

# Mapping Indonesian Web Series Themes: Insights into Over The Top Content Diversity

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## ABSTRACT

The ease of internet access in Indonesia is increasing. This encourages content production on the internet to grow as well, including producing original web series broadcast on over-the-top (OTT) services in Indonesia. Encouraging the creation of content diversity in web series requires mapping content produced within a certain period. This research will map the content of the Indonesian web series broadcast on five OTTs in 2020-2022. This research attempts to map the Indonesian web series themes published from 2020 to July 2022. The method used is a qualitative content analysis by reading various theme elements in the web series. These elements can describe the ideas and impressions created by filmmakers. Thematic elements include (1) plot, (2) emotional or mood effects, (3) character, and (4) style or structure. A popular theme is the theme of romance with a variety of school love. The mood is built through conflicts that are close to everyday life. Style the camera arrangement using cinematic and dynamic shots. The sound arrangement makes a lot of use of dialogue to convey messages. Artistic has a trend to take advantage of the beauty of nature and space. To strengthen the three dimensions of the character, make-up, and wardrobe are used according to the character's

#### Vol.16/No.2 / OCTOBER 2023 - Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi



character. The results of this study are as follows: A popular theme is romance with a variety of school love. The mood is built through conflicts that are close to everyday life.

## INTRODUCTION

Films, web series, and television programs are audio-visual communication media. Web series, like movies, are a powerful communication medium for conveying messages quickly. One can get a picture of life through the story in the movie. Audio-visual media, including films, web series, and other audio-visual media, are communication media aimed at conveying messages about the reality that grows and develops in society. Communication products like this produce a product in the form of communication messages; these products are distributed to a wide audience continuously and at a fixed distance and time (Asri, 2020).

Audio-visual products are cultural products and also a form of communication technology. This technology contains articulations of events in the form of signs made by filmmakers. Therefore, cultural and technological products-in this case, filmshave long been believed to express societal events that can be read through social approaches, one of which is communication. Worth (1966) introduced a concept of visual communication called visual communication. Events in film are no longer considered mere products of art but also pieces of communication that depict human interaction (Ruby, 1976).

Film is considered a language, so it is

closely related to communication and linguistics. The film has a visual aspect close to human associations to portray a message (Worth, 2016). Experts have long trusted communication through audio-visual products. Communication products in audio-visual products change and evolve along with technological developments. In the past, audio-visual products were in the form of films, then increased with television programs. Now, audio-visual services are rising again with the existence of video-ondemand services.

As the internet infrastructure in Indonesia accelerates, it impacts people's entertainment consumption. Web series are one of the products that have grown with the internet development in Indonesia. A web series is a serial program broadcast on a developing medium called web television. Web series are specially designed to be released first via the Internet (Alfajri et al., 2014). Thus, the community has more and more entertainment options.

The growth of web series in Indonesia was also triggered by using this medium as a means of product promotion. The audience wants programs that provide entertainment and a sense of comfort. Entertainment

#### Vol.16/No.2 / OCTOBER 2023 - Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi



doesn't always mean comedy; it has a broader meaning. All programs that generate pleasure and provide psychological satisfaction can be considered entertainment programs (Widyatama et al., 2021). This has made many brand owners use various web series stories to market their products. This can be seen through web series that were successful in Indonesia, such as Sore (Tropicana Slim), Yakin Nikah (JBL), Perjalanan Terbaik Sepanjang Masa (Toyota Indonesia), and many more. The development of the Over the Top (OTT) platform in Indonesia has also accelerated the growth in the number of web series in Indonesia. In 2012, around 66 million Indonesians used OTT services (Sutrianto, 2020).

The growth of web series in Indonesia can be seen from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. WeTV Original Little Mom has made it into the ranks of WeTV's trending programs in 10 different countries at once. On the YouTube platform, this series is the first web series to trend at number 1 for more than 48 hours. Meanwhile, on TikTok, it has reached 1.5 billion views and is also one of the trending topics on Twitter (Media Indonesia, 2021). The web series Little Mom premiered on September 10, 2021, and became one of the top 10 trending in 22 countries (Agnes, 2020). This can prove that Indonesian web series have the opportunity to penetrate the international market.

