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From Emotional Investment To Commercial Asset: A Critical Digital Discourse Analysis Of Affective Brand Relational Narratives On Platform X

Tri Eko Agustiningrum
Doctoral Program of Language Education, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia
Rudi Hartono
Doctoral Program of Language Education, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia
Yuliati
Doctoral Program of Language Education, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: triekoagustiningrum@students.unnes.ac.id

Abstract

In the contemporary digital landscape, brand communication on platforms like X has transformed into interactive, participatory engagement. This study employs Critical Digital Discourse Analysis (CDDA) to examine the quasi-romantic narrative constructed through the interaction between Toshiba TV and Amanda Brownies. By bridging Fairclough's critical discourse perspective with Bowlby's attachment theory, we analyze how this constructed persona generated deep relational expectations and collective emotional investment. Organized through a five-phase model emergence, intensification, rupture, repair, and resolution, the findings reveal how communicative shifts, such as sudden silence, triggered anxious attachment dynamics in the audience. Subsequent repair was achieved through visually "controlled authenticity," actively co-constructed by stylized fan art. While the symbolic "engagement" provided affective closure, the study concludes it was immediately converted into quantifiable commercial success metrics, proving that affective branding functions as a creative site of continuous social negotiation between corporate actors and affective publics.

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Keyword: critical digital discourse analysis, parasocial interaction, affective publics, attachment theory, emotional branding.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital landscape, brand communication has undergone a significant transformation from unidirectional information delivery to interactive and participatory engagement. Social media platforms such as X (Twitter) enable brands to communicate in real time, fostering immediacy, informality, and relational proximity with audiences. This shift reflects a broader transition in communication practices, where meaning is no longer solely produced by institutions but is increasingly co-constructed through networked interactions (boyd, 2014; Jenkins, 2006).

Within this context, brands are no longer perceived merely as economic entities but as social actors that perform identity and engage in discourse resembling interpersonal communication. The use of conversational tone, humor, and emotional cues allows brands to cultivate a sense of authenticity and relatability. Such practices align with Norman Fairclough's (2015) perspective that discourse functions not only to convey information but also to construct social relations and identities.

Recent studies have demonstrated that digital interactions increasingly generate forms of relational engagement that extend beyond traditional communication models. Early conceptualizations of parasocial interaction describe it as a one-sided relationship in which audiences develop a sense of intimacy with mediated figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956). However, in contemporary social media environments, this dynamic has evolved into more interactive and participatory forms. For instance, recent research shows that social media engagement, such as replies, mentions, and ongoing interaction plays a significant role in shaping and strengthening parasocial connections (Maheeyaa & Head, 2025). Similarly, perceived reciprocity in digital interaction has been found to intensify emotional involvement and audience attachment, blurring the distinction between mediated and interpersonal relationships (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Zahara et al., 2025).

This phenomenon is further reinforced by the emergence of affective publics, in which emotions circulate as a central force in shaping discourse and mobilizing participation (Papacharissi, 2015). In such environments, audiences do not merely consume content but actively engage in interpreting, amplifying, and extending narratives. Recent studies also suggest that parasocial interaction functions as a mediating mechanism in shaping trust, perception, and

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behavioral responses in digital contexts (Fauziyah & Sudradjat, 2025; Lestari & Yopiannor, 2025). These findings highlight the increasing complexity of audience engagement, where emotional and relational dimensions play a critical role in meaning-making.

A particularly illustrative case of this phenomenon can be observed in the interaction between Toshiba and Amanda Brownies on X, which has been widely interpreted by audiences as a quasi-romantic narrative. What begins as playful brand communication gradually evolves into a structured storyline involving anticipation, tension, rupture, and resolution. This transformation demonstrates how discourse can be narrativized through repeated interaction and audience participation, supporting the view that meaning in digital environments is dynamic and collectively produced.

From a theoretical perspective, such developments can also be examined through the lens of attachment theory, as proposed by John Bowlby (1969). Although originally developed to explain interpersonal relationships, attachment theory provides a useful framework for understanding how repeated interaction and perceived relational cues can generate patterns of expectation, emotional response, and dependency. In digitally mediated contexts, these dynamics may emerge between audiences and constructed personas, reflecting attachment-like engagement rather than direct interpersonal bonds.

Despite the increasing visibility of such phenomena, existing research on digital branding has largely focused on influencer culture, identity performance, and engagement metrics (Abidin, 2018), with limited attention to the relational and attachment-oriented dimensions of discourse. Moreover, while recent studies have begun to explore parasocial interaction in interactive environments, the integration of critical discourse analysis with affective and attachment-based perspectives remains underexplored.

This study offers a distinct contribution by bridging critical digital discourse analysis with attachment theory to examine brand interaction as an evolving relational narrative rather than a static marketing strategy. It introduces a phase-based analytical model, comprising emergence, intensification, rupture, repair, and resolution to capture the temporal and emotional dynamics of digitally mediated interaction. By doing so, the study moves beyond descriptive accounts of social media engagement and provides a more integrative framework for understanding how discourse, emotion, and relational expectations intersect in contemporary digital environments.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how relational narratives are constructed in brand interactions on social media, how audiences participate in shaping these narratives, and how such

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interactions can be understood through the lens of critical digital discourse and attachment theory.

