

Analysis of Tulus's Music Video 'Satu Kali' as a Persuasive Medium for Student Self-Development

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ABSTRACT

University students are a group that is particularly vulnerable to academic pressure, uncertainty about the future, and various psychological challenges that may hinder their personal development. In the digital era, music videos no longer function solely as a form of entertainment but have also become a communication medium capable of conveying reflective and persuasive messages. One work that explores this theme is "Satu Kali," a music video by Indonesian singer Tulus, released in 2025 as part of the Manusia album. The music video presents a sequence of visuals that combines seven music videos from the album into a unified narrative depicting the journey of human life, from childhood, adolescence, and adulthood to old age. The analysis employed a descriptive-interpretative qualitative approach based on Stuart Hall's Encoding–Decoding theory. This was followed by an audience reception study through interviews with university students to identify their interpretive positions according to the categories of dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings. The findings indicate that the majority of participants, accounting for fifty percent (50%), occupied the dominant reading position, suggesting that the music video is effective as a persuasive medium for promoting personal development.

Keywords: Music Video, Self-Development, Tulus

INTRODUCTION

University students are often confronted with mental health issues and challenges in adapting to university life, particularly when facing academic pressure and assignment deadlines. Good mental health is essential for students, as it significantly influences their academic performance, quality of life, and social relationships. (Sakinah & Ernyasih, 2025). This condition can hinder the process of personal development, or self-improvement. Self-improvement has recently become a highly popular concept, particularly among Generation Z. It refers to the process of enhancing one's attitudes, character, behavior, emotional well-being, mindset, and way of thinking in order to become a better version of oneself (Tauhid & Rahma, 2024). To address these challenges, university students require psychographic support, inspiration, and emotional representation that closely reflect their lived experiences. Audiovisual media, particularly music videos, have emerged as an effective medium for influencing emotions and providing motivation (De Fretes et al., 2023).

Music videos combine various artistic elements, including cinematography, production design, costumes, color, and visual effects, all of which work together to create a compelling and immersive visual experience for the audience. (Wicaksana & Prasetyo, 2024). In the digital era, music videos serve not only as a form of entertainment but also as an audiovisual medium with the potential to influence audiences' emotional states. Visual communication in music videos can represent popular culture through complex symbols and narratives (Aqili Zaidan, 2025).

In today's digital era, music videos have evolved from being merely a medium for promoting audio content into a complex form of visual communication. They no longer serve only aesthetic purposes but also function as narrative media capable of conveying social, philosophical, and instructional messages in a persuasive manner. For university students, who are psychologically in a transitional stage toward adulthood, the consumption of audiovisual media plays a significant role in shaping their mindset and behavior, particularly regarding the concept of self-improvement. One work that stands out in this context is "Satu Kali," a music video by the Indonesian singer Tulus.

Tulus is an Indonesian singer-songwriter widely recognized for creating songs with profound and meaningful messages (Juwita et al., 2022). This music video is recognized not only for its poetic melody and lyrics but also for its narrative visualization, which portrays the human life cycle from birth and childhood to adulthood and old age within a single continuous storyline. The lyrics in Tulus's work convey the values of self-improvement by encouraging listeners to embrace themselves, rise above failure, and continuously strive to become better individuals (Tauhid & Rahma, 2024). For university students, who are often faced with academic pressure and anxiety about the future, the message of "cherishing every moment" conveyed in this music video is particularly relevant.

However, the meanings constructed within media texts are not necessarily interpreted uniformly by audiences. According to Stuart Hall's (1980) Reception Theory, audiences play an active role in the process of meaning-making through different reading positions: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings (Hall, 1997)

In this context, the interpretation of a music video depends not only on the structure of signs that construct its visual message but also on the audience's reception of those signs. Visual elements intended to represent encouragement or motivation may be interpreted in alignment with the intended meaning, negotiated, or even rejected by viewers. Therefore, the analysis of a music video should consider two interconnected dimensions: how motivational meanings are constructed within the audiovisual text and how those meanings are received by the audience.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive–interpretative research design. Qualitative research methodology was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation through the collection and analysis of descriptive, interpretative, and contextual data (Rifa'i, 2023). The second stage of the study consisted of an audience reception analysis based on Stuart Hall's Reception Theory to examine how audiences interpret the motivational messages encoded in the music video. This was conducted through in-depth interviews with purposively selected participants. The reception data were then classified into three reading positions: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Stuart Hall's Encoding–Decoding model is one of the key approaches in media reception studies. According to Hall (1980), the meaning of a media text is not fixed but is produced through two primary processes: encoding, in which media producers construct messages through various communicative elements, and decoding, in which audiences interpret those messages based on their own experiences, knowledge, values, and social backgrounds. Consequently, the meanings derived by audiences do not necessarily correspond to those intended by the message creators.

