



Research Paper

Reducing Mental Health Stigma Through Narratives: A Narrative Paradigm Analysis of an Indonesian Digital Campaign

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Abstract

This study analyzes the role of narrative in digital campaigns as a strategy to reduce mental health stigma, using the Instagram account @intotheilightid as a case study. A qualitative approach with a narrative analysis method was employed, focusing on the two main elements of Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm: narrative coherence and narrative fidelity. Data were collected from @intotheilightid posts published between January 2024 and March 2025 containing educational, reflective, and collective-action content. The findings reveal that the narratives are structured coherently and consistently, and that their messages align with the lived experiences and values of young Indonesian audiences. These narratives not only deliver mental health information empathetically but also create a digital safe space that encourages open dialogue and emotional validation. Engagement indicators, namely the number of likes and the content of audience comments, suggest that the campaign messages succeeded in building public resonance. The study concludes that a narrative-based approach in social media campaigns is an effective and transformative communication strategy for dismantling the stigma that has long hindered mental health recovery efforts in Indonesia.

Keywords: Narrative Paradigm, Mental Health, Stigma, Digital Campaign, Social Media

1. Introduction

Indonesian culture has a considerable influence, both direct and indirect, on the formation of stigma toward mental health. Indonesian society still tends to hold negative views of mental health issues, which directly limits access to care and treatment for people living with mental disorders [1]. The misconception that equates all mental health problems with severe mental illness, locally referred to as ODGJ (*orang dengan gangguan jiwa*), creates strong social stigma [2]. This stigma appears in two forms: public stigma, namely discriminatory treatment by society toward



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individuals with mental disorders, and internal stigma, namely negative attitudes that develop within individuals as a result of the social pressure they experience [2], [3]. Eka Viora, Chair of the Indonesian Psychiatric Association (PDSKJI), stated that because of negative stigma, approximately 15.6 million Indonesians living with depression are prevented from obtaining appropriate prevention and help, as they feel afraid, ashamed, or worried about being judged as insane if they seek assistance [4].

The scale of unmet need is considerable. Indonesia's first national adolescent mental health survey found that about one in three adolescents aged 10–17 had experienced a mental health problem in the previous 12 months, yet only 2.6% of them had accessed mental health services [5]. Several challenges underlie this gap: limited public understanding of mental health information, low awareness of its importance, and persistent stigma, discrimination, and stereotypes toward mental disorders. As a result, many people living with mental health problems choose to remain silent and are reluctant to consult professionals [4], [6]. These conditions indicate that cultural influences that sustain stigma, low mental health literacy, and strong negative stereotypes are serious barriers to comprehensive treatment and recovery. In facing these challenges, social media has emerged as a promising alternative space for raising mental health issues, dismantling stigma, and building collective awareness through a more open, inclusive, and personal narrative-based approach.

Social media plays a strategic role in mental health advocacy by providing interactive spaces that encourage open discussion and the sharing of personal experiences [7]. It has strong potential as a means of public education because it can convey mental health information in a more accessible way and help reduce the stigma attached to it in society [8]. Through educational and empathetic digital campaigns, social media contributes to changing public perceptions of mental health and fosters a more open and inclusive environment [9], [10]. Social media is therefore not merely a communication channel but also an effective instrument of social transformation that supports mental health literacy and erodes stigma through humanistic and participatory narrative approaches.

Through visual content, personal narratives, and inclusive communication, social media can create more open and empathetic spaces for dialogue. The Instagram account @intothelightid is a concrete example of social media serving this function, as it consistently presents educational, recovery-narrative-based campaigns aimed at building collective awareness and encouraging healthy help-seeking behavior. Claretta *et al.* [11] found that @intothelightid guides the public to understand the importance of mental health awareness through narratives packaged as social media campaigns that invite and educate the public. Into The Light Indonesia is a youth-based community established in May 2013 that focuses on education, advocacy, and research on suicide prevention and mental health. Carrying the motto “Hapus Stigma, Peduli Sesama, Sayangi Jiwa” (Erase Stigma, Care for One Another, Cherish the Soul), the community upholds evidence-based approaches and human rights principles in all its activities. Driven by individuals of diverse identities, Into The Light Indonesia is inclusive and has collaborated with civil society organizations, local communities, universities, government ministries, and international institutions. Its Instagram account is actively used to raise mental health issues through educational campaigns and personal narratives that aim to reduce public stigma toward individuals with suicidal thoughts, experiences, or histories, while also encouraging help-seeking behavior and collective awareness of the importance of mental health in Indonesian society.