To clarify the theoretical positioning of this study, Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework that underpins the analysis. The framework conceptualizes digital brand interaction on X (Twitter) as a dynamic process in which discourse, emotion, and relational perception are interconnected.

At the initial level, brand communication is understood as a form of discursive practice shaped by strategic language use, in line with Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2015). These discursive strategies give rise to affective engagement, where emotional tones such as humor, anticipation, and intimacy begin to structure audience responses. As interaction becomes more sustained, these affective exchanges develop into parasocial interaction, which, in contemporary digital environments, is increasingly reinforced by perceived reciprocity and audience participation (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Maheeyaa & Head, 2025).

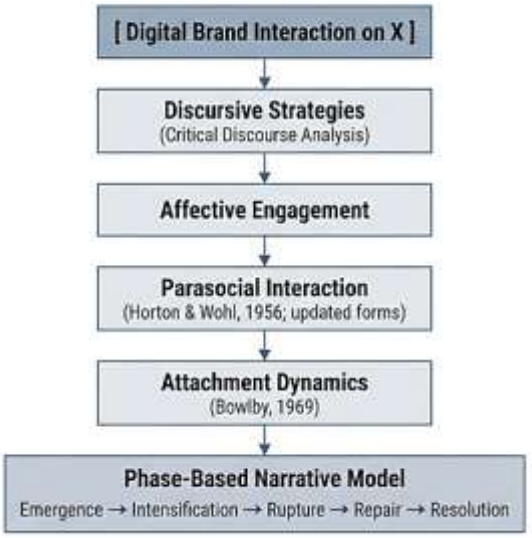
This parasocial dynamic is further interpreted through the lens of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), suggesting that repeated interaction and emotional cues may generate attachment-like orientations among audiences. Such orientations shape expectations, reactions, and interpretative involvement, particularly when the interaction unfolds over time.

The framework ultimately proposes that these interconnected processes produce a relational narrative that evolves through identifiable phases: emergence, intensification, rupture, repair, and resolution. This phase-based model enables a more nuanced understanding of how meaning is constructed temporally and collectively in digital discourse, highlighting the interplay between language, emotion, and relational imagination.

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Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Relational Narrative in Digital Brand Interaction



Based on this framework, the study employs Critical Digital Discourse Analysis to examine how relational narratives are constructed and evolve across different interactional phases. This study proposes a phase-based model as a conceptual contribution to understanding temporality in digital discourse.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Digital Discourse Analysis (CDDA) to examine how relational narratives are constructed and negotiated in brand interactions on social media. This approach is appropriate as it enables a multimodal analysis of language, visual semiotics, and interactional structures within digitally mediated environments. CDDA (Fairclough, 2015) conceptualizes discourse as a socially constitutive practice shaped not only by content producers but also by active audience participation within affective publics (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Papacharissi, 2015).

The research setting is the digital platform X (Twitter), which serves as a site of naturally occurring public interaction. The primary material of this study consists of interactions between two corporate brand accounts, Toshiba TV (@toshibatv_id) and Amanda Brownies (@_AmandaBrownies). This case was purposively selected due to its distinctive and sustained quasi-romantic communication pattern, which generated high public engagement and provided a rich dataset for examining complex digital narratives.

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Data were collected from January, 4th to March, 16th 2026 through non-participatory observation of publicly available interactions, including posts, replies, and quote tweets. The research instruments consisted of digital documentation tools, specifically screenshot capture and textual transcription, used to systematically record both linguistic features and contextual metadata. These included micro-linguistic elements (e.g., slang, non-standard spelling), visual semiotics (e.g., stock images, diagrams, and shared photographs), timestamps to identify interactional shifts, view counts to indicate engagement intensity, and selected instances of amplified user-generated content.

Data selection followed a purposive sampling strategy based on the progression of the relational narrative between the two accounts. Interactions were selected according to their relevance to five analytically defined phases: (1) emergence, (2) intensification, (3) rupture, (4) repair (including controlled authenticity), and (5) resolution (narrativization and closure). This phase-based classification enabled the study to capture key turning points and discursive shifts that structure the development of the narrative.

The data analysis procedure followed an interpretative and iterative process. First, data were organized chronologically to identify patterns of interaction, conversational rhythm, and critical transitions between phases. Second, the data were coded inductively based on recurring discursive features, including tone, interaction frequency, and affective markers. Third, a Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis was conducted, focusing on close reading of linguistic features (e.g., humor, relational cues, rhetorical strategies) and visual semiotics. This stage also examined how specific artifacts, such as the use of diagrams as rhetorical devices and audience-generated fan art contribute to meaning-making and narrative stabilization (Maheeyaa & Head, 2025).

Subsequently, structural and affective analysis was performed to examine how emotional engagement is constructed and amplified. View counts were used as an indicative metric to trace fluctuations in audience attention and intensity of engagement across key narrative moments, particularly during phases of rupture and repair. The primary unit of analysis was the interactional thread (a tweet and its associated replies and quote tweets), allowing discourse to be interpreted as a dynamic and contextually embedded sequence.

