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Narratives of change: How sungai watch educates on waste management through instagram

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Abstract

Indonesia produces approximately 33.621 million tons of waste annually, with a significant portion polluting rivers and oceans. River pollution has long been a critical environmental issue in the country, drawing sustained criticism from activists, communities, and policymakers. In recent years, the rise of digital communication has transformed the ways these concerns are articulated and mobilized. Social media platforms now serve as dynamic arenas that amplify advocacy efforts, enabling environmental education campaigns, such as those on waste management, to reach broader and more diverse audiences. Guided by the concept of the "narrative of change" in social change communication, this study examines how Sungai Watch constructs and delivers such narratives through educational videos on Instagram, linking environmental issues with calls for behavioral change. Using a qualitative narrative analysis, the study draws on digital observation of the @sungaiwatch account and documentation of six featured videos: Sachets, Plastic Pollution, Easily Cut Down on Single-Use Plastics, Diapers, Trash-Free Muncar Beach, and Empowering the Next Generation. Findings show that each video follows a narrative structure comprising an introduction, conflict, climax, and resolution, and features diverse characters, including co-founder Gary Bencheghib, local communities, and young people. The moral messages consistently emphasize community collaboration, environmental education, and specific behavioral changes, such as reducing single-use plastics, practicing proper waste disposal, and participating in community clean-up activities. Narratives grounded in real action and practical solutions, presented in visually engaging formats, were observed to enhance audience awareness and encourage active engagement with waste management issues. The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of digital environmental communication by illustrating how social media narratives can function as meaningful educational tools. By delivering relatable messages, fostering audience reflection, and motivating pro-environmental actions, such narratives provide strategic insights for practitioners, academics, and organizations seeking to design behavior change campaigns addressing complex environmental challenges.

Keywords: instagram; narratives; sosial change; sungai watch; waste

Introduction

Social change is a phenomenon involving transformations in social structures, norms, and values within society. Communication plays a central role in driving and facilitating these transformations, as social change agents, whether individuals or groups, employ diverse strategies to influence public opinion, shape agendas, and mobilize collective action (Obregón & Tufte, 2017). With the advancement of information technology and social media, these communication methods have evolved into new, participatory platforms for interaction and rapid information dissemination (Eriksen et al., 2005). Among them, Instagram has become a prominent medium for environmental education, leveraging its visual storytelling features to reach younger, digitally active audiences (Goesda et al., 2022; Ardianti et al., 2022; Karim & Yulianita, 2021).

Social change agents play a pivotal role in facilitating societal transformation through the deployment of diverse communication strategies. Communication serves as a central instrument for disseminating ideas, shaping public opinion, and mobilizing collective action (Irwan & Indraddin, 2016). While communication holds considerable potential to support social change, significant challenges persist in understanding how the techniques and strategies adopted by social change agents can achieve effectiveness across varied and dynamic contexts (Fronzetti Colladon & Grippa, 2025). Among the pressing global issues that demand strategic intervention from social change agents, the

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problem of waste management stands out as a critical challenge requiring innovative and sustainable approaches to foster long-term transformation.

In Indonesia, the waste management problem remains a persistent challenge. Data from the National Waste Management Information System (SIPSN) of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) indicate that, as of January 26, 2025, the total waste volume reported from 227 districts and cities across the country reached 19.6 million tons. Of this total, 58.52%—equivalent to 11.5 million tons—had been processed, while 41.48% or 8.1 million tons remained unmanaged (KLH, 2024). The inability to effectively manage a substantial portion of the country's waste underscores systemic gaps in waste management capacity, particularly at the local government level. Beyond administrative shortcomings, the consequences of inadequate waste management extend to public health risks and environmental degradation, as unprocessed waste has the potential to contaminate soil, water, and air.

In this context, communication serves as a critical instrument for raising public awareness about the adverse impacts of inadequate waste management and for fostering public participation in sustainable waste practices (Dwivayani & Almalita, 2022). In contrast to legal regulations or technical innovations that often operate in a top-down manner, communication functions as a social process that facilitates dialogue, co-learning, and collective sense-making among stakeholders (Servaes, 1999; Obregón & Tufte, 2017). Through strategic messaging, visual storytelling, and participatory media such as social platforms, communication not only disseminates information but also mobilizes communities to engage with environmental issues and take collective action (Bandura, 2001; Green & Brock, 2014). Empirical studies demonstrate that campaigns rooted in narrative structures and local cultural values are more effective in influencing behaviors and shifting social norms than purely technical instructions (Ardianti et al., 2022; Nabilah et al., 2022). Within the domain of waste management, therefore, communication operates as a catalyst for translating awareness into tangible action, bridging the gap between knowledge and sustained behavioral change.

For instance, social change agents—including environmental communities and non-governmental organizations—are increasingly employing social media—based education campaigns to expand audience reach, shape public opinion, and stimulate collective action through initiatives such as environmental clean-ups, recycling programs, and the reduction of single-use plastic consumption. These campaigns capitalize on the interactive and visual affordances of platforms like Instagram, which facilitate real-time engagement and enable storytelling that resonates with diverse user groups (Leaver et al., 2020; Shabrina et al., 2023). Social media supports the formation of networked publics and mobilizes individuals around shared concerns, transforming passive audiences into active participants in environmental advocacy (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Obregón & Tufte, 2017). Empirical evidence indicates that Instagram-based campaigns—such as those conducted by @zerowaste.id_official and @siapdarling—can effectively enhance environmental awareness and encourage pro-environmental behavior, particularly among younger demographics (Goesda et al., 2022; Nabilah et al., 2022). By leveraging storytelling formats such as short videos, compelling visuals, and thematic hashtags, social change agents cultivate a sense of collective identity and shared responsibility for advancing environmental sustainability.