Narrative approaches in mental health campaigns, particularly recovery narratives, have proven effective in creating emotional connections between survivors and message recipients. A systematic review by Rennick-Egglestone *et al.* [12] showed that listening to or reading stories of

recovery from mental illness can deepen understanding, validate personal experiences, reduce stigma (including self-stigma), and increase hope. More broadly, narrative communication has been recognized as a powerful tool for health behavior change because stories can reduce counterarguing, reactance, and other forms of resistance to persuasive messages [13]. Narratives also offer particular benefits in online contexts, especially for individuals who experience social isolation or have limited access to peer support. This approach is therefore an important strategy for inclusive, empathy-based mental health advocacy.

Previous studies have examined the role of Instagram campaigns in building public awareness [11] and the influence of narrative-based YouTube content on audience attitudes toward mental health [4]. However, few studies have analyzed how the structural and value dimensions of campaign narratives, as formulated in Fisher's narrative paradigm, operate in Instagram-based mental health campaigns in Indonesia. This study addresses that gap. It is guided by three research questions: (1) what forms and characteristics of narrative are used in @intothelightid posts; (2) how narrative coherence and narrative fidelity are reflected in these narratives; and (3) how the narratives contribute to reducing mental health stigma in society. Through these three foci, this study analyzes the role of narrative communication as an effective strategy in social media-based mental health campaigns and evaluates its impact on public perception and understanding.

Mental Health and Stigma

Mental health is defined as a state of mental well-being that enables individuals to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to their community. Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders; it is an integral part of overall health and well-being [14]. Globally, mental health conditions are highly prevalent in every country. According to the World Health Organization [14], approximately one in seven people in the South-East Asia region, or around 13.2% of the population, live with a mental disorder, indicating a substantial mental health burden in the region. The report also highlights that mental disorders are a leading cause of years lived with disability (YLDs) in the region. Despite this high burden, most people with mental health conditions do not receive adequate care because of limited access to services, a shortage of professionals, and social stigma that discourages help-seeking.

Stigma refers to a social process in which individuals with certain characteristics are labeled negatively, ultimately leading to a loss of social status and discriminatory treatment by society (Goffman, 1963, as cited in [15]). Maya [15] explains that mental health stigma consists of two main forms: public stigma and self-stigma. Public stigma refers to the negative attitudes of society toward individuals with mental disorders, such as labeling, exclusion, or discrimination. Self-stigma arises when individuals with mental disorders internalize these negative views and begin to feel ashamed, unworthy, or afraid of being judged by those around them [3]. Although different, both forms of stigma strongly influence a person's tendency to seek professional psychological help; a systematic review confirmed that stigma has a small to moderate negative effect on help-seeking, with fear of disclosure among the most frequently reported barriers [6]. The Lancet Commission on ending stigma and discrimination in mental health further emphasizes that stigma can be more damaging than the condition itself, and identifies social contact, including personal testimonies from people with lived experience, as the most effective evidence-based intervention to reduce it [16].

Maya [15] further shows that in the Indonesian cultural context there is still a strong tendency to seek help through non-medical or informal channels, such as traditional healers (*dukun*) and religious leaders, to address mental health problems. This tendency reflects the influence of culture and traditional beliefs that reinforce stigma toward professional psychological services [1]. The behavior is found not only in rural areas but also in urban areas, indicating that cultural barriers to

help-seeking remain socially and geographically widespread. This pattern shows that cultural and social factors in Indonesia contribute to the slow acceptance of scientific and professional approaches to mental health.

Narrative Paradigm Theory

As described by Littlejohn *et al.* [17], the narrative paradigm developed by Walter Fisher starts from the view that human beings are essentially storytelling creatures who think, communicate, and understand the world through stories, a condition Fisher calls *homo narrans* [18]. In communication, stories are not merely tools for conveying information; they are the primary way people construct meaning, interpret experience, and decide on action. Stories about health and personal experience, for example, not only provide medical information but also help people understand their situation emotionally and socially and give direction to the actions they take.