To ensure analytical rigor, the study employed iterative coding, constant comparison, and theoretical triangulation by integrating perspectives from Critical Discourse Analysis, parasocial interaction, and attachment theory. In this regard, John Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory was used as an interpretative lens, not to diagnose individual behavior, but to analyze collective

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patterns of engagement, expectation, and relational orientation, particularly in relation to attachment-like dynamics emerging from repeated interaction.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed. All data were derived from publicly accessible content produced by verified corporate accounts. Audience data were analyzed at an aggregate level and specific user-generated content was included only when publicly amplified by the brands and used strictly as illustrative evidence of audience co-construction.

Through this methodological framework, the study provides a systematic and theoretically grounded analysis of how digital brand interactions evolve into complex, affectively charged relational narratives shaped by both producers and audiences.

To provide clarity on the tailored five-phase analytical model and its execution, the overall research process, encompassing data collection, preparation, and parallel iterative procedures, is visually summarized in Figure 2.

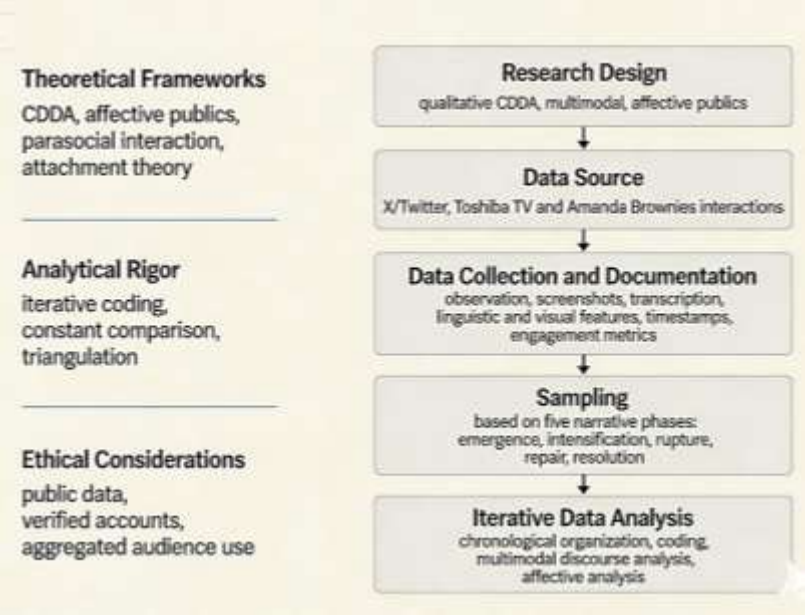


Figure 2. Research Methodology Framework

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study through a phase-based analysis of the interaction between Toshiba TV and Amanda Brownies on X (Twitter). Drawing on a Critical Discourse Analysis framework (Fairclough, 2015), the analysis examines how relational meaning is constructed, negotiated, and transformed across multimodal elements, including textual

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exchanges, visual representations, and interactional patterns. The dataset is organized into five analytical phases: Emergence, Intensification, Rupture, Repair, and Resolution, to capture the dynamic progression of the narrative. This structure allows for a systematic exploration of how discourse operates not only as a communicative tool but also as a mechanism for generating affective engagement and shaping audience participation within networked publics.

Emergence Phase: Initiating Relational Engagement

This phase marks the initial interaction, where relational meaning begins to emerge through discursive strategies such as humor, informality, or playful tone. In this specific dataset, the relationship is initiated when a major electronics brand interacts with a bakery brand as if the former were a regular person.



Figure 3. Emergence Phase

Source: X account @_AmandaBrownies

(Translation: Admin, if I am a Jakarta person, where do I go to buy? I want to watch a horror movie with friends, I want to find some cakes/snacks.)

The use of highly informal language constructs an approachable and personable brand identity from the very first interaction. Specific linguistic choices, such as using slang ("Min" for Admin) and colloquial, non-standard spellings (“*kalo,” “pengen*”), signal that Toshiba TV is not adopting a stiff corporate persona but rather attempting a peer-to-peer interaction. Furthermore, the humorous juxtaposition of a television brand asking another entity where to find cakes (rather than where to buy TVs), adds a layer of playful wordplay to the discourse.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective (Fairclough, 2015), this linguistic strategy deliberately reduces the perceived social distance between the large corporate entity and the

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average Indonesian social media user. By adopting the vernacular of its target audience and mimicking the everyday social context of "preparing for a movie night with friends," the discourse repositions the brand. It shifts from being viewed as a purely commercial entity aimed at extraction toward being viewed as a relational "social actor" participating horizontally in online conversations.

At this stage, tangible relational engagement begins to form, evidenced by the high view count (158K) on this initiating tweet and the subsequent direct response from the recipient brand (Amanda Brownies). This specific interaction functions as the critical entry point for potential parasocial perception. By personifying itself as a relatable, snack-seeking individual, the Toshiba brand invites audiences and other brands to begin attributing human personality traits, such as playfulness, approachability, and warmth to its core identity, thereby initiating the relational narrative flow (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Intensification Phase: Developing Affective and Parasocial Engagement

This phase is characterized by repeated interaction, the emergence of relational tropes (e.g., flirting and jealousy), and increasing audience participation, all of which contribute to the intensification of affective engagement. At this stage, the brands move beyond casual interaction and begin to co-construct a sustained relational narrative that mirrors interpersonal dynamics.