In order to better understand how narrative-based digital communication can drive environmental awareness and behavioral change, this study focuses on the case of Sungai Watch, an Indonesian environmental organization known for its initiatives in river waste management. To understand how narrative-based digital communication can foster environmental awareness and behavioral change, this study examines the case of Sungai Watch for several empirical reasons. Founded in 2020 by the Bencheghib brothers, Sungai Watch implements river barrier installations, waste collection, and processing operations that are documented on its official platforms (Watch, 2025b). Media reports provide measurable records of their activities, for instance, The Guardian reported that by early 2024 the organization had installed 268 barriers and collected over 1.7 million kilograms of waste, demonstrating tangible field outcomes that can be empirically verified (Syakriah, 2024). Furthermore, their operational practices, including mapping pollution sources, installing and monitoring barriers, conducting daily waste collection, sorting by material category, and recording data for advocacy, illustrate a combination of on-the-ground action and systematic documentation. This dual approach yields a robust dataset for communication analysis (Watch, 2025a). Equally



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important, the organization maintains a rich digital corpus through its active Instagram account (@sungaiwatch), producing educational and documentary videos with significant audience reach. This content provides multimodal analytical material, including video narratives, captions, and audience interactions. Coverage by international outlets such as Forbes (Forbes, 2025) and TriplePundit (Triplepundit, 2023) further supports the selection of this case, not as a promotional endorsement, but due to the availability of verifiable field evidence, systematic documentation practices, and diverse communication outputs that enable an in-depth examination of how narratives of change are constructed and disseminated.

Sungai Watch integrates on-the-ground river clean-up initiatives with the strategic use of digital platforms to amplify its environmental advocacy. Through its Instagram account (@sungaiwatch), the organization disseminates not only visual documentation of its activities but also systematically crafted educational messages that underscore environmental conservation, the reduction of single-use plastics, and the adoption of sustainable practices. These posts combine visual storytelling with explicit calls to action, reflecting a deliberate communication strategy aimed at fostering audience engagement and mobilizing public participation. Such practices correspond directly to the focus of this study, which examines how narrative-based communication within digital environments can promote environmental awareness and stimulate community involvement.

Previous research on Instagram as a communication medium for environmental change has been widely conducted by prior scholars (Putra & Rocmaniah, 2024) (Zulkifli & Abd Manaf, 2024) (Hartika et al., 2022) (Nabilah et al., 2022) (Shafa Meidina et al., 2022) (Karim & Yulianita, 2021) (Pramana et al., 2021) (Ardianti et al., 2022) (Noviyanti et al., 2022) (Junaidi & Syaifurahman, 2022) (Ramjaun, 2021) (Goesda et al., 2022) (Tarigan et al., 2021). Most of these studies emphasize the effectiveness of using Instagram as a campaign tool for environmental change and the formation of hybrid activism, which combines collective and connective action.

However, much of the existing scholarship has concentrated on campaign strategies and audience engagement metrics, with comparatively less emphasis on how narrative structures within Instagram content function as instruments for environmental education and behavior change. Limited scholarly attention has been given to the ways in which environmental actors construct educational narratives that integrate moral messaging, character-driven storytelling, and contextually grounded visuals to cultivate pro-environmental values. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the narrative elements, such as plot, character, setting, and moral messaging, embedded in educational videos posted by @sungaiwatch.

Adopting a narrative communication perspective, the study analyzes how these elements are employed to convey waste management issues, foster environmental awareness, and encourage proenvironmental behaviors. By focusing on both the structural and thematic dimensions of the narratives, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how digital storytelling on Instagram operates as a medium for environmental learning and social persuasion. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on digital environmental communication, offering insights into the potential of social media platforms to cultivate collective awareness and motivate community-based environmental action.

Narrative, understood as the use of stories to convey the lived experiences of individuals or groups, offers a valuable lens for examining the role of communication in processes of social change (Riessman, 2007). Narrative analysis enables researchers to investigate how social change agents construct and disseminate their stories, as well as how these narratives shape public understanding and influence responses to social issues (Polkinghorne, 1995). Through this approach, scholars can gain in-depth insights into the subjective experiences of social change agents, elucidating how individuals or groups develop and circulate stories designed to motivate and inspire collective action (Bruner, 1991). Such narratives often embody the values, identities, and objectives of the change agents, while also reflecting the communication strategies employed to effectively engage their target audiences.

Within narrative analysis, several core parameters are typically examined to understand how stories are structured and communicated. These include: (1) Characters: the individuals or entities involved in the narrative and the roles they assume (e.g., hero, victim, or antagonist); (2) Plot: the



sequence of events or progression of the storyline that provides coherence and direction; (3) Setting: the temporal and spatial context in which the narrative unfolds; (4) Conflict or problem: the central challenge or issue that drives the narrative and must be addressed or resolved; and (5) Moral or message: the underlying lesson, value, or normative position conveyed through the story (Fisher, 1984; Labov, 1972; Czarniawska, 2004).

This study is grounded in Fisher's Narrative Paradigm, which posits that human communication is most persuasive when presented as coherent and value-driven stories (Fisher, 1987), and is further informed by Social Change Communication Theory (Obregón & Tufte, 2017), which emphasizes participatory, culturally relevant messaging to inspire collective action. These theoretical frameworks provide the analytical lens for examining how narratives function within digital environmental communication.

Furthermore, narrative analysis can illuminate how stories interact with broader social and cultural contexts, shaping the acceptance and implementation of social change initiatives (Mishler, 1986). In this study, the identified narrative parameters are applied to examine how environmental actors, such as @sungaiwatch, construct educational narratives on Instagram to foster environmental awareness and promote behavioral change in waste management practices.

Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to analyze the narrative structures embedded within content posted on the @sungaiwatch Instagram account as part of its efforts to raise public awareness of environmental issues and encourage pro-environmental behaviors. Rather than merely disseminating information, the account employs visual storytelling, explanations of ecological processes, and explicit calls to action that reflect pedagogical intentions, aiming to enhance followers' understanding of environmental challenges and to motivate their active participation in sustainable solutions.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine how environmental narratives are constructed by Sungai Watch on Instagram, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument for interpreting visual and textual content (Lune & Berg, 2017). Data were collected through digital observation and documentation.