Web series, compared to TV series or movies, have the following advantages: (1) Can be distributed worldwide; (2) The audience is actively involved (can provide comments); (3) Serial or continuous storytelling; (4) Monetization opportunities; and (5) There are no rules so that web series creators have autonomy over content (Williams, 2012). Monetization allows web series creators to get AdSense and product placement.

Web series production can be a locomotive for the creative industries in Indonesia. Producing web series can encourage various creative industry sectors, such as the music industry, fashion, and many more. In addition to the technical aspects of production, new themes are needed to maintain audience interest.

Communication research on audio-visual works focuses a lot on reading the meaning and effect of works. There is an urgency to know the patterns of audio-visual works. These patterns will help creators maximize the diversity of web series in Indonesia. Similar audio-visual mapping has been done on comedy films in Indonesia throughout three periods, namely the classic era (1960–1970), middle era (1980–1990), and millennium era (2000-2017)(Chaniago, 2018), slang in Indonesian 2016), films (Setiawati, and the Pornography Association in the title of Indonesian films of the horror genre from 2008–2011 (Khoirunnisa, 2012). This kind of mapping can be done to find out the variation of shapes in the film. Something similar can be done with web series content. Through research on mapping content, a webseries can provide an overview of stakeholders to magnify the diversity of the work.

#### Vol.16/No.2 / OCTOBER 2023 - Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi



This study aims to map existing web series themes from January 2020 to July 2022. This period is important in the production of Indonesian web series because there is a significant increase in entertainment needs during the pandemic. This need does not only occur in Indonesia; there is a significant increase in OTT users worldwide, which causes an increasing need for world content (Saini & Saini, 2020).

Thematic elements of web series can show filmmakers' ideas to find out filmmakers' tendencies and trends in determining themes and technical aspects of making their works.

The Internet, like the rhetoric that has previously been echoed, will change the structure of broadcasting. Especially by opening opportunities for more producers to produce various genres and models in storytelling (serial/uncontinued stories) under various business models developed through the web, traditional TV, and omnibus such as YouTube. Audiences will have more and more choices (Christian, 2012). Web series are one of the products born from the development of the internet. At the beginning of its development, web series were serial stories called webisodes. Each only lasts a few minutes. The term webisode evolved to web TV series or web series(Williams, 2012).

Researchers have found that web series can increase brand awareness and even product sales. This phenomenon shows that web series marketing positively affects consumer interest in a product (Widiasih, 2019). With brand interest in promoting through web series, web series production has the opportunity to continue to grow. Research on stories has been done by analyzing narratives, as was done in the Persija Players campaign on the #JagaGBK video (Pratiwi et al., 2020).

The web series plot structure consists of episodic structures that form a story. Web series have a story structure consisting of a beginning, a middle, and an ending (Williams, 2012). This section is also called exposition, conflict, and resolution (Block, 2021).

Thematic elements are not only the main ideas of the film. Unlike literary works, thematic elements refer to the film's main focus. The filmmaker may focus on ideas but can also emphasize one of the four major elements. The four major elements include (1) plot; (2) emotional or mood effects; (3) character, and (4) style, texture, or structure (Boggs & Pertie, 2018).

The plot is defined as what happens in the film (Boggs & Pertie, 2018). Plots in web series tend to use a 3-act structure, which consists of exposition, conflict, and resolution. Exposition, or part of the exposition, can be interpreted as "facts that can start a story". These facts include the identity and personality of the characters, plot, location, and time aspects. These facts can still be added, but the basic information needed to start the story must be included in the exposition. The next morning of the plot, there is conflict. When the conflict begins, the main character faces obstacles that prevent him from achieving the story's goal. As the story progresses, the

## Vol.16/No.2 / OCTOBER 2023 - Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi



obstacles get more difficult and the conflicts intensify. Conflict, in this case, can come from within or outside the main character. Conflicts that are built intensely as a barrier for the main characters to become more difficult to overcome are called the climax. The last part of the story is the resolution. At this stage, characters, relationships, and plot complete the story (Block, 2021).

Film themes can be identified through the mood or emotional effects filmmakers create. This emotional effect can be the theme of a film, for example, comedy, romance, and so on.