Image Extract 1. Visualizing the Relationship

Context: Following earlier interactions, a fan account (@jeivalpotra) produced and shared anime-style fan art that personifies multiple brand accounts, including Amanda Brownies (depicted as female) and Toshiba (depicted as male), demonstrating active audience involvement in shaping the narrative.

Toshiba TV @toshibatv_id (Jan 26):

"*Aku kira kuemu saja, ternyata kamu juga aslinya manis ya* :) @_AmandaBrownies"

*(*Translation: I thought it was just your cake, but turns out you are actually sweet too :))

The interaction in Extract 1 marks a clear escalation in relational intensity. Toshiba shifts from generalized humor to direct personal compliment ("manis"), adopting a flirtatious tone that signals a transition from casual engagement to affective positioning. This linguistic move constructs a more intimate relational frame and aligns with audience expectations of romantic narrative development. The validation of fan-produced visual content further reinforces this shift, as the brand incorporates audience-generated interpretations into its own discourse, thereby extending the narrative beyond corporate control.

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Image Extract 2 (Narrative Continuum and Drama)

Context: This interaction follows a perceived moment of "drama," in which Toshiba was seen engaging closely with another account, creating a sense of narrative continuity across interactions.

Amanda Brownies @_AmandaBrownies (Feb 4):

"*gausah mengalihkan pembicaraan ya, km kira aku lupa yg td*? 🙄"

(Translation: Don't change the subject, do you think I forgot what happened earlier? 🙄)

Toshiba TV @toshibatv_id (Feb 4):

"*Malam ini aku menuju bandara Narita. Besok pagi aku sampai Bandung. Aku jelaskan semuanya agar tidak salah paham*."

(Translation: Tonight I'm heading to Narita airport. Tomorrow morning I arrive in Bandung. I'll explain everything so there are no misunderstandings.) [Attached: nighttime street photo from Japan]

Extract 2 demonstrates the development of a more complex relational narrative structure. Amanda's response introduces a jealousy trope, while Toshiba's reply adopts a conciliatory and dramatic tone, resembling a narrative of conflict and resolution. The reference to Narita and Bandung situates the interaction within a quasi-realistic spatial framework, leveraging brand identity to enhance narrative plausibility. This discursive construction mirrors familiar patterns from romantic storytelling, thereby strengthening audience anticipation and emotional investment.

From a parasocial interaction perspective, these exchanges illustrate a shift from passive consumption to active co-construction. Contemporary studies highlight that parasocial engagement on social media is increasingly shaped by reciprocal interaction rather than one-sided exposure (Maheeyaa & Head, 2025). The incorporation and validation of fan art, combined with ongoing narrative continuity, position audiences not only as observers but as contributors who shape relational meaning (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Zahara et al., 2025). This dynamic is reflected in the high engagement metrics (e.g., 429.2K views in Extract 2), indicating intensified affective alignment and sustained audience attention.

Rupture Phase: Disruption, Asymmetry, and Affective Reconfiguration

This phase is marked by a disruption in the established interactional rhythm, introducing asymmetry and heightened emotional tension. Unlike previous phases characterized by reciprocal exchange, the rupture emerges through a temporary absence that interrupts continuity and reconfigures the relational dynamic.

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The rupture phase marks a critical turning point in the interaction, where the previously stable pattern of playful and reciprocal engagement begins to fragment. Rather than a single moment, rupture unfolds as a layered process involving temporal disruption, discursive asymmetry, and affective intensification. The interruption of interactional continuity, most visibly through delayed response and absence, reconfigures the relational dynamic, shifting it from mutual exchange to a suspended and imbalanced interaction.

This phase is characterized by a contraction in textual expression, a shift in tone toward emotional uncertainty, and the emergence of multimodal cues that amplify tension across the discourse. Meaning is no longer produced through ongoing dialogue but through the interplay of presence and absence, where silence, delay, and minimal utterances become significant semiotic resources. At the same time, audience participation intensifies, as users interpret, extend, and emotionally align with the unfolding disruption.

Taken together, rupture functions as a transitional phase in which the interaction moves from affective coherence to instability. It establishes the conditions for subsequent developments, namely, the escalation of emotional engagement and the emergence of audience-driven negotiation by foregrounding imbalance, uncertainty, and the redistribution of discursive control.

1. Absence and Discursive Disruption

Image Extract 3. Absence and Discursive Disruption

Amanda Brownies @_AmandaBrownies (Feb 7):

"Hey, are you still there?" *(333.8K views)*

A critical turning point in the interaction occurs when Toshiba becomes temporarily absent, disrupting the previously established rhythm of rapid and reciprocal exchange.

This rupture is evidenced multimodally through both textual and temporal cues. In Image extract 3, Amanda's post, "Hey, are you still there?" (Feb 7), appears as an isolated interrogative, marked by its brevity and lack of accompanying playful or affiliative markers that characterized earlier interactions. The utterance signals a shift toward relational uncertainty, functioning less as a request for information than as an index of affective vulnerability.

In the replies section, Toshiba's response is dated Feb 10, revealing a three-day gap in communication. This temporal delay operates as a semiotic resource, transforming absence into a meaning-bearing element within the discourse. In contrast to the previously continuous and rapid exchanges, the delayed response introduces a clear disruption in interactional continuity.