Fisher argues that the power of a narrative lies not only in its plot but also in its ability to build trust and connection with the audience [18]. Two main elements determine the effectiveness of a narrative: narrative coherence and narrative fidelity. Narrative coherence refers to the extent to which a story appears logical, well structured, and internally consistent in its plot, characters, and the relationships between episodes. A coherent story allows the audience to follow its flow easily and understand its message. Narrative fidelity concerns the degree to which a story matches the values, experiences, and realities the audience believes in. When a story feels “real” or reflects truths of life that the audience can recognize, it is considered to have high fidelity. Both elements are essential for building narratives that are not only informative but also persuasive and emotionally moving, especially in mental health campaigns that seek to change social perspectives and attitudes. Experimental research supports this view: audiences who are “transported” into a story tend to adopt beliefs consistent with it and become less critical of its message [19].

The application of narrative theory to mental health communication rests on the power of stories to convey experience and build empathy. Narratives are used not only to inform but also to create emotional closeness between survivors of mental disorders and the wider public. Personal stories of struggle, recovery, and hope can achieve high narrative fidelity when audiences feel that the values and experiences in them correspond to their own reality, while narrative coherence emerges when the stories are logically and completely structured, making them easy to understand and believe. Narrative approaches in mental health campaigns, such as those used by @intothelightid on social media, can dismantle stigma in a subtler and more humane way. By identifying with characters in the stories, audiences become more open to new understanding, more inclusive, and more willing to support others or seek help without shame.

Using the narrative paradigm, Saputra and Cholifah [4] demonstrated that authentic and personal storytelling plays an important role in shaping public awareness of and attitudes toward mental health. The narratives in the YouTube vlog “Menjadi Manusia” not only provided information but also built emotional closeness and imaginative experiences that made audiences feel personally connected to the characters. This fostered positive attitudes, including greater confidence to seek professional help, maintain mental health, and resist the stigma that has long been a barrier.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach [20] with a narrative analysis method. The main advantage of narrative analysis is that it enables an in-depth exploration of individuals’ personal experiences as representations of broader social meanings, and it has been used to examine how online narratives shape public health communication [21]. Narratives can be examined in terms of

their content, their structure, and the purposes they serve for the audience, such as informing, engaging, persuading, and comforting [22]. This design was chosen to understand how the narratives constructed in the @intothelightid Instagram campaign contribute to reducing mental health stigma.

Research Object and Data Sources

The object of this study was Instagram content from @intothelightid containing personal stories, education, and calls for collective action related to mental health, published between January 2024 and March 2025. Posts were selected purposively based on the following criteria: (1) the post addresses a mental health issue; (2) the post contains a narrative structure that can be examined in terms of coherence and fidelity; and (3) the post displays audience responses in the form of likes and comments. From the posts that met these criteria, two collaborative posts were selected as representative cases and are analyzed in depth in this article.

Data Collection

Data were collected through documentation of posts in the form of captions, carousels, reels, and story highlights, together with the likes and comments attached to them. The primary data were supported by previous studies relevant to narrative theory and health communication.

Research Ethics

This study analyzed only publicly accessible Instagram content and involved no direct interaction with human participants. To protect the privacy of audience members, the usernames and profile photos of commenters were anonymized in the figures, and their comments are quoted without identifying information. The analysis was limited to content relevant to the research questions, and the accounts of the campaign organizers are named only because they are public institutional accounts.

Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis was based on Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm, focusing on its two main elements: narrative coherence and narrative fidelity [18]. Narrative coherence was analyzed through the consistency of story structure, the clarity of characters, and the narrative flow, whereas narrative fidelity was evaluated based on the correspondence between the meaning of the story and the values and experiences of the audience. Audience responses (number of likes and the content of comments) were used as supporting indicators of the resonance of the narratives. Through this approach, the study examines the extent to which the narratives developed by @intothelightid create emotional engagement and shift public perspectives on mental health from stigma toward openness and empathy.

3. Result and Discussion

Forms and Characteristics of the Narratives

The posts of @intothelightid display a distinctive and consistent narrative pattern in raising mental health issues. The narratives generally take the form of personal stories, including testimonies from survivors of mental disorders, emotional reflections, and collective invitations to care about mental health. These stories are packaged as long captions, informative carousels, or short videos (reels), with a narrative structure that includes an introduction to the situation, an emotional conflict or crisis, and a resolution in the form of self-acceptance or an invitation to seek help. In terms of characteristics, the narratives show a high level of narrative coherence, evident in their orderly plots, clear characters, and complete messages. Narrative fidelity is also strong because the issues raised are highly relevant to the lives of young Indonesians. The language is

empathetic, familiar, and non-judgmental, creating emotional closeness with the audience. The accompanying visuals are simple yet symbolically strong, such as expressive illustrations and legible typography. This combination of narrative and visual content makes @intothehighlightid a digital safe space that fosters awareness while dismantling the stigma surrounding mental health.