The film's theme can be seen in the characters developed in the film. Films, through action and dialogue, often depict a unique central character. The plot serves as our tool to understand the character being developed. Most of the characters in question are different from those of most people (Block, 2021). Characters are divided into several types, namely stereotypes, static/dynamic, and flat/round.

The theme can also be seen from the technical aspect, which is the director's way of presenting the film. This part is an aspect that is always remembered and strongly impacts the audience. A unique look, feeling, rhythm, atmosphere, tone, and unique arrangement that the audience can remember forever (Block, 2021).

After evaluating the film through the four elements, we can see the main idea of the film. Evaluating ideas can help determine the overall theme of the film. We can identify the themes of films into several categories, namely:

- Moral implications
- The truth of human nature
- Social problems,
  - Struggle to defend human dignity,
  - The complexity of human relationships
  - Growing awareness
- Philosophical value (Petrie & Boggs, 2018)

Thematic analysis developed by Boggs and Pertie has been used to review characters (AM et al., 2017; Rastina, 2019) and scenes (Hardianti, 2022).

## METHODOLOGY

In previous studies, films were mostly analyzed through semiotic analysis. For example, in the film Parasite, semiotic analysis is used to find the meaning of social class. Through the semiotic analysis, it is known: 1. ease of life and a different lifestyle. 2. Differences in fashion or clothes worn by each class 3. There are unconscious social class boundaries. 4. The smell of the body can become a class identity. 5. Class contradiction with black and white symbols (Dianiya, 2020) In this analysis, semiotic analysis can read the latent meaning of a film but often pays little attention to the technical aspects of the film and tends to focus on the mise en scène in the film.

This study will use a qualitative content analysis research method. The content analysis method seeks to define content casually to show the strength of the media stimulus. In addition, the

#### Vol.16/No.2 / OCTOBER 2023 - Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi



content analysis can also define all the techniques used to define signs. This method relies entirely on the analyst's judgment to enter categories.

The stages of content analysis are described through several steps, namely, planning, data collection, data analysis, and then ending with making a report and presenting the results (Bengtsson, 2016). a web series that airs from January 2020 to July 2022 on five OTT platforms in Indonesia, namely Viu, Netflix, YouTube, Vidio, WeTv/Iflix.

The method used is manifest analysis, where the researcher will describe the data according to the data, close to the text, and use what is in the text (Bengtsson, 2016).

Qualitative content analysis is widely used to see patterns in audio-visual presentations. For example, content analysis was used to view romantic scenes in Disney movies from 1989–1998. The results show that there are lots of romantic scenes in Disney movies. Romantic scenes are usually initiated by the main male character (Hefner et al., 2017). Thus, content analysis can be used to see patterns in web series in Indonesia.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This research found several themes that frequently appeared in Indonesian web series throughout 2020–2022. We categorize these themes into several divisions of themes, namely, love, friendship, family, horror, good versus evil, religion, and health.

The results of this study illustrate that the Indonesian web series content that aired

from 2020 to July 2022 is dominated by love ideas and themes, with a variety of stories raised, such as school love, love hindered by differences, love triangles, affair, and betrayal, as well as other story ideas that are close to the sphere of romance. The next idea or theme is friendship, which is dominated by various stories about the power of friendship and competition between gangs. themes Other dominate Indonesian web series throughout 2020-2022: family, superheroes, mysticism, religion, and health. This data shows that Indonesian web series production still focuses on romance.

Romantic themes are one of the most popular themes in the entertainment world in Indonesia, both in movies, soap operas, music, and various content on social media. Not only in Indonesia, the romantic theme has been popular since the 1930s. This type of theme is considered a theme that can seize various markets, ranging from teenagers to adults. Romantic movies can go viral because they give a sense of reality. being out of Romantic relationships are idealized, perfected, and portraved so that everything has a way of working out in the end. Hence, reliance on romantic films for applicable knowledge in everyday life, coupled with the fact that these romantic films an idealized—rather than portray realistic-concept of romance (Hefner et al., 2017); in the Disney Era, romance portrayed through various was expressions and character reactions. Romantic themes usually do not stand alone but go side by side with themes of and friendship. family However, Indonesian web series tend to feature involved characters in romantic relationships. Both from the main character and supporting characters.