Taken together, the minimal textual form and the temporal gap construct a moment of discursive asymmetry, where Amanda's presence is foregrounded through questioning while

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Toshiba is rendered present through silence. This imbalance marks the rupture as a pivotal shift from reciprocal engagement to suspended interaction, in which meaning is generated not only through what is said, but through what is withheld.

The defining feature of this phase lies not in discursive abundance, but in absence. Prior interactions were characterized by rapid, reciprocal exchanges; however, Toshiba's delayed response creates a visible break in conversational continuity. Amanda's isolated utterance, brief, direct, and devoid of previous playful markers, signals a shift from humor to emotional uncertainty.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, this moment introduces discursive asymmetry: Amanda becomes hyper-present as an actor defined by waiting and questioning, while Toshiba is constructed through silence. This imbalance transforms the interaction into a suspended dialogue in which meaning is produced through absence. The high engagement level (333.8K views) indicates that this asymmetry becomes the central focus of audience attention. In this moment, the interaction is no longer driven by reciprocity but by imbalance, where one party's emotional presence is intensified against the other's non-response.

Crucially, this disruption generates a discursive vacuum that is actively filled by the audience through multimodal expression. One prominent response incorporates song lyrics referencing themes of disappearance and emotional distance ("you'll fade away again"), functioning as an intertextual resource that encodes affective meaning. Rather than merely commenting, the audience appropriates shared cultural texts to articulate a narrative of abandonment and longing. This demonstrates how affect is not only expressed but mediated through recognizable cultural symbols.

Other responses further reinforce this dynamic by explicitly tracking the absence and speculating about prior interactions, indicating that audiences are actively monitoring and interpreting the narrative progression. These practices position the audience as co-constructors of meaning rather than passive observers.

From an attachment perspective, this configuration reflects patterns associated with anxious attachment dynamics (Bowlby, 1969), in which perceived absence triggers heightened emotional expression and a desire for reconnection. Notably, these dynamics are not confined to the brand actors but are collectively enacted by the audience, who align themselves with the emotional structure of the interaction.

Taken together, the tonal shift, textual minimalism, and temporal delay construct a moment of suspended interaction in which meaning is produced through the contrast between

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presence and absence. This rupture marks a critical reconfiguration of the relational dynamic, shifting the discourse from playful reciprocity to affective tension and uncertainty.

2. Return and Affective Continuation

Image Extract 4. Return and Affective Continuation

Toshiba TV @toshibatv_id (Feb 10):

"*Manda, maafkan aku. Tak pernah mampu kusiapkan*..."

*(*Amanda replies with a distressed reaction image*)*

The rupture extends beyond a textual disruption and becomes fundamentally affective, reshaping the emotional rhythm of the discourse. The temporary absence of Toshiba not only interrupts interactional continuity but reorients the narrative from playful reciprocity to a state of emotional tension and anticipation.

This shift is first constructed through the visual-temporal configuration of the interaction. The absence of response from Toshiba, juxtaposed with Amanda's isolated query ("Hey, are you still there?"), produces an emergent narrative of waiting and abandonment. Within the timeline, this creates a perceptible change in rhythm: previously dense, playful exchanges give way to a sparse and emotionally charged sequence. Audience responses further amplify this shift, as comments expressing concern and longing accumulate, transforming the interactional space from banter into collective affective engagement.

The return of Toshiba does not restore the prior equilibrium but instead confirms the persistence of this affective disruption. Toshiba's extended apologetic message ("*Manda, maafkan aku. Tak pernah mampu kusiapkan*...") marks a significant tonal shift toward emotional accountability, reinforced by the use of direct address ("Manda") as an intimacy marker. In response, Amanda deploys a distressed reaction image (a character clutching a pillow), which functions as a form of affective condensation, visually intensifying anxiety and emotional overwhelm in a culturally recognizable format.

Crucially, a multimodal dissonance emerges between Toshiba's controlled, verbal apology and Amanda's emotionally heightened visual response. This contrast indicates that the interaction has not returned to stability but remains in a state of affective imbalance. The discourse continues to carry the residue of rupture, demonstrating that disruption operates not only at the level of turn-taking but in the reconfiguration of emotional intensity across textual and visual modes.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, this phase sustains discursive asymmetry: Toshiba re-enters the interaction through structured narration and explanation, while Amanda's response foregrounds affective immediacy. This imbalance, coupled with intensified audience

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engagement, reflects dynamics consistent with anxious attachment patterns (Bowlby, 1969), in which absence and delayed response generate heightened emotional expression and a strong drive for reconnection.

Taken together, the rupture is not resolved but prolonged through affective continuation. The emotional rhythm of the discourse is fundamentally altered, shifting from playful interaction to a more complex, tension-filled relational dynamic in which meaning is distributed across absence, return, and multimodal expression.

3. Community fatigue and micro-conflict: Negotiating expectations

Image Extract 5. Visualizing Fatigue and De-legitimation

The shift toward audience fatigue is made visible through both textual articulation and interactional tone. In the replies, users explicitly question the sustainability and authenticity of the ongoing narrative. Comments such as framing the interaction as “too far” or suggesting that it begins to feel like “drama” rather than marketing signal a breakdown in the previously shared affective investment.