According to Tulus, as quoted by *Spotlight*, the inspiration for the *Manusia* album originated from his interactions with people. He explained that the album portrays a wide range of emotions and the dynamics of being human. The songs were written based on his personal experiences, observations, interactions with others, and self-reflection, all of which were ultimately woven together into a cohesive body of work (Meidina Safira, 2022). Tulus also expressed his hope that the music on the album would grow deeply in listeners' hearts and inspire everyone who hears it (Tulus, 2022).

According to the official Instagram account of Tulus Company Indonesia, the music videos from the *Manusia* album have collectively accumulated 218.6 million views on YouTube (Tulus Company, 2025). The music video "Satu Kali" was first released on September 28, 2025, and has received more than 17 thousand likes.

ENCODING THE MESSAGE IN THE MUSIC VIDEO 'SATU KALI' BY TULUS

The music video "Satu Kali" presents a sequence of visuals that combines seven music videos from the *Manusia* album into a single narrative. The visuals focus on personal experiences, self-reflection, and the simple moments of everyday life that people often take for granted.

In this study, the encoding process was examined by analyzing both the visuals and the lyrics to uncover the primary meanings encoded within the music video. The analysis focused on lyrical passages and visual scenes that represent specific messages, enabling the identification of the dominant meanings offered to the audience.

More specifically, the encoding process was analyzed by examining how the visuals and lyrics in "Satu Kali" construct meaning. The video integrates seven music videos from the *Manusia* album into a continuous visual narrative rather than presenting them as separate works.

The visuals are dominated by ordinary scenes closely related to everyday life, including personal expressions, domestic settings, and intimate and reflective interactions. Rather than relying on heroic or overly dramatic imagery, the video directs the audience's attention toward personal experiences and inner reflection. Consistent with these visuals, the song's lyrics emphasize messages about embracing life's journey, accepting the process, and appreciating moments that often go unnoticed.

Through the combination of these visual and lyrical elements, the music video "Satu Kali" encodes a dominant meaning centered on self-reflection and awareness of the significance of ordinary life experiences, inviting audiences to interpret life from a more reflective perspective.

Decoding

In this study, decoding is understood as the process through which audiences interpret the messages conveyed in the music video "Satu Kali." After the message has been encoded through the video's visuals and lyrics by its creators, it is not necessarily interpreted in the same way by every viewer. Each individual brings their own life

experiences, social background, and personal perspectives, all of which influence how they interpret the video.

The decoding process was conducted by collecting audience responses through an open-ended questionnaire and identifying how participants understood the video's central message. The analysis focused on how audiences interpreted the sequence of visuals, the song lyrics, and the relationship between the two, particularly in communicating motivational messages.

Based on Stuart Hall's Encoding–Decoding theory, audience interpretations in this study were classified into three reading positions: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. This classification was used to determine the extent to which audience interpretations aligned with or diverged from the dominant meanings encoded in the music video.

Audiences occupying the dominant position generally accepted the video's message as intended by its creators. Those in the negotiated position understood the central message but adapted its meaning according to their own personal experiences or specific social contexts. Meanwhile, audiences in the oppositional position recognized the intended message but chose to reject it or interpret it differently from the meaning proposed by the creators.

Therefore, the purpose of the decoding process in this study was not to determine whether audience interpretations were right or wrong, but rather to understand the diversity of ways in which audiences interpret media messages. Specifically, the decoding analysis sought to confirm and examine the range of meanings that audiences derived from Tulus's music video "Satu Kali."