Digital observation, conducted on the official @sungaiwatch Instagram account from January to August 2024, followed Kozinets (2019); Flick (2018); and Murthy (2008) in systematically reviewing all video content posted during the period. Each post's metadata (date, caption, hashtags, engagement metrics) and narrative features (characters, plot sequence, moral messaging) were recorded. Videos were selected if they: (1) were video posts; (2) explicitly addressed environmental education, particularly waste management; and (3) used storytelling techniques, including character-driven narratives, visual plotlines, and calls to action. Six videos met these criteria: Sachets, Plastic Pollution, Easily Cut Down on Single-Use Plastics, Diapers, Trash-Free Muncar Beach, and Empowering the Next Generation.

Table 1. Title of Educational @sungaiwatch Content

No.	Content Title	Upload Time
1.	Sachets	February 17, 2024
2.	Plastic Pollution	March 8, 2024
3.	Easily cut down on single use plastic	June 21, 2024
4	Diapers	August 6, 2024
5.	Trash-free Muncar Beach	August 16, 2024
6.	Empowering the Next Generation	August 19, 2024

The table above displays six educational video titles related to environmental issues available on the @sungaiwatch Instagram account. These six titles were selected because they meet the criteria set by the researcher, namely educational video content utilizing storytelling techniques.

Documentation, as defined by Creswell & Creswell (2018), refers to the use of textual or visual records in qualitative analysis. Documentation involved extracting video transcripts, captions, and on-screen text, which were analyzed using four narrative elements: characters, plot, setting, and



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moral message. While no interviews or surveys were conducted, audience engagement patterns (comments, shares, and tagged reposts) were reviewed to provide supplementary insights for limited data triangulation.

Results and Discussion

Narrative as an Environmental Education Tool

Character: Becoming the Representation of Social Change Agents

Scholes et al. (2006) define character as a narrative element that serves as an agent within the story, advancing the plot through actions, decisions, and interactions. Characters add a human dimension to narratives, enabling audiences to establish emotional connections and engage more deeply with the message. Table 2 presents the principal characters featured in the six videos produced by Sungai Watch, each centered on plastic waste education and waste management advocacy.

In the video Sachet, the central character is Sam Bencheghib, Co-founder of Sungai Watch, who assumes the role of protagonist by articulating the environmental impact of single-use plastic sachets and advocating for alternatives. In Plastic Pollution, the primary character is Ani, a supervisor at Sungai Watch, who emerges as a key figure in confronting the challenges of plastic waste and underscoring the necessity of behavioral change to reduce plastic consumption.

Table 2. Characters in @sungaiwatch Environmental Education Videos

Video Title	Sachets	Plastic Pollution	Easily cut down on single use plastik	Diapers	Trash-free Muncar Beach	Empowering the Next Generation
Character	Sam Bencheghib (Co-founder Sungai Watch).	Ani (supervisor at Sungai Watch)	Marcellinus Indra (filmmaker Sungai Watch)	Giri, cleanup liaison Sungai Watch	Gary Bencheghib (Co-founder of Sungai Watch) and a grandmother of a local resident of Muncar Beach	Gary Bencheghib (Co-founder of Sungai Watch) and local children

Source: Author

In the video Easily Cut Down on Single-Use Plastics, the featured character is Marcellinus Indra, a filmmaker collaborating with Sungai Watch. In this narrative, Indra assumes the role of an advocate, encouraging the public to reduce their reliance on single-use plastics by demonstrating more environmentally sustainable alternatives. In Diapers, the central character is Giri, who highlights the specific challenges Sungai Watch faces in addressing diaper waste in Indonesia's rivers.

In Trash-Free Muncar Beach, Gary Bencheghib takes on the leading role, engaging directly with the local community to address waste-related issues and emphasize the importance of proper waste management practices along Muncar Beach. Finally, in Empowering the Next Generation, the main characters are Gary Bencheghib, Co-founder of Sungai Watch, and local children. In this video, Gary collaborates with the children to foster awareness about reducing plastic usage and to educate them on the environmental consequences of plastic waste.

The principal characters in these educational videos, featured on the Instagram account @sungaiwatch, serve as pivotal narrative drivers, each bringing distinct qualities to the storytelling. Gary Bencheghib, in particular, is frequently portrayed as an inspirational leader who guides both local communities and broader audiences in understanding the environmental impacts of waste. As noted by Lundgren & McMakin (2018), the presence of a credible authority figure or trusted character can significantly enhance the persuasiveness and credibility of a message. Gary's role extends beyond the transmission of information; he functions as a social change agent, instilling a sense of urgency and motivating proactive engagement with environmental issues.



Gary's positioning as both a communicator and a transformative leader is instrumental in ensuring that the campaign's messages resonate with diverse audiences. His relatability and credibility position him as a persuasive figure who not only encourages action but also fosters meaningful participation. By combining authority with direct, personal engagement in community contexts, Gary enhances the authenticity of the campaign, thereby motivating others to actively contribute to efforts aimed at reducing plastic waste and promoting environmental sustainability. This dual role underscores the significance of leadership in advancing social and environmental change, illustrating how influential figures can shape public opinion and mobilize collective action.

In the video Trash-Free Muncar Beach, Gary plays a pivotal role in educating local communities about the importance of effective waste management. He demonstrates empathy toward the community's circumstances—particularly their limited access to proper waste management facilities—while simultaneously raising awareness about feasible alternative solutions. This communicative approach aligns with the principles of sustainable development communication, which emphasize the centrality of local participation in problem-solving processes (Servaes, 1999). By creating a dialogic space between the organization and the community, Gary facilitates the cocreation of collaborative solutions, thereby reinforcing community ownership of environmental initiatives.