This moment represents a process of de-legitimation. What was initially perceived as playful and engaging is re-evaluated as excessive or strategically manufactured. The audience no longer passively participates in the narrative but instead adopts a critical stance, assessing the appropriateness and credibility of the brands’ relational performance.

At the same time, these responses introduce micro-conflict within the discursive space. Not all users disengage uniformly; some continue to support or rationalize the interaction, while others express discomfort or critique. This divergence produces a fragmented interactional field in which multiple interpretative positions coexist and compete.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, this phase illustrates a shift in discursive authority. The brands no longer fully control the narrative trajectory; instead, audiences assume the role of normative regulators, articulating implicit expectations about authenticity, moderation, and corporate boundaries. Their comments function as metadiscursive evaluations, not only reacting to the content but also redefining how such interactions should be conducted.

Importantly, this shift signals affective fatigue rather than mere disengagement. The audience’s continued participation, now in the form of critique, indicates that emotional investment persists but is reoriented. Rather than amplifying the narrative, affect is redirected toward evaluation and boundary-setting.

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4. Direct Critique and Boundary Regulation

Image Extract 6. Direct Critique and Boundary Regulation

The negotiation intensifies as audiences articulate explicit expectations regarding narrative closure, tone, and brand identity. Comments suggesting that the storyline feels "dragged out" or resembles "Indonesian soap operas" indicate a growing dissatisfaction with the prolonged affective engagement. These critiques move beyond preference and into normative evaluation, questioning the legitimacy of the brand's performative strategy.

Particularly significant is the statement that "you are a brand, not a human alter-ego," which functions as an explicit act of boundary regulation. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, this marks a shift in discursive authority: audiences actively redefine the limits of acceptable corporate personification, challenging the brand's attempt to sustain a human-like relational identity.

This moment also reveals the emergence of micro-conflict within the audience itself. While some users continue to appreciate the creativity of the campaign, others reject its direction, producing a fragmented interpretative space in which competing evaluations coexist. Such divergence illustrates that meaning in digital discourse is not fixed but continuously negotiated among participants.

From the perspective of affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015), this phase demonstrates that collective emotions do not only amplify narratives but can also constrain them. Emotional investment is not withdrawn but redirected into critique, as audiences enforce implicit norms of authenticity, moderation, and narrative coherence.

This shift also reconfigures parasocial dynamics. While earlier interactions fostered perceived intimacy and reciprocity, the prolonged and intensified narrative generates heightened expectations. When these expectations are unmet, whether through perceived excess, inconsistency, or lack of closure, audiences respond with disappointment, disengagement, or corrective feedback. In this sense, the interaction reflects dynamics consistent with attachment-oriented responses (Bowlby, 1969), where instability in relational signals produces frustration and withdrawal.

Taken together, this phase reveals that affective engagement carries inherent risks. The same emotional investment that initially drives participation can generate narrative fatigue when prolonged without resolution. As the interaction becomes perceived as "dragged out," audiences construct what can be understood as a form of narrative debt, an expectation for closure and coherence that the brand struggles to fulfill.

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In response to this crisis, Toshiba's shift toward professionalized discourse represents an attempt to restore legitimacy. However, this move creates a new tension between affective authenticity and institutional authority, leaving the interaction in an unresolved state of discursive instability.

Repair and Controlled Authenticity: Managing Narrative Tension

1. Controlled Authenticity and Narrative Stabilization

Following the preceding rupture marked by absence, asymmetry, and affective instability, the interaction enters a phase of repair in which the brands attempt to restore relational coherence. In digital discourse, such repair cannot be purely transactional; it must operate affectively, addressing both the emotional disruption and the audience's heightened expectations. This phase therefore involves not a return to the previous state, but a strategic reconfiguration of the narrative.

Extract Image 7.

Toshiba TV @toshibatv_id (Feb 22): *[Attached: A non-stock, informal photo of a shared casual meal, featuring two separate steak dinners, fries, and a drink, taken from a high angle (image_9.png)]*

"*Berbukalah dengan yang manis... Wibawa seperti apa yang harus aku kenakan agar aku bisa setara denganmu, Manda? Aku bersaksi, tiada yang lebih cantik dari langit jingga di sore hari. Kecuali dirimu. Terima kasih sudah menerima undanganku*."

(Translation: Break your fast with something sweet... What kind of authority/charisma must I wear to be equal to you, Manda? I testify, there is nothing more beautiful than the orange sky in the evening. Except for you. Thank you for accepting my invitation.)

This post occurs after some period of absence or tension, presenting a visual and linguistic culmination of relationship narrative. This reconfiguration is achieved through the introduction of a "real-world" encounter, which functions as a pivotal mechanism of relational stabilization. The post by Toshiba, featuring a casual, non-stock photograph of a shared meal, marks a significant multimodal shift. Visually, the image presents an intimate yet carefully curated setting: two separate steak meals, positioned side by side, signal togetherness while maintaining distinct identities. The high-angle, informal composition conveys spontaneity and authenticity, contrasting with the earlier heightened drama and reinforcing the impression of an off-platform, "real" meeting.