ANALYSIS OF MESSAGE ENCODING IN THE SONG 'SATU KALI' MUSIC VIDEO

Table 1. Analysis table. (2025)

Picture	Lyrics	Description
 Visual 1	Untuk matamu yang basah tak berhenti Untuk tawa yang datang sese kali Di titik gelap dan terang yang berganti Gemuruh angin berbagai penjuru	A woman wearing a black headscarf with a gloomy or pensive expression.
 Visual 2		A young woman with a smiling expression, seen from another person's point of view in front of her (the dark foreground covers part of the frame).
 Visual 3		An airplane flying across the sky, with clouds in the background and the sky colored a purplish-orange.

(Source: Youtube Tulis - Satu Kali)

The lyric "matamu yang basah" refers to tears that have yet to subside. The visual of a woman dressed in black, a color commonly associated with mourning, reinforces the representation of grief and loss. Her downward gaze signifies the emotional burden she continues to carry.

After portraying sorrow, the lyrics shift to moments of laughter that occur only occasionally. The woman's smile symbolizes that happiness can still be experienced, even if only briefly. The camera angle, filmed from behind another person with a dark foreground partially obscuring the frame, creates a sense of intimacy and personal connection.

The visual of an airplane flying across the vast sky serves as a metaphor for life's journey moving forward. The sunset sky, blending warm tones with dark clouds, represents the transition between difficult times (darkness) and hopeful moments (light), as expressed in the lyrics. The phrase "Gemuruh angin berbagai penjuru" is visualized through large clouds, symbolizing the challenges and changes that arise from all directions.

Table 2. Analysis table. (2025)

Picture	Lyrics	Description
 Visual 4	Kecil hanya sekali, Muda hanya sekali, Tua hanya sekali	A little girl is riding a red tricycle in a narrow alley. Ahead of her, a few other children can be seen riding bikes in the same direction.
 Visual 5		A group of boys wearing school uniforms are inside a vehicle. They look crowded together, laughing, and physically interacting with each other
 Visual 6		An adult woman is standing inside a classroom, wearing a white top and dark bottoms. Behind her, there is a chalkboard and a projector screen displaying a presentation slide.

(Source: Youtube Tulus – Satu Kali)

Tulus encodes a message about the awareness of time and the value of life through the lyrics, “Kecil hanya satu kali, Muda hanya satu kali, Tua hanya satu kali”. These lyrics serve as a reminder that every stage of life is unique and cannot be repeated; therefore, each should be lived fully and meaningfully.

The visuals of children playing, riding bicycles, and laughing encode values of freedom, curiosity, and the courage to try without fear of failure. This representation of childhood portrays the early stage of life as a space for exploration that fosters bravery. These values function as a motivational foundation, reminding the audience of the pure and unburdened spirit of living.

On the other hand, the presence of a mother attending classes in a classroom constructs the meaning that learning and self-development do not end at a certain age. This visual encodes the message that education is a lifelong process and can be pursued at every stage of life.

Table 3. Analysis table. (2025)

Picture	Lyrics	Description
 Visual 7	Tidak ada lirik dalam visual ini, hanya suara sylophone dan mainan anak-anak	A vast sea view with the sun behind layers of clouds, the evening light shining on the sky with clouds looking low and scattered.
 Visual 8		Showing ocean waves rolling dynamically towards the beach. The sea surface in the background looks wavy, indicating wind and natural energy constantly in motion.
 Visual 9		Showing a close-up visual that's kind of blurry, with dominant soft brown and green colors.

(Source: Youtube Tulus – Satu Kali)

In this scene, the sound of a xylophone, which is closely associated with children's musical toys, is featured. The xylophone encodes an atmosphere of innocence, simplicity, and joy that is characteristic of childhood.

Representationally, the scene constructs the meaning of the past as an inner experience that continues to exist within an individual's life. The rolling ocean waves represent the ongoing and recurring dynamics of the past, symbolizing life experiences that come and go in succession. Rather than disappearing completely, past events re-emerge through their emotional influence and their role in shaping one's character.

The sunlight partially obscured by clouds symbolizes memories or experiences that have been overshadowed by sadness, conflict, or uncertainty, yet continue to provide guidance for the path ahead. Meanwhile, the blurred and out-of-focus visuals represent the fragmented and incomplete nature of memories from the past.