Sam Bencheghib, as a central figure in the organization, strategically leverages his authority and credibility as Co-founder of Sungai Watch to effectively capture audience attention. He employs a persuasive communication style that underscores the urgency of addressing the plastic sachet pollution prevalent in Indonesia's rivers. Sam's role exemplifies transformational leadership within the environmental movement, wherein he not only disseminates knowledge but also inspires tangible action. This approach aligns with Lee & Kotler (2011), perspective, which highlights the critical role of authoritative figures in social change campaigns to enhance message credibility and audience acceptance.

By assuming a visible leadership position, Sam's communication extends beyond the provision of information; it actively motivates audiences to assume responsibility and participate in tackling the environmental challenges associated with single-use plastic packaging. His persuasive narrative compels audiences to critically reflect on their consumption habits and fosters a sense of shared responsibility for addressing the plastic waste crisis. Such leadership is essential for mobilizing large-scale social change, as it facilitates the transition from passive awareness to active engagement, a shift that is fundamental to the success of environmental campaigns such as those spearheaded by Sungai Watch.

Ani serves as an environmental practitioner who directly confronts the challenges of plastic waste in rivers, embodying a local figure with a deep understanding of the socio-environmental context. As noted by Singhal & Rogers (2012), the inclusion of local characters in social change narratives can enhance the relevance and resonance of messages, as such figures are perceived to be closely aligned with the lived realities of the community. Ani's role provides a concrete example of how women can serve as influential agents of environmental change.

Her involvement in the narrative illustrates the pivotal role of local actors, particularly women, in addressing environmental issues. By presenting both the challenges and potential solutions from a grounded, community-based perspective, Ani strengthens the authenticity and relatability of the message. This approach aligns with the concept of empowerment, demonstrating how individuals within a community, especially those who are often marginalized, can initiate and sustain meaningful change. Ani's participation not only informs but also inspires others, particularly women, to engage actively in environmental initiatives, thereby fostering a shared sense of responsibility and local agency in advancing environmental sustainability.

Marcellinus Indra assumes the role of a practical educator, demonstrating accessible and straightforward methods for reducing single-use plastics. His character communicates the message through a relatable, everyday approach, employing dialogue that encourages the audience to engage in critical self-reflection. This method aligns with Freire (2000) perspective, which underscores the importance of dialogue and critical consciousness in fostering social awareness. Indra exemplifies how seemingly small lifestyle adjustments can collectively contribute to significant environmental outcomes.



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By incorporating relatable language and concrete examples, he invites audiences to examine their own behaviors and consider the cumulative effects of those behaviors on the environment. This approach not only imparts knowledge but also fosters a sense of personal responsibility, motivating individuals to make deliberate, environmentally conscious choices. Indra's role effectively empowers audiences to comprehend the broader implications of their everyday actions, thereby promoting active engagement in the environmental movement. His character underscores the transformative potential of individual actions, reinforcing the principle that even minor behavioral shifts, when aggregated, can produce substantial collective impact.

Giri serves a pivotal role as an intermediary between the organization and its audience, presenting the operational dimensions of Sungai Watch's efforts to address diaper waste. His portrayal captures the tangible challenges encountered in the field, including microplastic pollution resulting from improperly disposed diapers, and underscores the urgency of confronting this environmental threat. Consistent with Bandura (2001), concept of "social models," Giri exemplifies how individual actors can inspire others by demonstrating concrete actions to address pressing environmental problems.

His narrative not only conveys the gravity of diaper-related pollution but also delineates practical steps for its mitigation, thereby illustrating how an organization can effect meaningful change within local communities. By modeling proactive, solutions-oriented behavior, Giri encourages audiences to emulate his example, reinforcing the idea that effective environmental action requires both awareness and sustained, hands-on engagement. In this capacity, his role underscores the critical importance of bridging strategic communication with operational practice in order to mobilize public participation in environmental initiatives.

Additionally, the inclusion of local characters, such as children in Banyuwangi or residents of Muncar Beach, serves to illustrate the lived realities of communities directly affected by environmental degradation. As Chatman (1978) notes, characters in narratives function as vehicles through which audiences can comprehend social realities by engaging with relatable experiences. The presence of these local actors imbues the narrative with a heightened sense of authenticity, enabling audiences to form a stronger emotional and cognitive connection to the environmental issues portrayed. By anchoring the storyline in the specific socio-cultural and ecological contexts of affected communities, the message of environmental responsibility becomes more immediate, tangible, and personally relevant, thereby motivating audiences to critically reflect on, and potentially modify, their own behaviors in relation to environmental sustainability.

Rahmawati et al. (2024) found that change agents with celebrity backgrounds on Instagram can enhance environmental awareness among their followers, often employing family-oriented narratives to promote eco-friendly practices. Diverging from this perspective, the findings of the present study indicate that the characters featured in the six videos posted by the Instagram account @sungaiwatch fulfill distinct and complementary roles in advancing the narrative of waste education. These characters embody multiple dimensions of environmental change agency, including leadership (Sam and Gary), practical education (Indra), local engagement (Ani), and the empowerment of the younger generation (local children). This multi-character approach aligns with scholarship on social change communication, which underscores the strategic value of diversifying characters to appeal to varied audience segments and to address different facets of a social issue.

Setting: Relevant Local Context

The setting in the environmental education videos posted by @sungaiwatch constitutes a critical narrative element that shapes the effectiveness and relevance of the conveyed message. Within the scope of this study, the setting is analyzed in relation to its capacity to contextualize and reinforce the intended environmental education themes. By situating the narrative in specific geographical and socio-cultural contexts, the setting not only provides visual authenticity but also enhances audience engagement and comprehension of the environmental issues presented.

Table 3. Setting in @sungaiwatch Environmental Education Video



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Video Title	Sachets	Plastic Pollution	Easily cut down on single use plastik	Diapers	Trash-free Muncar Beach	Empowering the Next Generation
Setting	Beaches, rivers, Sungai Watch waste treatment sites, and minimarkets	The Watch River Office, a river polluted with plastic waste, and a traditional market	Sungai Watch office, highways, baso stalls and young coconut ice stalls	River	Muncar Beach	Residential areas near the beach in the Banyuwangi area

Source: Author

Table 3 presents the settings of the six environmental education videos posted on the Instagram account @sungaiwatch. The setting serves as a critical narrative component that supports and strengthens the conveyed message, as it provides a strong visual context to underscore the urgency and relevance of environmental issues.