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Linguistically, the accompanying caption intensifies this effect through a blend of poetic expression and relational address. Phrases such as "*Terima kasih sudah menerima undanganku*" (Thank you for accepting my invitation) construct a narrative of reconciliation, while the continued use of direct address ("Manda") sustains interpersonal intimacy. At the same time, the elevated, almost lyrical tone ("*tiada yang lebih cantik dari langit jingga… kecuali dirimu*") extends the established romantic trope, ensuring continuity with earlier affective engagement.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, this moment represents a form of controlled authenticity. The "real-world" visual operates as an authenticity claim, grounding the previously abstract, performative interaction in a tangible setting. However, this authenticity is carefully managed: the image is informal but aesthetically composed, intimate yet publicly consumable. It balances the need to resolve narrative tension with the imperative to sustain audience engagement.

Crucially, this phase does not eliminate tension but restructures it. The interaction shifts from uncertainty and absence toward resolution and validation, yet retains the affective intensity that initially drove engagement. In this sense, repair is not a closure but a recalibration, where authenticity is strategically performed to restore legitimacy while preserving the narrative's emotional appeal.

2. Audience Co-Construction of Cohesion

Image Extract 8. Fan Art Dialogue posted by @Fadr08:
Amanda: "*Dagingnya dimakan, atuh*." (Translation: "Come on, eat your steak.")
Toshiba: "*Aku sedang menikmati manismu, Manda*." (Translation: "I'm savoring your sweetness, Manda.")
Hashtags: #AmandArt, #ToshibArt, #toshimanda

This phase is defined not by full transparency, but by the strategic deployment of controlled authenticity, in which visibility is carefully calibrated to balance intimacy and distance. The "real-world" meal in the preceding extract provides visual evidence of an encounter, yet this authenticity is deliberately partial. The image foregrounds the shared setting two plated meals in a casual dining context while excluding any human presence: no faces, bodies, or identifying features are shown. This selective framing constructs what can be understood as a boundary of visibility, where reality is invoked but not fully disclosed.

Such selective revelation aligns with the notion of curated authenticity (Abidin, 2018), in which digital actors provide just enough realism to sustain relatability while preserving the distinction between persona and person. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, this visual

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strategy enables the brands to maintain interpretive control: the interaction is grounded in the "real," yet remains safely within the domain of performance.

Linguistically, this duality is reinforced through Toshiba's caption, which combines explicit relational markers with performative stylization. The use of direct address ("Manda") and expressions of gratitude signals reconciliation and relational closure, while the poetic and hyperbolic phrasing, "*tiada yang lebih cantik dari langit jingga… kecuali dirimu*" (translation: "Nothing is more beautiful than the amber evening sky… except you."), sustains the established romantic trope. This stylistic layering functions as a protective rhetorical mechanism, allowing the brand to deliver emotional intensity without committing to literal realism. In Fairclough's terms, this represents a calculated communicative choice in which affective meaning is amplified while referential specificity remains controlled.

At the level of audience reception, this controlled authenticity does not limit engagement but instead invites co-construction. The fan art produced by "@Fadr08" exemplifies this process. Rather than seeking to uncover the "real" individuals behind the interaction, the audience fills the visual absence by generating stylized human representations: an idealized male figure for Toshiba and a feminine counterpart for Amanda. The inclusion of flirtatious dialogue echoing the original caption and the use of ship hashtags (#toshimanda) demonstrate that audiences actively extend and stabilize the relational narrative.

This dynamic reflects an advanced form of parasocial engagement. As originally conceptualized by Horton and Wohl (1956), parasocial interaction involves perceived intimacy with mediated figures; however, in this context, intimacy is not merely received but collaboratively produced. The audience accepts the boundaries established by the brands and participates in completing the narrative, transforming ambiguity into coherence. In line with the concept of affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015), emotional investment is mobilized not only to engage with the narrative but to sustain and regulate it.

Taken together, this phase illustrates that repair in digital discourse is not achieved solely by the brand but emerges through a reciprocal process of controlled disclosure and audience co-construction. Authenticity operates here as a discursive effect, carefully staged by the brand and actively realized by the audience, resulting in a stabilized yet inherently mediated form of relational cohesion. In this sense, authenticity is not revealed but collaboratively performed, emerging at the intersection of strategic opacity and participatory imagination.

Resolution and Recontextualization: Narrativization, Commercialization, and Open-Ended Closure

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The resolution phase unfolds as a structured**,** cinematic progression of discourse, where meaning is not delivered in a single moment but gradually consolidated across sequential posts. The discourse moves from affective intensification, to symbolic climax, followed by relational continuation, and finally institutional reframing.

It begins with heightened playful intimacy in Figure 3, where Toshiba's metaphorical line ("even the best interest rates don't compare to the interest I have in you") signals the peak of affective-commercial hybridity. This moment functions as a pre-climax intensification, where promotional language is fully absorbed into romantic discourse, blurring the boundary between marketing and intimacy.