Table 4. Analysis table. (2025)

Picture	Lyrics	Description
 Visual 10	Hiduplah Hiduplah kini oh-oh, oh-oh	A man and a woman are riding a motorcycle on a residential street. Both are wearing helmets and have cheerful expressions on their faces
 Visual 11	Hiduplah kini	A group of people of different ages wearing graduation gowns are taking a photo together using a cellphone. Their faces show cheerful expressions and their body language is friendly.
 Visual 12		An adult man is running along the beach wearing a blue jacket and casual clothes. The background consists of the sea, wet sand, and a mostly cloudy sky.

(Source: Youtube Tulus – Satu Kali)

Verbally, the lyric “Hiduplah, hiduplah kini” is both repetitive and affirmative, emphasizing the urgency of being aware of the life that is currently being lived. The repetition of the phrase “hiduplah kini” reinforces its reflective and persuasive meaning, serving as an existential reminder for individuals not to become trapped in regrets about the past or anxieties about the future.

The visuals in this scene depict freedom of movement, togetherness, and life achievements, representing the human journey from the past toward the present.

QUESTIONNAIRE DATA ANALYSIS

Table 5. Questionnaire Data (2026)

Meaning Position	Number of Informants	Percentage
Dominant Position	11	50%

Negotiated Position	5	22,7%
Oppositional Position	6	27,3%
Total	22	100%

The findings show that audiences interpreted the music video in diverse ways. These differences can be understood through Stuart Hall's Encoding–Decoding theory, which categorizes audience interpretations into three positions: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. A total of twenty-two (22) informants, consisting of university students from various higher education institutions and academic levels, participated in the study.

The results indicate that eleven (11) informants, or approximately **50%**, were categorized as occupying the **dominant position**. This suggests that the majority of the audience accepted the message conveyed in the video in accordance with the meaning intended by its creator. The informants perceived the message as easy to understand and relevant to their personal experiences and current circumstances.

"It is highly relevant because, in my current situation, I have so many ambitions I want to achieve, starting from academics, gaining experience, planning my career goals, and enjoying my youth. There is so much to do, and there are often moments of exhaustion and failure." (R5) In addition, five (5) informants (**22.7%**) were categorized as occupying the **negotiated position**. Audiences in this group generally understood the main message conveyed by the video but did not accept it entirely. *"I think this message is more relevant to life in general, not just to university students, because the visuals depict people from various backgrounds and age groups."* (R22) Meanwhile, six (6) informants (**27.3%**) were categorized as occupying the **oppositional position**. *"I do not think it is very effective. In my opinion, the best source of motivation and self-improvement for university students is personal determination. This song may provide some motivation, but without genuine intention and effort, it will not lead to self-improvement."* (R8)

Individuals in this position still understood the intended message of the video but chose to reject or disagree with it. This rejection indicates that audience interpretation is strongly influenced by individual backgrounds, personal preferences, and different perspectives.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the encoding and decoding analyses of Tulus's music video "Satu Kali," it can be concluded that this audiovisual work has significant potential as a persuasive medium for self-improvement among university students. The encoding

process demonstrates that the creator successfully constructs a strong dominant meaning centered on mindfulness, the importance of self-reflection, and the essential message of appreciating every unique and irreplaceable stage of life. Through the combination of visuals depicting everyday activities closely related to social reality and the song's affirmative and repetitive lyrics, particularly the phrase "hiduplah kini" ("live in the present"), the music video offers a profound space for emotional reflection.

From the decoding perspective, students' interpretations of the motivational message are dynamic and varied, as they are influenced by individual backgrounds, personal experiences, and perspectives. The reception study based on Stuart Hall's Encoding–Decoding theory confirms that the majority of student informants (50%) occupied the dominant position, indicating that the self-improvement message conveyed in the music video was perceived as highly relevant and easy to understand, particularly amid the academic pressures and periods of exhaustion commonly experienced by university students. Meanwhile, 22.7% of the audience occupied the negotiated position, viewing the message as more universal and applicable to people of all ages rather than being specifically intended for university students. On the other hand, 27.3% of the audience adopted the oppositional position, arguing that motivational media alone cannot effectively foster self-improvement without an individual's internal motivation and genuine effort.

Overall, this study concludes that the music video "Satu Kali" effectively communicates reflective and persuasive messages. However, its transformative impact on students' actual behavior ultimately depends on each individual's personal agency and intrinsic motivation.

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