In the video Sachet, the primary setting is a coastal area, depicted as the main location for sachet waste clean-up activities. The narrative also includes scenes from a waste processing facility operated by the Sungai Watch team. This combination of settings illustrates the real conditions of plastic pollution in coastal zones, which often function as the ultimate dumping grounds for waste originating from both terrestrial and marine sources.

In Plastic Pollution, the setting alternates between the Sungai Watch office and a river heavily contaminated with plastic debris. The office functions as the organization's operational hub, symbolizing the coordination and strategic planning behind their environmental initiatives. In contrast, the polluted river offers a stark visual representation of the detrimental effects of plastic waste on aquatic ecosystems, reinforcing the urgency of intervention and waste reduction efforts.

In Easily Cut Down on Single-Use Plastic, the setting comprises the Sungai Watch office, a highway, and a traditional market. These locations represent everyday community environments and visually demonstrate the link between single-use plastic consumption and the waste it generates. The inclusion of the traditional market and the highway underscores the need for behavioral change within public spaces where plastic use is prevalent, highlighting the direct connection between individual consumption patterns and broader environmental impacts.

In Diapers, the setting is a river section heavily polluted with discarded diapers. This environment reflects the specific and pressing challenges associated with managing diaper waste, which is frequently disposed of irresponsibly into waterways. The visual portrayal of the contaminated river offers a stark and tangible illustration of the severe environmental consequences of such practices, reinforcing the urgency for targeted waste management interventions and community education.

In Trash-Free Muncar Beach, the primary setting is Muncar Beach, a coastal area in Indonesia selected to underscore the problem of shoreline pollution resulting from inadequately managed domestic waste. The beach functions as a symbolic representation of the urgency for sustainable waste management practices, particularly in vulnerable coastal regions where the ecological impact of pollution is highly visible.

In Empowering the Next Generation, the setting shifts to a residential neighborhood near the coast in Banyuwangi. This location depicts the daily lives of local communities residing in proximity to the shoreline, illustrating the ways in which everyday activities directly influence coastal environmental conditions. The use of a residential backdrop emphasizes the importance of localized, community-level environmental education and the necessity of fostering environmentally responsible behavior among those living in ecologically sensitive areas.

Across videos such as Sachets, Plastic Pollution, and Trash-Free Muncar Beach, beaches and rivers serve as primary locations. These natural environments visually convey the tangible effects of plastic waste accumulation, functioning as both symbolic and empirical evidence of environmental degradation. As critical ecosystems, rivers and coastal areas often become the ultimate repositories for waste, whether through direct disposal or indirect runoff. This visual framing is intentionally designed to elicit emotional engagement from viewers by confronting them with the visible realities



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of the pollution crisis. Consistent with Hartika et al. (2022), such portrayals have the potential to heighten environmental awareness by making explicit the causal link between human behavior and ecological harm.

Videos such as Empowering the Next Generation and Trash-Free Muncar Beach depict coastal community settlements as their primary setting. This choice of location illustrates the direct interaction between local communities and waste, highlighting the socio-environmental challenges these communities face in managing waste effectively. The depiction of residential areas provides a critical social context, underscoring that environmental problems are inherently intertwined with social dimensions rather than being purely ecological concerns. This observation aligns with Ojala & Bengtsson (2018) argument that representing local communities within environmental narratives can foster a sense of collective responsibility and stimulate the development of community-driven solutions.

Similarly, videos such as Plastic Pollution and Easily Cut Down on Single-Use Plastic feature Sungai Watch's operational facilities, including its office, as central settings. These locations serve to illustrate the organization's systematic approach to waste collection, sorting, and processing, thereby offering viewers an inside perspective on the operational side of environmental activism. The professional and organized nature of these settings enhances the perceived credibility of the message, as suggested by Mele (2011), who emphasizes that showcasing an organization's facilities in educational content can strengthen the narrative by reinforcing the importance of structured and coordinated waste management systems.

The traditional market setting featured in the video Easily Cut Down on Single-Use Plastic symbolizes the pervasive use of single-use plastics in the daily activities of Indonesian society. This setting situates the issue of plastic consumption within the framework of local cultural practices, thereby enhancing the contextual relevance of the narrative for domestic audiences. By incorporating familiar and culturally embedded locations into environmental education content, the narrative fosters a stronger emotional resonance with viewers, allowing them to relate the issue to their own lived experiences. As demonstrated by Ayu et al. (2023), visual depictions of everyday life in social media content are effective in delivering environmental awareness messages and increasing audiences' emotional engagement. In this way, the traditional market setting not only contextualizes the environmental problem but also strengthens the persuasive power of the narrative by connecting it to recognizable aspects of community life.

The settings used in the videos posted by @sungaiwatch serve not only as visual backdrops but as integral narrative elements that contextualize the specific environmental issues addressed. Each video employs a setting that corresponds directly to the type of waste being discussed—such as plastic waste, diapers, or sachets—thereby reinforcing the thematic focus of the narrative. For instance, the video Diapers features a river heavily polluted with discarded diapers, visually demonstrating the tangible consequences of improper waste disposal practices. By aligning the setting with the specific environmental problem, the narrative enhances viewers' comprehension of the link between human behavior and its ecological impact. As noted by Ayu et al. (2023), the strategic use of relevant settings can strengthen audience engagement and facilitate a deeper understanding of environmental issues by situating them within concrete, observable contexts.

The settings in the analyzed videos also incorporate the presence of children, as exemplified in Empowering the Next Generation, which depicts children from a coastal village in Banyuwangi engaging in discussions and participating in clean-up activities. This choice of setting underscores the importance of introducing environmental education at an early age and highlights the role of the younger generation as future stewards of the environment. This finding aligns with Rahman (2024) who emphasizes that settings involving youth can serve as an effective strategy for fostering long-term environmental awareness.