Figure 3. Metaphorical line

Source: X account @_AmandaBrownies

This intensification culminates Figure 4, where the engagement visual operates as a **discursive anchor**. The close-up of hands and the placement of a ring provide a culturally legible symbol of relational closure, retrospectively organizing prior fragmented interactions into a coherent romantic trajectory. From a **Critical Discourse Analysis** perspective (Fairclough, 2015), this represents a process of **narrativization**, where dispersed discourse is restructured into a meaningful and goal-oriented storyline. Audience engagement at this stage reflects **collective affective alignment**, reinforcing the idea that meaning is co-constructed within networked publics (boyd, 2014; Jenkins, 2006).

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Figure 4. The Narrative Climax

Source: X account @_AmandaBrownies

However, rather than functioning as a definitive endpoint, the narrative resolution is immediately followed by a continuation of interaction that sustains the relational dynamic. In a subsequent sahur (pre-dawn) exchange, Amanda Brownies initiates a casual, time-specific post ("Sahur Sahurrr Day 26") on March, 16th, 2026, which is reciprocated by Toshiba through a response that blends routine, intimacy, and subtle promotion "*Sahur lebih menyenangkan sembari menonton TV*" (translation; "Sahur is more enjoyable while watching TV."). The use of the personal address "Manda," combined with the reference to a shared activity (video call), reinforces a constructed sense of interpersonal reciprocity. This interaction is further extended through playful banter, culminating in Toshiba's response "*Suapin*" ("Feed me"), which explicitly mobilizes romantic and domestic tropes within an otherwise mundane context.

From a critical discourse perspective, this moment is significant not for introducing new narrative tension, but for **stabilizing the relational meaning established at the point of climax**. The discourse shifts from heightened symbolic resolution to normalized, everyday intimacy, indicating that closure in this context is not terminal but **affectively sustained through continuity**. The interaction no longer seeks to escalate the narrative, but rather to maintain its coherence by embedding it within familiar, repeatable social practices.

This continuation also reflects the persistence of **parasocial dynamics** (Marwick & boyd, 2011), 2011), where the perceived relationship remains active despite having reached a narrative high point. The absence of rupture or escalation suggests a transition from narrative progression

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to relational maintenance, in which intimacy is reproduced through low-stakes, routine exchanges rather than dramatic developments.

At the level of audience reception, this phase further demonstrates the co-construction of meaning within networked publics. User responses explicitly interpret the interaction as evidence of an ongoing romantic relationship, indicating that the interpersonal framing has been collectively stabilized. In this sense, the discourse no longer depends solely on brand-generated content; instead, relational meaning is sustained through **shared recognition and participatory validation**, reinforcing the durability of the constructed bond beyond its narrative climax.

The final movement occurs where the entire relational trajectory is **retrospectively reframed within a corporate register**. Toshiba's campaign summary translates emotional engagement into quantifiable outcomes ("highest TV sales," "54 people approved by buying"), marking a shift from affective discourse to **institutional evaluation**. This constitutes a clear instance of **discursive recontextualization** (Fairclough, 2015), where meanings generated within an affective-public sphere are appropriated into a market logic. The romantic narrative is thus redefined as a **commercial asset**, effectively closing the campaign at an organizational level.

Yet, this closure remains strategically incomplete. While the campaign is declared finished, the forward-looking statement ("Wait for the next…") reopens the narrative horizon. From an attachment perspective (Bowlby, 1969), this phase represents **affective stabilization rather than termination**: emotional expectations are satisfied, but the relational structure is preserved for future activation.

Synthesis: Discourse, Affect, and Attachment in Digital Branding

Across the five phases, the interaction between Toshiba TV and Amanda Brownies reveals a dynamic system of meaning-making shaped by discourse, affect, and audience participation. Integrating Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2015) and Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969), the findings show that discourse not only represents but constitutes relational meaning, generating sustained emotional investment over time.

The analysis demonstrates that affective engagement is co-constructed through ongoing interaction, where audiences actively interpret, reinforce, and regulate the narrative. However, this engagement is inherently unstable: increased emotional investment produces heightened expectations, making the discourse vulnerable to fatigue, critique, and disruption.

In response, brands employ controlled authenticity, selectively introducing elements of realism to restore relational coherence while maintaining narrative boundaries. This process

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stabilizes engagement without fully resolving the tension between corporate identity and interpersonal performance.

Ultimately, the narrative is recontextualized into commercial value, where emotional investment is translated into measurable outcomes. Yet, closure remains open-ended, preserving audience attachment and enabling future cycles of engagement. These findings suggest that digital branding operates through a continuous cycle of affective construction, disruption, and strategic stabilization, with audiences functioning as active co-authors of meaning.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that brand communication in participatory digital environments functions as a relational narrative co-constructed through discourse, affect, and audience interaction. Through Critical Digital Discourse Analysis integrated with attachment theory, the findings identify a progression: emergence, intensification, rupture, repair, and resolution, where engagement evolves dynamically. Rupture triggers audience responses resembling anxious attachment, while repair relies on controlled authenticity to restore stability. The resolution phase demonstrates how emotional investment is transformed into measurable commercial outcomes.

Theoretically, the study advances understanding of discourse as constitutive of affective engagement and relational expectations, while highlighting the dual nature of affective branding as both effective and inherently unstable. Practically, it suggests that brands must balance emotional intensity with narrative coherence to manage audience expectations and mitigate backlash. Future research may examine these dynamics across platforms, contexts, and the long-term sustainability of attachment-driven branding

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