#### Vol.16/No.2 / OCTOBER 2023 - Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi



A style is a technical approach used by websites to convey their messages and an approach used by programmers that leaves a mark when this web series ends. The researcher divides style into several categories: camera arrangement, sound arrangement, artistic arrangement, editing, and scenery.

Camera Setup in the Indonesian web series 78% focuses on presenting cinematic images. Filmmakers can choose the position of objects to display a certain impression. Objects do not have to be placed in the middle of the frame. However, it can also be placed in various frame positions. This placement will give a certain impression of the subject in web series. There are various the compositions in an audio-visual work, but generally, they can be divided into symmetrical and dynamic compositions. Symmetrical composition is achieved through objects placed right in the center of the frame. In contrast, the dynamic composition is placed flexibly, and the object's position can align with the frame's movement (Pratista, 2017). Indonesian web series tend to use dynamic composition, where many shooting compositions are used, like the rule of thirds, and the composition changes dynamically depending on the movement of objects. The composition is balanced with camera movements and angles that match the built emotions.

In the arrangement of sound, most of the web series use music. Most use nondiegetic sound techniques. Non-diegetic sound is a sound management technique in which all sound elements come from outside the story and can only be heard by the audience (Pratista, 2017). The use of nondiegetic sound can also be seen in the narrator's voice in the Perfect Love series. There are several websites using music to build each emotion. These web series include Heart the Series, Imperfect, and Perfect Love. Heart The series and Imperfect use music extensively to represent the characters' feelings in dealing with conflict.

The unique sound arrangement is seen in the web series Perfect Love, which uses diegetic sound to display songs to convey the main character's message. Diegetic sound is an arrangement in which all sound elements appear on the screen (Pratista, 2017). Sound effects are widely used in horror, comedy, and action web series.

Artistic arrangement includes settings, makeup, and wardrobe. Settings in Web series 76% take advantage of natural beauty or spaces laid out by showing luxury and realism. For example, the Dilemma web series on OTT Video emphasizes the beauty of space with images of luxurious houses, complete with household equipment owned by wealthy couples. Besides realistic spaces, Indonesian websites have also started building imaginative spaces. These kinds of spaces are usually found in web series in the sci-fi genre. Examples of web series that use this technique are Facetrix and Code Helix.

Makeup and wardrobe are some of the tools that play an important role in character. Much of the characterbuilding is supported by the artist's physical appearance. Therefore, makeup and wardrobe have an important role to play in a story. Makeup serves as an introduction to a character's personality (Setiani et al., 2022). The characters' makeup is tailored to the story, identity, and function of the characters in a story.

Costumes are everything worn by the actor or actress, along with all the accessories. Accessories included in costumes include hats, jewelry, watches, 360

## Vol.16/No.2 / OCTOBER 2023 - Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi



glasses, shoes, sticks, and so on. Costumes not only function as body coverings but also have a function in their narrative context (Setiani et al., 2022).

Makeup and Wardrobe: The Natural Concept dominates web series content throughout 2020–2022. For example, the character Aisyah in the web series Satu Amin Dua Iman is described as an intern at a hospital. She always wears a doctor's uniform, complete with her hijab. This description strengthens the character with professionalism in his career and helps his best friend move on for the better.

#### Picture 1. Aisyah in Natural Makeup Look



Source: Satu Amin Dua Iman, 2022

This pattern can also be seen in the Kaget Nikah web series, where the picture of a middle- and upper-class family is very prominent with the luxurious impression of each character's house or villa setting. Makeup and wardrobe use the concept in the real world (natural) without exaggerating. Furthermore, beauty makeup settings are contained in six series. The use of makeup beauty as a tool to strengthen the dimensions of the characters in the characters to support storytelling. For example, the character models in the series Love is Not Blind are depicted with bold makeup, while the special effects and character makeup are found in the horror series. Character makeup is used on ghost characters. For example, in the series with the title "Titisan". The characters Ara and Thalia use scary makeup to create an impression of horror and mystery.

#### Picture 2: Makeup Character



Source: Titisan, 2021

Makeup and fashion are part of the communication process between a web series and its audience. The use of make-up and fashion can represent life according to the characters' backgrounds. Currently, fashion permeates virtually every aspect of culture. In a world dependent upon visual representations, fashion has become an important tool for communicating and representing one's persona (Kuruc, 2008).