Overall, the settings in @sungaiwatch's videos function not merely as visual backgrounds but as narrative devices that reinforce environmental education messages. By selecting locations such as beaches, rivers, traditional markets, and residential areas, the videos offer an authentic portrayal of the environmental crisis while presenting contextually relevant solutions. This approach reflects



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principles from environmental communication theory, which stress the role of setting in strengthening narrative impact and enhancing audience engagement (Mele, 2011).

Plot: Narrative Structure to Build Awareness

The plots in these videos generally adhere to a classic narrative structure comprising an introduction, conflict and climax, and resolution. Each video posted on the @sungaiwatch Instagram account employs this structure to deliver environmental education messages effectively, highlighting specific issues and offering contextually relevant solutions.

Table	4. F	lot	in (@sungaiwatc	h]	Environmental	Ec	lucation	Video
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Source : Author

In the video Sachet, the introduction features Sam Bencheghib, Co-founder of Sungai Watch, presenting a visual of a beach heavily littered with sachet waste. The conflict and climax emerge as Sam underscores that sachets are among the most difficult forms of plastic waste to recycle, posing a significant obstacle to environmental cleanup efforts. The resolution is articulated through a call to



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action, in which Sam and Sungai Watch urge the public to actively reduce their consumption of plastic

In the video Plastic Pollution, the introduction features Aini, a supervisor at Sungai Watch, explaining the extent of plastic pollution in the Winong River. The conflict and climax are framed around the pervasive challenge of single-use plastic, which remains difficult to address due to high consumption levels within the community. The resolution highlights a cleanup initiative and public education efforts aimed at encouraging the reduction of single-use plastic consumption.

In the video Easily Cut Down on Single-Use Plastic, the introduction features Marcellinus Indra, a filmmaker at Sungai Watch, presenting a campaign aimed at reducing the use of single-use plastics. The conflict and climax emphasize the widespread reliance on items such as plastic bags and straws, which frequently end up as environmental waste. The resolution provides practical, actionable solutions, including bringing reusable shopping bags and using refillable water bottles.

In the video Diapers, the introduction opens with footage of a river heavily polluted by discarded diapers. The conflict and climax center on the significant environmental and water pollution caused by improper diaper disposal. The resolution depicts Sungai Watch advocating an educational approach to raise public awareness on the importance of proper diaper waste management.

In the video Trash-Free Muncar Beach, the introduction begins with an interview between Gary Bencheghib and local residents discussing the prevalent practice of waste disposal at Muncar Beach. The conflict and climax highlight the community's habit of discarding and even burning waste on the beach, underscoring the absence of an adequate waste management system. The resolution advocates for the establishment of a more effective and sustainable waste management system in the Muncar area.

In the video Empowering the Next Generation, the introduction features Gary Bencheghib engaging with local children in Banyuwangi. The conflict and climax reveal that these children have limited alternatives to single-use plastics, which contribute to environmental degradation. Gary responds by providing direct environmental education, encouraging the adoption of eco-friendly practices such as carrying reusable water bottles, and fostering awareness of the importance of maintaining a clean environment.

These videos illustrate Sungai Watch's consistent application of a narrative plot that centers on specific environmental issues. By integrating elements of conflict, the narratives effectively capture the audience's attention toward pressing problems, while the resolutions—often presented as practical solutions and educational messages—serve to encourage active participation in addressing these challenges. This approach is consistent with narrative theory, which underscores the role of conflict as a catalyst for emotional engagement (Chatman, 1978).

Each video posted by @sungaiwatch follows a narrative framework comprising an introduction, a conflict and climax, and a resolution. This structure not only facilitates clear message delivery but also enhances the audience's comprehension of environmental issues, particularly those related to waste management. Moreover, it inspires viewers to engage in pro-environmental actions. As emphasized by Chatman (1978), an effective narrative relies on emotional engagement, which is cultivated through relevant conflicts and resolutions that offer actionable solutions.

The introductions in these videos function as strategic entry points to focus the audience's attention on specific environmental issues. For instance, in the video Sachets, the narrative opens with a striking visual of a beach littered with sachet waste, immediately drawing attention to a form of plastic pollution that is often overlooked. Similarly, Trash-Free Muncar Beach begins with interviews with local residents, providing contextual insight into the community's habitual disposal of waste along the shoreline. An effective environmental narrative captures the audience's attention from the outset by establishing a clear connection between local contexts and broader global issues. As argued by Betsill & Bulkeley (2007), local initiatives that emerge in response to global environmental challenges demonstrate that integrating both local and global scales can enhance the effectiveness of environmental problem-solving.

Conflict emerges as a central narrative element across all videos, functioning to underscore the urgency of the environmental issues being addressed. Each conflict spotlights a specific challenge. For instance, in Plastic Pollution, the narrative centers on the contamination of the Winong River,



which not only disrupts the aquatic ecosystem but also reflects persistent community practices rooted in inadequate environmental awareness. Similarly, Diapers focuses on the detrimental impact of used diaper waste on water quality, presenting a vivid example of how improper disposal practices exacerbate pollution. As Chatman (1978), suggests, concrete and relatable conflict narratives enhance audience comprehension of environmental issues by increasing their personal relevance.

The resolutions offered in these videos provide actionable solutions that audiences can implement in their daily lives. For example, in Empowering the Next Generation, children receive direct education on replacing single-use plastics with tumblers, fostering early behavioral change. In Trash-Free Muncar Beach, the emphasis is placed on the establishment of effective waste management systems to prevent marine littering. Research by Ramadhan & Rochmaniah (2023) indicates that solution-oriented resolutions reinforce narrative impact by instilling a sense of efficacy in the audience, thereby motivating them to contribute to environmental change.

