dengan mood saya	Ya, ada satu lagu yang sangat menggambarkan saya : Saat sedang santai	
6/3/2025 16:01:33	Aurelia Putri Dyfa Khan	Perempuan	Lebih dari 3 tahun	Liriknya menggambarkan perasaan saya	Beberapa lagu terasa dekat dengan pengalaman : Saat merasa sedih	
6/9/2025 8:13:23	dinda	Perempuan	Kurang dari 1 tahun terakhir	Gaya musiknya unik dan enak didengar	Beberapa lagu terasa dekat dengan pengalaman : Saat merasa sedih	
6/3/2025 14:17:58	repan	Laki-Laki	Kurang dari 1 tahun terakhir	Gaya musiknya unik dan enak didengar	Beberapa lagu terasa dekat dengan pengalaman : Saat merasa sedih	
6/2/2025 11:45:36	Saffana	Perempuan	Lebih dari 3 tahun	Liriknya menggambarkan perasaan saya	Beberapa lagu terasa dekat dengan pengalaman : Saat mengerjakan	
6/9/2025 5:55:57	salu	Perempuan	Kurang dari 1 tahun terakhir	Suasana lagunya sesuai dengan mood saya	Ya, ada satu lagu yang sangat menggambarkan saya : Saat sedang santai	
6/3/2025 15:20:07	Talita	Perempuan	1-3 tahun terakhir	Liriknya menggambarkan perasaan saya	Beberapa lagu terasa dekat dengan pengalaman : Saat merasa sedih	
6/3/2025 18:49:54	Widiannefa	Laki-Laki	Lebih dari 3 tahun	Suasana lagunya sesuai dengan mood saya	Beberapa lagu terasa dekat dengan pengalaman : Saat merasa sedih	
6/12/2025 22:01:36	Shazia Syahada	Perempuan	Lebih dari 3 tahun	Suasana lagunya sesuai dengan mood saya	Beberapa lagu terasa dekat dengan pengalaman : Saat sedang santai	

Figure 1. Responses

Source: (Google form)

Based on the survey results of NIKI's music listeners, it appears that the majority of respondents have known and listened to his music for more than one year, and most even claimed to have followed NIKI's work for more than the last three years. This shows that

There is a long-term attachment that is most likely influenced by the consistency of musical quality and thematic relevance in his works. When asked why they relate to NIKI's music, most said that the lyrics are able to describe how they feel, while others said that the lyrics are able to describe how they feel. Highlighting the uniqueness and enjoyment of his musical style. This indicates that the strength of NIKI's music lies in the combination of the emotional depth and unique lyrics of his works that are easily absorbed by listeners.

Most respondents stated that there were certain songs from NIKI that felt close to their personal experiences, both in general and specifically. These songs are listened to especially when they are relaxing, resting, or in certain emotional states such as feeling sad or upset. Some students also mentioned that they listen to NIKI songs while doing assignments or studying, which shows the flexibility of the music's function in daily life. Regarding the role of this music in dealing with academic or personal pressures, respondents' responses varied, some felt very helpful, some only sometimes, and some did not really feel the influence. This shows that although NIKI songs can be a means or tool used for some people, the effect is highly dependent on the context and emotional closeness of each individual.

In terms of self-expression on social media, some students admitted to having expressed their feelings or experiences that connected with NIKI songs, although others tend to be passive or do not use social media for that purpose. The role of social media in strengthening the sense of connection with the fan community is also quite significant for some people, they occasionally participate in discussions or follow NIKI-related content, although there are also those who prefer to enjoy the music personally without the need for community involvement. In the context of self-identity formation, some respondents felt that NIKI's songs had an influence, although some did not feel that way. This shows that music can be an aspect of identity formation, especially during periods of self-discovery such as adolescence or early adulthood.

Lastly, although not all of them use NIKI music as their main "escape" from the pressures of campus life, some respondents admitted to doing so depending on the situation. Most still see this music as regular entertainment, but it still holds the possibility of being a space for emotional reflection. In the digital era, NIKI music is also used by some respondents as a medium to express themselves, either through stories, captions, or personal playlists, although some are not very active in this regard. The overall findings show that NIKI music is not only present as entertainment, but also as a medium that emotionally and socially plays a role in the life of the listener, with intensity and meaning that varies depending on the individual.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that NIKI's music plays a strong role in the lives of UPN "Veteran" Jakarta students, especially in helping them recognise themselves, manage their emotions, and express their feelings. NIKI's meaningful, poetic and emotional songs make many students feel represented by the lyrics, resulting in a deep emotional connection. This music is not only a friend when relaxing or studying, but also an escape when facing academic pressure and personal problems.

Although not all respondents used NIKI's music as a primary tool for coping or self-expression, many who recognised that the songs could give them a sense of purpose, tranquillity and a sense of comfort. Some students also utilise social media to express their feelings through lyric excerpts or playlists, although some prefer to enjoy it in private. This shows that NIKI music can be a flexible medium - both for self-reflection and as part of emotional communication in the digital space.

Overall, the "NIKI patient" phenomenon reflects how music can be a mirror of identity and a means of meaningful emotional connection for the younger generation, especially amidst the dynamics of campus life and the pressures of the digital age. Music is no longer just entertainment, but also a tool to understand and convey feelings that are difficult to express with ordinary words.

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