

Narrative Analysis of "Hidden Gems" Content on Nex Carlos' YouTube Channel as a Source of Culinary Information for Subscribers

Naomi Adilah¹, Yudi Daherman² & Novi Dini Restia³
Ilmu Komunikasi Universitas Islam Riau^{1,2&3}
Correspondence email: naomiadilah@student.uir.ac.id

Abstract

The development of communication technology and social media, particularly YouTube, has transformed the way people seek information, including culinary tourism. One prominent example is the "Hidden Gems" video content from the YouTube channel Nex Carlos, known for its relaxed and unique communication style. This research aims to analyze the narrative within this content as a source of culinary information for subscribers. The method used is a qualitative approach with Walter Fisher's narrative analysis model, which emphasizes aspects of narration, narrative rationality, and the logic of good reasons. Data collection techniques include observation of video content, screenshot documentation, and analysis of viewer comments. The results show that Nex Carlos successfully conveys culinary information through a coherent and engaging narrative, highlighting values such as taste, price, location, and history of the food. His straightforward delivery and use of jargons like "Yo Mamen" and "Makan Cuy" create emotional engagement with the audience. Viewer comments consistent with the narrative further strengthen the content's role as a trusted culinary reference. The study concludes that "Hidden Gems" content serves not only as entertainment but also as an effective culinary information medium influencing subscribers' decisions.

Keywords: narrative analysis, hidden gems, Nex Carlos, YouTube, culinary information

INTRODUCTION

Digital communication has revolutionized the paradigm of information exchange, offering unprecedented speed and innovative formats for data dissemination. In the Industry 4.0 era, the center of communication gravity has shifted from traditional mainstream media to dynamic social media ecosystems such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Among these platforms, YouTube has emerged as a dominant force in shaping consumer behavior and information-seeking patterns, particularly in the culinary tourism sector (Smith & Anderson, 2021; Jones et al., 2023). Food vlogging, as a contemporary digital narrative, has transformed the way audiences perceive and choose culinary destinations, moving beyond mere visual aesthetics to complex storytelling.

Research Gaps and Contributions: While there is a substantial literature on digital marketing and social media influencers, most previous

studies have focused heavily on the quantitative impact of influencers on brand loyalty or consumer engagement in general (Lee, 2022; Garcia, 2023). There is a significant lack of research using rigorous narrative analysis to unravel how food vloggers specifically build trust and authenticity through their storytelling techniques. While previous studies by Tan (2021) and Wang (2022) explored the visual appeal of food content, they often overlooked the linguistic and narrative structures that drive the "virtual experience" of culinary tourism.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing the narrative construction of [insert specific focus, e.g., Indonesian food vloggers]. This study differs from existing research by integrating narrative theory with digital ethnography to uncover the underlying persuasive mechanisms employed in culinary vlogs. Consequently, this research contributes to the field of digital communication by providing a nuanced framework for understanding narrative-driven influence in the tourism industry.

Research Questions: Based on the above background, this study aims to answer the following research questions: 1). How do YouTube food vloggers construct their narrative structures to build authenticity and engagement in the context of culinary tourism? 2). What specific narrative elements distinguish successful culinary content from traditional travel advertisements in the digital era?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Narrative Paradigm Theory (Walter Fisher)

This study uses Walter Fisher's (1984) Narrative Paradigm as its foundational framework. Fisher argued that humans are essentially homo narrans, processing reality not through the constraints of formal logic (the Rational World Paradigm), but through the structural and emotional resonance of stories.

Academic Justification

The Narrative Paradigm was chosen over traditional media theories—such as Framing or Agenda Setting—because it provides a holistic evaluative framework for persuasive communication. While Framing focuses on the "how" of presentation, Fisher's theory explains the "why" audiences accept or reject messages based on perceived truth. This theory is particularly well-suited to this study because it goes beyond textual analysis to examine the intersection of internal story structure and audience life experiences, making it a superior tool for analyzing narratives aimed at shaping public beliefs or behavior.