The videos posted on @sungaiwatch strategically integrate narrative plot structures with environmental education objectives. The consistent application of a three-part structure, introduction, conflict, and resolution, facilitates audience comprehension, strengthens emotional engagement, and fosters environmental awareness. This finding aligns with Green & Brock (2014) assertion that narratives featuring clearly articulated conflicts and corresponding solutions are more likely to motivate audiences to adopt pro-environmental behaviors.

Moreover, these videos embed local cultural contexts to enhance the relevance and resonance of their messages for Indonesian audiences. For instance, in Empowering the Next Generation, Gary Bencheghib adopts a direct communication style and uses language that is accessible to children in Banyuwangi. This approach reflects Amelia (2023) perspective that environmental narratives achieve greater effectiveness when they are grounded in local cultural values, as such contextualization increases both audience relatability and message persuasiveness.

Moral Message: Aiming for Real Action

Each video embeds a clear moral message, emphasizing themes such as the importance of environmental education for younger generations and the urgency of reducing single-use plastic consumption. These messages are consistent with Ajzen (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, which posits that behavioral change is shaped by an individual's intention, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. By presenting actionable recommendations—such as bringing reusable shopping bags or practicing proper waste disposal—the videos not only increase audience awareness but also strengthen behavioral intentions, thereby fostering the adoption of pro-environmental practices.

Table 5. Moral Message in @sungaiwatch Environmental Education Video

Video Title	Sachets	Plastic Pollution	Easily cut down on single use plastik	Diapers	Trash-free Muncar Beach	Empowering the Next Generation	
Moral Message	Brands must be responsible in choosing packaging materials that are more environmentally friendly, and consumers need to be wiser in choosing products. This message is conveyed through the delivery of information about the negative impact	The importance of reducing the use of plastic and keeping the environment clean starts with oneself and requires collective action. This message was conveyed through Ani's personal experience	Every individual has a responsibility to protect the environment by reducing the use of single-use plastics. With awareness, small actions, education, and collaboration, society can contribute to reducing plastic pollution and creating a	Maintaining the cleanliness of the environment, especially rivers, is a shared responsibility. By understanding the adverse effects of disposable diapers, not throwing them into rivers, and raising public awareness, we can reduce	The importance of collective awareness and shared responsibility in managing waste, especially in coastal areas. This video raises the problem of litter dumping, especially on Muncar beach, which not only	Protecting the environment is a shared responsibility that starts from small actions and education. The younger generation plays an important role in change, but they need guidance and inspiration from previous generations to understand the importance of	



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call to action.	and a direct	more	maintain	environment	the earth.
	invitation to	sustainable	healthy	but also has an	Collaboration,
	the audience	environment.	ecosystems for	impact on the	education, and
	to	This video also	future	quality of life	concrete action
	participate	inspires	generations.	of the	are key to
	in efforts to	viewers to	This video	surrounding	addressing
	reduce	initiate changes	inspires simple	community.	environmental
	plastic	from	actions that can		challenges,
	waste.	themselves.	bring about big		such as plastic
			change.		waste, for a
			-		better future.

Source : Author

In the video Sachet, the central moral message underscores the imperative of corporate responsibility in managing the sachet waste generated by brands. It advocates for more sustainable product design, particularly aimed at mitigating the environmental impact of single-use plastics. Complementing this, the video calls for heightened individual awareness to support collective solutions for sachet waste management. In Plastic Pollution, the narrative focuses on promoting prudent plastic use. The educational content encourages communities to be more mindful of the environmental consequences of plastic, particularly its detrimental effects on river ecosystems. Furthermore, it highlights the necessity of multi-stakeholder collaboration, encompassing communities, educational institutions, and government bodies, to achieve meaningful progress in addressing plastic pollution.

In Easily Cut Down on Single-Use Plastics, the moral message emphasizes behavioral change through the reduction of single-use plastic consumption in everyday life. By presenting practical measures, such as using refillable tumblers, the video illustrates how small, consistent lifestyle adjustments can yield significant positive environmental outcomes. Meanwhile, Diapers conveys the urgency of addressing the ecological hazards posed by disposable diapers, particularly their impact on water quality and aquatic ecosystems. The video underscores the importance of community education on responsible diaper disposal and advocates for the adoption of environmentally friendly alternatives.

The moral message in Trash-Free Muncar Beach centers on the shared responsibility of maintaining beach cleanliness and preserving the surrounding environment. The video underscores the importance of collaboration between local communities and environmental organizations in mitigating the impacts of marine pollution. It also raises awareness of the detrimental consequences of harmful practices, such as littering and waste burning.

In Empowering the Next Generation, the moral message focuses on the role of children as future leaders with a commitment to environmental stewardship. The educational approach in this video seeks to inspire younger generations to actively engage in social change initiatives aimed at achieving a more sustainable environment. Additionally, it advocates for cross-community collaboration as a means to ensure lasting change.

Collectively, the moral messages conveyed in these six videos demonstrate the consistency of Sungai Watch's mission to promote environmental education. Each narrative emphasizes the dual importance of individual awareness and collective action in tackling diverse environmental challenges. These findings align with Ramadhan & Rochmaniah (2023) and Shabrina et al. (2023), who argue that narratives grounded in practical solutions and tangible actions are effective in fostering awareness and encouraging pro-environmental behavior. Moreover, Sungai Watch's integration of local communities and younger generations reflects a community-based environmental communication strategy, as described by Amelia (2023), which prioritizes inclusivity and participatory engagement for sustainable impact.

The Context of Digital Media: Instagram as an Educational Platform

Instagram has emerged as a pivotal medium for Sungai Watch to disseminate its environmental narratives. As noted by Leaver et al. (2020) Instagram serves as an effective visual



platform for communicating social issues due to its interactive features and community-oriented nature. The short educational videos produced by Sungai Watch employ two primary strategies. First, visual storytelling, which enhances the aesthetic and emotional appeal of the message, thereby increasing audience engagement. Second, interactive affordances, such as comments and likes, which facilitate audience participation and enable the amplification of environmental awareness through networked sharing.