Narrative Analysis of the Backburner Relationship Post



Figure 1. Collaborative post on the backburner relationship phenomenon (2 February 2024)

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/C22HfxmxFla/>

The narrative in the collaborative post by @intothehighlightid and CIMSA (Center for Indonesian Medical Students' Activities) on the backburner relationship phenomenon contributes to reducing mental health stigma through a humanistic and relatable approach. Opening with a quotation from a popular song, the narrative invites the audience to reflect on the dynamics of modern relationships that are often emotionally unhealthy yet frequently normalized. Rather than assigning blame, the narrative asks the audience to reconsider whether it is worth sacrificing one's mental health to maintain an uncertain relationship. This reflective question serves as an entry point for discussing the psychological impact of relationships, a topic often considered taboo.

Structurally, the narrative follows an orderly sequence: it introduces the backburner concept through the song quotation, then presents a scientific explanation, research data, the impact on mental health, and finally a reflective invitation to the audience. The content is arranged logically and progressively, making the narrative easy to follow and coherent. Visuals and text complement each other to reinforce the message, and the carousel design maintains continuity between slides. Narrative fidelity is evident in the choice of a topic relevant to young people today, namely uncertain interpersonal relationships that affect psychological well-being. Audiences who are in an ambiguous relationship, or who have faced a similar dilemma, can see their own experience reflected in the narrative. The language is close to the audience's everyday speech (empathetic, non-patronizing, and emotionally touching), building a strong connection between the message and their personal values. The narrative as a whole not only educates but also encourages self-reflection and emotional validation, which lie at the core of narrative-based communication.

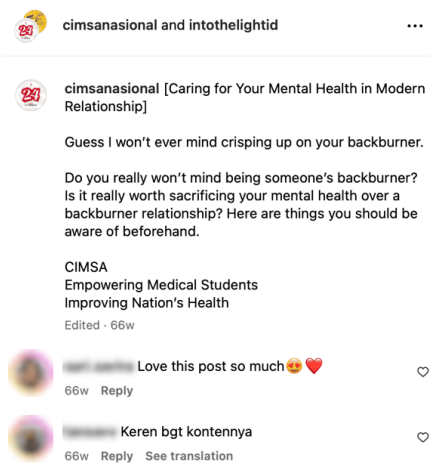


Figure 2. Audience responses to the collaborative post on the backburner relationship phenomenon (2 February 2024)

The strongly positive audience response, reflected in 1,293 likes and in appreciative comments such as “Love this post so much” and “Keren banget kontennya” (“Such great content”), indicates strong acceptance of and resonance with the issue raised. This shows that the narrative succeeded in touching the emotional experiences of the audience, validating their feelings, and creating a digital safe space that encourages awareness and reduces mental health stigma, particularly stigma related to interpersonal relationships.

Narrative Analysis of the World Mental Health Day Post



Figure 3. Collaborative post for World Mental Health Day (10 October 2024)

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DA7uUnNv67C/>

The narrative in the collaborative post by CISDI (Center for Indonesia's Strategic Development Initiatives), KPSI, and other partners raises the structural dimension of mental health, particularly the responsibility of the government and the workplace in creating conditions that support psychological well-being. Unlike individualistic approaches that place the burden of recovery on the individual, this narrative emphasizes that systems, public policies, and social infrastructure also play a major role in shaping workers' mental health. The message is delivered affirmatively and contains a collective moral appeal, broadening the scope of the mental health narrative into a matter of public concern and social rights. This strengthens the contribution of the narrative to

dismantling the stigma that mental disorders are caused solely by personal weakness or a lack of individual resilience.

This post demonstrates strong narrative coherence and narrative fidelity in conveying mental health issues in the workplace. In terms of coherence, the content is arranged systematically with a logical flow: it begins by introducing the World Mental Health Day moment, continues with facts about mental health risks at work, and is followed by an explanation of causes, statistical data, and concrete solutions directed at both the government and workers. Each slide is connected to and reinforces the main narrative, namely that unhealthy work environments seriously affect workers' mental health and that change requires shared responsibility. Narrative fidelity is reflected in the choice of issues close to the audience's reality, such as job insecurity in the informal sector, high workloads, and limited access to psychological support. Audiences working in either the informal or formal sector under less than ideal conditions can easily identify with the narrative. The language is straightforward yet inclusive, avoiding technical terms that are difficult to understand and emphasizing empathy and calls to action. Supporting visuals, such as photographs of workers, data charts, and illustrations of women workers, strengthen the relevance of the experiences portrayed and clarify the structure of the story. The narrative not only raises awareness but also encourages change through concrete policy demands and collective action.