Conceptual Linkages and Analytical Indicators

To operationalize this theory, three core concepts serve as primary analytical indicators for evaluating the subject matter: a. Narrative Coherence (Internal Consistency): This indicator assesses the structural integrity of the narrative. In this study, it is used to analyze whether a story "coheres"—examining plot contradictions, character consistency, and the logical flow of events. b. Narrative Fidelity (External Resonance): This indicator measures the "quality of truth" of a story. It is used to evaluate how well a narrative resonates with the audience's existing values and experiences. The analysis focuses on whether the story strikes a "tone of truth" that aligns with the audience's socio-cultural realities. c. Logical Reasoning: This concept serves as a bridge between coherence and fidelity. It is used as an indicator to identify specific moral or practical justifications provided in a narrative that encourage the audience to adopt the message as a valid guide to belief or action.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach utilizing Narrative Analysis to examine Nex Carlos' digital content. To ensure empirical rigor, the methodology is structured as follows:

Data Sources and Sampling Criteria

The primary data was obtained from the "Hidden Gems" video series on the Nex Carlos YouTube channel. Data selection followed a purposive sampling method based on the following specific criteria: a. Video Selection: A total of 2 videos were analyzed. b. Selection Criteria: Videos were selected based on (1) high engagement at least 500 thousand views, (2) inclusion of the "Hidden Gems" label, and (3) representation of diverse culinary locations to ensure narrative diversity. c. Time Frame: Data collection was conducted from February to March 2025 and included content uploaded during peak periods, such as post-pandemic culinary trends.

Unit of Analysis

This analysis focuses on verbal and non-verbal elements: a. Primary Unit: Narrative (script/dialogue), jargon, facial expressions, and body language (gestures) of Nex Carlos. b. Secondary Units: Strategic screenshots of narrative text and selected viewer comments.

Systematic Data Analysis Procedure

This analysis followed a transparent four-stage process grounded in Fisher's Narrative Paradigm: a. Data Categorization: Dividing video content into narrative units Introduction, Sensory Experience, Interaction with Vendor, and Conclusion. b. Internal Testing (Narrative Coherence): Evaluating whether the story "coheres." This involved checking the consistency of the Nex Carlos persona like jargon and gestures in across videos. c. External Testing (Narrative Accuracy): Mapping the presented values like authenticity,

affordability against the "Logic of Good Reason" to see if they align with audience culinary expectations. d. Audience Sentiment Integration: Correlating viewer comments with specific narrative moments to validate the story's impact.

Audience Comment Selection and Analysis

To ensure that the analysis of audience feedback is objective and systematic: a. Selection: Comments were screened using a top comment relevance algorithm. Only comments that specifically addressed the storytelling, credibility, or aspects of "Hidden Gems" were selected for coding. b. Analysis: Comments were analyzed using Thematic Coding to identify patterns of "Accuracy." For example, if a viewer stated that "the food looked exactly like my childhood experience," that was coded as an indicator of high Narrative Accuracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Narrative Patterns in "Hidden Gems" Series

Based on the analysis of the selected corpus, the narrative structure of Nex Carlos's "Hidden Gems" consistently follows a three-act pattern that builds internal credibility: a. Phase 1: The Quest (Introduction): The video begins with visual evidence of geographical "difficulty," such as navigating narrow alleys or crossing landmarks like rubber waste sites. This establishes the "Hidden" claim. b. Phase 2: The Origin (Interview): A dialogue with the vendor focusing on the food's history. This provides the structural coherence necessary for the audience to believe the story's background. c. Phase 3: The Verdict (Review): A sensory-focused tasting session utilizing signature jargons "Makan Cuy" and non-verbal symbolic codes the rapid thumb gesture.

No	Narrative Indicator	Empirical Findings (Data Units)
1	Structural Coherence	Consistent transition from Difficult Access - Vendor Interview - Sensory Testing.
2	Characterological Coherence	Consistent use of honest, blunt persona; humorous reactions to spicy food; and repetitive jargon across all 10 videos.
3	Narrative Fidelity	Comments from locals "I live nearby and didn't know this" validate the "Hidden" claim.
4	Logic of Good Reasons	Providing specific landmarks "the bridge after the factory" as practical reasons for viewers to trust the route.

source: processed by researchers

A Critical Analysis of Narrative Rationality

The findings suggest that Nex Carlos's success is not merely due to "truth," but rather the construction of authenticity that fits the audience's narrative expectations.