Shabrina et al. (2023) highlight that environmental campaigns conducted via social media have the potential to cultivate virtual communities that actively support collective action. Consistent with this finding, Sungai Watch's videos integrate visual and narrative components in a way that not only informs audiences about environmental challenges but also motivates them to take tangible steps toward addressing these issues. Through this integration, Instagram functions not merely as a dissemination tool but as a participatory space for fostering environmental consciousness and collective responsibility.

Research by Ardianti et al. (2022) underscores the effectiveness of Instagram as a medium for fostering positive attitudes toward waste management among its followers. The study finds that the structure of campaign messages, beyond the content itself, plays a critical role in shaping audience perceptions and attitudes. Several key factors contribute to the success of Instagram-based environmental campaigns: effective account management, clarity of messaging, creativity in presentation, and strong visual appeal.

The effectiveness of such campaigns is heightened when messages are concise, easily comprehensible, and relevant to the target audience, particularly younger generations who tend to engage with information in visually appealing and succinct formats. Creativity in content delivery emerges as a central determinant of audience engagement, as creative outputs are more memorable and have a greater potential to stimulate behavioral change. Visual elements such as infographics, illustrations, and short videos not only attract attention but also enhance message retention. Furthermore, consistent posting schedules and high-quality production values reinforce the credibility of the campaign, encouraging sustained audience engagement. With these strategic elements in place, Instagram serves not merely as a promotional platform but as a transformative communication tool capable of driving social change by raising awareness and prompting concrete actions toward improved waste management practices.

The Instagram account @ecoton.id functions as an effective platform for disseminating environmental knowledge and mobilizing individuals to participate in environmental awareness initiatives. Interactive features on Instagram, such as likes, comments, and shares, facilitate extensive reach and active engagement among its followers (Putra & Rocmaniah, 2024). By utilizing engaging visual content, including short videos, infographics, and emotionally evocative photographs, @ecoton.id successfully educates its audience on various environmental issues. Furthermore, the platform enables faster and broader dissemination of messages, connecting individuals across diverse regions who may lack direct access to environmental information or activities through traditional media channels.

Nabilah et al. (2022) rgue that Instagram functions as an effective medium for social development communication, particularly in optimizing campaigns targeted at environmentally conscious youth. The platform serves as an educational tool on environmental issues for the millennial generation, enabling outreach to a broader young audience and encouraging their active participation or advocacy in environmental movements. This effectiveness stems from Instagram's highly visual and interactive nature, which allows environmental messages to be delivered through engaging and easily comprehensible formats such as videos, infographics, and motivational imagery. Moreover, features such as Stories, IGTV, and Reels facilitate wider dissemination and direct engagement with younger demographics, who are typically prolific users of social media in their daily routines.

The findings of this study confirm that Instagram can serve as an effective medium for environmental education when narrative strategies are deliberately employed. By incorporating relatable characters, emotionally compelling storylines, and localized contexts, the environmental messages disseminated by Sungai Watch transcend mere information transmission, fostering deeper cognitive and affective engagement among audiences. Theoretically, these findings underscore the pertinence of Fisher's Narrative Paradigm by illustrating that persuasive communication in



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environmental advocacy is more impactful when structured as coherent, value-driven narratives. Furthermore, the study advances the application of narrative theory within digital media contexts by demonstrating how mobile-native visual storytelling, particularly on platforms such as Instagram, can operationalize narrative elements to enhance environmental awareness and catalyze behavior change. This implies that future research in environmental communication should move beyond conventional evaluations of message reach or engagement metrics, instead focusing on how narrative forms shape meaning-making processes, value construction, and social mobilization within online environments.

The findings of this study also carry several theoretical implications. By applying Fisher's Narrative Paradigm within the framework of Social Change Communication Theory, the research demonstrates how narrative elements, particularly character construction, plot sequencing, and moral messaging, can be adapted to digital platforms to foster environmental awareness and promote specific behavioral changes, such as reducing single-use plastics, proper waste disposal, and active participation in clean-up activities. This suggests that narrative-based communication retains its persuasive power in digital contexts when combined with visual storytelling and interactive audience engagement features inherent to platforms like Instagram.

In relation to previous studies, this research extends existing scholarship on environmental communication via social media (Goesda et al., 2022; Ardianti et al., 2022; Karim & Yulianita, 2021) by shifting the analytical focus from audience engagement metrics and campaign reach to the structural and moral dimensions of the narratives themselves. While earlier research has highlighted the role of Instagram in awareness-raising, this study positions itself by unpacking how specific narrative constructions within environmental content work to connect issues with actionable solutions. Moreover, by situating the analysis within the Indonesian context and focusing on a localized actor like Sungai Watch, this research contributes region-specific insights to the broader global discourse on digital environmental activism.

Critically, the analysis also raises questions about the sustainability and scalability of narrative-driven campaigns in fostering long-term behavioral change. While Sungai Watch's Instagram content demonstrates strong potential for mobilizing public support, its impact may be contingent upon continuous content production, audience attention cycles, and integration with offline community engagement. These considerations point to the need for future research to investigate longitudinal effects and cross-platform narrative strategies to better understand the durability of such interventions in addressing complex environmental challenges.

Conclusion

The narratives presented in Sungai Watch videos illustrate the potential of digital media as an educational instrument for enhancing environmental awareness. By employing inspiring protagonists, contextually relevant local settings, and explicit moral messaging, these videos seek to motivate audiences toward concrete environmental protection actions. Nonetheless, achieving systemic and sustainable changes in waste management requires broader collaborative efforts. Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed: first, effective waste management systems necessitate coordinated collaboration among social change agents, governmental bodies, and local institutions. Second, the reinforcement of environmental education programs within schools is imperative to incorporate educational content derived from these videos into formal curricula. Lastly, Sungai Watch is encouraged to diversify its digital presence by extending the dissemination of its content beyond Instagram to other platforms, thereby reaching a broader and more varied audience.

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