Web series Indonesia uses a continuous storytelling technique, which emphasizes the sequence of events based on a time sequence. The image-cutting technique uses the cut technique as a transition. The choice of this technique has a strong basis because the effect caused by the cut technique is the same as the blink of a human eye, so the audience will not feel the effect of cutting the image. While other techniques such as wipe, dissolve, and fade are rarely found. This transition raises awareness among the audience that there has been a movement of

#### Vol.16/No.2 / OCTOBER 2023 - Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi



images. This technique is used in the Perfect Love web series.

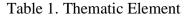
There is manipulation of space and time through the elliptical editing technique. The web series I Love You, Baby tells the story of Baby traveling from Jakarta to Bandung. The journey is shortened by using the elliptical editing technique.

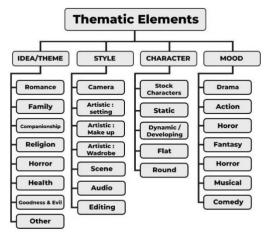
Characteristics are divided into several types, namely stereotyped characters, static/dynamic, and flat/round. Stereotypical characters are types of characters that are often found in various stories. Static characters are characters that do not develop from the beginning of the story to the end of the story. Conversely, dynamic characters develop or grow along with the conflicts they experience. Flat characters are characters that are displayed in two dimensions. Characters can be displayed in three dimensions or two dimensions. Characters with three dimensions can be displayed as characters with strong motivations and backgrounds so that the audience believes these characters are real. Indonesian web series have mostly stereotyped characters or tend to be the same between one web series and another. More than 67% of the characters are dynamic, which changes when the characters face conflict. The characters, especially the main characters. are displayed with strong motivations and background figures (3D figures), commonly called rounds.

The researcher divides the moods in the Indonesian web series into several moods according to the film genre. This division is based on the consideration that the atmosphere in the film will be built in the same way as the genre of the film. For example, a scary atmosphere will be built by the horror genre. Thrilling action in action films The cheerful and funny atmosphere in the comedy genre Thus, the genre will be closely related to the mood built into a story.

The drama genre will be the most popular genre throughout 2020–2022. The drama genre emphasizes conflict built through; it is the most produced because of its extensive range of stories. Drama films relate to themes, stories, settings, characters, and situations that portray real life (Pratista, 2017). Thus, this genre is very close to the audience's daily life.

All the techniques and themes in the web series are realities presented through audio-visual formats. Through the trend of this web series theme, it can show the trend of reality that occurs in society. As a reality, films and web series move this reality through various codes, conventions, and ideologies of culture (Diani, 2015). Thus, reading the trends in the web series can provide an overview of the people in Indonesia, including the perspectives and ideologies that are believed by the general public.





Source: Author's Calculation, 2022

#### Vol.16/No.2 / OCTOBER 2023 - Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi



Reading the meaning of a film has been very often done through various methods. Start reading latent meaning, depicting pieces of reality through an audiovisual work. Read the techniques used that will describe various meanings and so on.

This article attempts to describe the method of the work's creator to convey the message to his audience and the friends of the themes conveyed to the audience. There are various similarities in how to make a web series in Indonesia. The themes raised are mostly themes related to love. Only some web series have a different narrative than others. The same narrative in the work of this web series will lead to a low level of diversity in people's entertainment. The lack of diversity in content will cause people's views to narrow to the same stories, the length of the stereotype, and the representation of stories from low community groups.

This is very dangerous because it will lead people to uniformity of opinion or perspective in seeing a reality. The audience needs a diversity of themes that are manifested in entertainment choices, one of which is one of which is web series. web series. In today's era of technological development, entertainment options that people can access are increasingly diverse, and the challenges facing media producers are getting tougher. The work created must compete head-to-head with content from abroad. Therefore, breakthrough after breakthrough must be made. Similarities and repeated treatments in an audio-visual work will make the audience bored quickly. This will be a motivating factor for people to switch to foreign content. The rise of foreign content in Indonesia will certainly threaten local content producers. Not only that, but foreign content can fuel an increasingly powerful cultural imperialism. Nationalist values can fade with the onslaught of foreign content.