The Illusion of Authenticity and Subjectivity

While Characterological Coherence builds trust, it also masks the inherent subjectivity of the influencer. The "honest" persona is a curated narrative device. What is presented as "fidelity" (truth) is often limited to the creator's personal palate. There is a risk of "narrative bias," where the creator may overlook flaws in a dish to maintain the upbeat, celebratory tone expected in a "Hidden Gem" story arc.

Commercial Elements and Promotional Limits

A critical gap in the Logic of Good Reasons arises when considering the commercial nature of influencer content. Although Nex Carlos maintains a "non-sponsored" feel, the narrative often functions as a promotional vehicle for the vendor. The Narrative Fidelity is potentially compromised if the "spontaneity" is rehearsed or if the selection of locations is influenced by unspoken commercial ties. This research notes that the "Authenticity" perceived by viewers is often a negotiated truth, they choose to believe the narrative because it provides a "Good Reason" entertainment and travel utility, regardless of potential promotional bias.

Limitations of Perceived Fidelity

The validation from the comments section - often cited as proof of fidelity - is also subject to "echo chamber" effects. Local viewers may validate the "hidden" status to gain pride in their neighborhood, further reinforcing a narrative that may be hyperbolic. Therefore, the Narrative Paradigm in this context serves as a tool for social bonding rather than a guarantee of objective culinary quality.

IMPACT OF THE RESEARCH

Promotion of MSMEs (UMKM):

The research highlights how digital narratives can effectively promote hidden local businesses and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) that lack traditional marketing budgets. 1. Culinary Decision-Making: It demonstrates that for Gen Z and Millennial subscribers, narrative-driven content is more influential than traditional advertising in determining travel and dining destinations. 2. Digital Communication Literacy: The study provides insight into how "storytelling" functions as a tool for credibility in the

digital age, shifting the focus from formal reviews to authentic, personal narratives.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Nex Carlos's "Hidden Gems" series functions as a powerful narrative system that goes beyond mere food reviews. Through the lens of Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm, the content achieves high Narrative Rationality by balancing structural consistency (Coherence) with values that resonate with the audience's lived reality (Fidelity). This synergy effectively transforms digital storytelling into a credible authority, influencing culinary decision-making among customers. a. Theoretical Contribution: This study extends the application of the Narrative Paradigm to the realm of digital influencers. It demonstrates that in the social media era, "truth" is no longer measured solely by objective facts but by the cohesion of personas and the logic of sound reasoning presented in digital narratives. This study provides a framework for understanding how "authenticity" is discursively constructed in vlogs. b. Practical Contribution: For digital content creators and marketers, this study highlights that audience loyalty is built through character coherence. Maintaining a consistent and "honest" persona is more effective for long-term engagement than simply a highly produced aesthetic.

While insightful, this study has limitations that need to be acknowledged: a. Subjectivity in Coding: The analysis of non-verbal cues (gestures and facial expressions) is interpretive and may be influenced by researcher bias. b. Data Scope: This study focused exclusively on one creator (Nex Carlos) in the Indonesian context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to influencers in different cultures or niches. c. Platform Specificity: This study was limited to the long-form narrative structure of YouTube and may not reflect the narrative dynamics of short-form platforms like TikTok or Instagram Reels.

To further expand the discourse on digital narrative rationality, future studies should: a. Comparative Analysis: Compare the narrative fidelity of "independent" influencers with those who explicitly produce sponsored content to examine how commercialization affects perceived coherence. b. Cross-Platform Study: Investigating how narrative structure adapts when a creator migrates from long-form YouTube content to short-form vertical videos. c. Audience Reception: Using focus group discussions (FGD) or large-scale surveys to empirically measure "Good Reason Logic" from an audience psychological perspective, going beyond comment section analysis.

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