Figure 4. Audience responses to the collaborative post for World Mental Health Day (10 October 2024)

Audience responses to this post show high emotional engagement and appreciation. With 1,944 likes and various positive comments, such as *"Terima kasih CISDI sudah menyuarkan isu ini jauh lebih vokal"* ("Thank you, CISDI, for voicing this issue much more loudly") and *"It's time to prioritize mental health in the workplace,"* the narrative clearly built resonance with the public. Other comments reflect critical engagement with government policy and emphasize the need for structural change. Thus, both quantitatively (likes and interactions) and qualitatively (comment content), this post succeeded in conveying its message and contributing to stigma reduction, while broadening public understanding that mental health is not only a personal issue but a shared responsibility.

Contribution of the Narratives to Stigma Reduction

Taken together, the two posts show that @intotheilightid reduces stigma through two complementary routes. The first post works at the personal level: by validating everyday emotional experiences, it addresses self-stigma, the internalized shame that discourages individuals from acknowledging their condition [3], [15]. The second post works at the structural level: by locating the causes of mental health problems in work environments and public policy, it challenges the

public stigma that attributes mental disorders to personal weakness [2]. These findings are consistent with Rennick-Egglestone *et al.* [12], who found that narratives can validate personal experience and reduce stigma, and with Saputra and Cholifah [4], who showed that authentic narratives encourage more positive attitudes toward maintaining mental health and seeking professional help. They also align with the Lancet Commission's conclusion that contact with the lived experiences of others is the most effective route to reducing stigma [16], and with evidence that social media can extend such contact to audiences who would otherwise be difficult to reach [7], [10]. From the perspective of narrative persuasion, the coherent and relatable stories in these posts enable audiences to become immersed in the narrative, which lowers resistance to the anti-stigma message [13], [19]. In the Indonesian context, where cultural barriers to professional help-seeking remain strong [1], [15], coherent narratives that resonate with the audience's values offer a culturally sensitive way to normalize conversations about mental health.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of posts on the @intothelightid Instagram account, this study concludes that a narrative approach in digital campaigns makes a significant contribution to reducing mental health stigma in society. The narratives take personal, reflective, educational, and collective-action forms and are packaged in various formats such as long captions, visual carousels, and short videos. They are characterized by an empathetic delivery style, inclusive language, and visuals that support both emotional and informative messages. Narrative coherence is reflected in orderly plot structures, consistent characters and conflicts, and alignment between text and visuals, while narrative fidelity appears in the connection between the narrative themes and the real experiences of the audience, such as uncertain interpersonal relationships and unhealthy working conditions, which makes the stories relevant and emotionally identifiable. Positive public responses, in the form of appreciative comments and high digital engagement, indicate the success of these narratives in dismantling negative stereotypes.

Academically, the findings reinforce the narrative paradigm as a relevant theoretical framework for mental health communication studies, particularly in the context of digital media, and open opportunities for more transdisciplinary narrative-based research involving psychology, digital culture, and social advocacy. Practically, the study offers guidance for health campaigners, non-profit organizations, and government institutions to adopt more humanistic and participatory narrative approaches in designing public communication. Health communication strategies in the digital era should therefore focus not only on delivering medical information but also on constructing narratives that are authentic, coherent, and emotionally close to people's everyday lives. This study is limited to a small number of posts from a single account; future research could analyze a larger sample of posts, compare several campaign accounts, or examine audience reception directly through interviews or surveys.

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Authors' contributions and responsibilities

Fiona Rafael: conceptualization, methodology, data collection, formal analysis, writing – original draft. Naniek Novijanti Setijadi: supervision, validation, writing – review & editing.

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Availability of data and materials

The data analyzed in this study are publicly available Instagram posts from the @intothelightid account; links to the posts are provided in the figure captions.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interest.

Ethical approval

Formal ethical clearance was not sought because this study used only publicly available social media content and did not involve direct interaction with, intervention on, or collection of private data from human participants. Identifying information of commenters (usernames and profile photos) has been anonymized in all figures.

Additional information

No additional information from the authors.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Claude (Anthropic) to translate the manuscript from Indonesian into English and to improve its language and readability. The tool was not used to generate research data, perform the analysis, or draw conclusions. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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