More serious treatment is needed in local content management to prevent this from happening. Local content must be strengthened so that it always gets the audience's attention. Innovation is key in this regard. Narrative and technical approaches must be innovated to capture the audience.

Innovation can be done, starting with providing innovation to the themes raised. Based on this research, friends raised by the Indonesian web series are the theme of love, especially teenage love. There has been an increasing trend in the number of infidelity stories on the theme of love in recent years. Some web series also portray infidelity as normal. Although controversial and able to arouse the audience's attention, themes like this will form a positive image of an affair. This is certainly undesirable.

Apart from the trend of Indonesian web series stories, there are repeated patterns in depicting characters in this web series. The main characters in the story are mostly people from upper-class families with various facilities who have a bourgeois lifestyle. The similarity of these characters will result in an image of a person's standard of living. The audience will themselves associate with the character, who must be rich and have a certain standard of living. The character has been described as a developing character, where the problems that occur will bring the

## Vol.16/No.2 / OCTOBER 2023 - Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi



character to a better life. However, many characters are developed inhumanely, and the traits built are negative or positive.

Regarding artistic arrangement, the exploration of Indonesian web series focuses mostly on having a real-life setting. Imaginative settings have been developed but are not yet widely used. This is triggered by the gender of this web series, mostly drama. The use of imaginative settings has been done by describing virtual discussion rooms depicted as if in the real world. The current trend of using Indonesian web series settings utilizes natural beauty more. This natural beauty is supported by the cinematic shooting method, which prioritizes the beauty of the shot. Trend Web series Indonesia still uses the same treatment regarding the sound arrangement. Using music or sound effects by utilizing jump scares is still widely used. Indonesian web series, although not too many, have started to utilize music and songs as character dialogue. This approach is common in musical films. This trend is a new one.

Regarding shot arrangement, Indonesian web series pays more to composition attention than Indonesian electronic cinema shots. The arrangement of images tends to have a dynamic composition and not only highlights humans but also highlights the background that is part of the webseries's storytelling. The choice of composition tends to be dynamic and uses a lot of varied camera movements. This is good to do so that the shot is not boring and makes the storytelling seem slow.

## CONCLUSION

Indonesian web series have a big opportunity to dominate the international web series market. This business needs to continue to be encouraged. This article will try to map what Indonesian web series producers have done in packaging their work. This paper functions as a starting point for reading trends in the Indonesian web series throughout 2020–2022 so that it can reflect future trends. This paper uses thematic analysis, which not only focuses on the ideas that the creator of the work will convey but also the methods used by the creator of the work through various technical approaches both in terms of audio, visual, and narrative elements inherent in a story.

The Indonesian web series Thematic Analysis has mapped Indonesian web series trends. The most popular theme throughout 2020–2022 is romance, with various school romances and love struggles that are hindered by differences. Apart from romance, there is the theme of friendship. Shooting trends in web series: Most explore cinematic shots with dynamic editing techniques. In structuring the setting, web series creators often explore the beauty of nature to be used as a background story. Makeup and wardrobe are mostly natural, using costumes that support the three dimensions of the characters.

Most of the characters that appear in Indonesian web series have been featured in other stories, or, in other words, stereotypes. The characters are described as changing before and after the conflict, or, in other words, the characters move dynamically. The characters, especially the

## Vol.16/No.2 / OCTOBER 2023 - Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi



main characters, are presented with strong motivations and background figures (3D). The mood that is built is a mood that depicts everyday life with problems that are close to life.

This research is limited to looking at Indonesian web series patterns in macro terms throughout 2020–2022. Therefore, this research must continue to read the trend of Indonesian web series from time to time. We invite researchers to continue this research to spark innovation in web series in Indonesia.

In addition, reading a web series in micro is still important. Both aim to map web series storytelling patterns, narrative strategies, visual strategies, audio structuring, etc. This can help the viewer sculpt a work more comprehensively. Reading the latent meaning of a work is also still important to meet the community's information needs in interpreting a work.

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# DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial, personal, or other relationships with other people or organizations related to the material discussed in the manuscript.

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#### 2

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Vol.16/No.2 / OCTOBER 2023 - Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi



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Vol.16/No.2 / OCTOBER 2023 - Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi

