

Depiction of Social Change in the Musical Theatre *Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* during the Breastfeeding Awareness Campaign

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Abstract

Musical theatre is a powerful tool for social change, engaging audiences emotionally with critical issues. This study examines *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu*, a theatrical production promoting breastfeeding awareness by depicting mothers' struggles in balancing work, family, and societal expectations. Using a qualitative approach, it analyses the script, lyrics, character development, and audience responses. Findings reveal that musical theatre fosters empathy and engagement more effectively than traditional campaigns. By examining workplace policies, cultural taboos, and misinformation, the production advocates for a supportive breastfeeding environment, illustrating the potential of the performing arts in public health communication and social advocacy.

Keywords: Musical theatre; social change; breastfeeding awareness; public health advocacy

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1.0 Introduction

Musical theatre has long served as a powerful medium for storytelling, allowing audiences to engage deeply with social issues through performance, music, and drama. It transcends cultural and linguistic barriers by evoking emotional responses that encourage reflection and behavioural change (Boal, 1995). In the realm of public health advocacy, theatre has been widely utilised to address issues such as HIV awareness (Campbell et al., 2011), gender equality (Prentki & Preston, 2009), and mental health (Leavy, 2015). This study focuses on the role of *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* in promoting breastfeeding awareness and challenging societal misconceptions surrounding the practice.

Breastfeeding has been scientifically proven to be the best source of nutrition for infants, providing essential nutrients and antibodies that boost immunity and overall health (World Health Organisation, 2021). However, despite extensive medical evidence and global health campaigns, breastfeeding rates remain suboptimal in many regions. Barriers such as workplace constraints, social stigma, and misinformation often prevent mothers from exclusively breastfeeding their children for the recommended six months (UNICEF, 2018). Despite extensive global efforts to promote breastfeeding, societal, structural, and cultural barriers continue to hinder its widespread practice. Many working mothers struggle with inadequate workplace support, leading to early cessation of breastfeeding, while cultural stigmas and public discomfort discourage breastfeeding in social settings. Traditional public health campaigns often fail to engage audiences on an emotional level, limiting their effectiveness in changing perceptions and behaviours. Given these challenges, innovative approaches such as musical theatre offer a compelling alternative by blending storytelling, music, and drama to foster empathy, challenge misconceptions, and promote positive breastfeeding practices.

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Acknowledging these challenges, *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* was developed as an integral component of the Breastfeeding Awareness Campaign to educate, inspire, and empower the audience. By blending narrative storytelling with music, the production aims to create a compelling emotional and intellectual impact, fostering greater acceptance and understanding of breastfeeding. This paper explores how the musical theatre format enhances public engagement and influences social perceptions regarding breastfeeding. The aim of this study is to explore how musical theatre can act as a medium for public health advocacy. Specifically, the objectives are: (i) to analyse the narrative and musical structure of *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu*, (ii) to examine audience emotional engagement, and (iii) to evaluate its effectiveness in promoting breastfeeding awareness.

2.0 Literature Review

Musical theatre, as a form of applied theatre, has increasingly been recognised as a powerful medium for social advocacy and behavioural influence (Ahmad, M. F., 2020). It combines storytelling, music, and performance to engage audiences on an emotional and intellectual level, making complex social issues more relatable and impactful (Leavy, 2015). In the context of public health awareness, theatre has been used to address issues such as HIV prevention (Campbell et al., 2011), mental health (Prentki & Preston, 2009), and gender equality (Boal, 1995). This literature review examines the role of musical theatre in public health advocacy, the impact of music on audience engagement, and the effectiveness of narrative-driven approaches in shaping societal attitudes toward breastfeeding.

Musical theatre is a unique blend of artistic expression and social commentary, allowing audiences to experience real-life struggles through character-driven storytelling. Theatre practitioners have long used performance as a tool to raise awareness and challenge societal norms. According to Jones, L., & Patel, R. (2022), theatre provides a platform for marginalised voices, enabling communities to reflect on and question dominant ideologies. Similarly, applied theatre has been instrumental in fostering social change, particularly in health education and behavioural interventions (Noor, M., & Hamid, A., 2021). In the case of breastfeeding advocacy, traditional health campaigns often rely on factual dissemination through pamphlets, medical lectures, and public service announcements. However, these methods frequently fail to engage audiences emotionally, limiting their ability to inspire meaningful behavioural change (Bandura, 1977). Musical theatre, on the other hand, fosters affective engagement—a crucial factor in persuasive communication—by immersing audiences in compelling narratives (Leavy, 2015). Research suggests that emotional engagement leads to higher retention of health messages and a stronger likelihood of behavioural adoption (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010).

Research in health communication suggests that narrative-based interventions are more effective than purely informational campaigns, particularly in addressing cultural taboos and stigmatised health behaviours (Rollins et al., 2016). For example, theatre-based interventions have successfully increased HIV/AIDS awareness by creating relatable characters who experience and navigate the challenges of the disease (Campbell et al., 2011). Similarly, *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* follows a structured narrative arc that guides audiences from scepticism to advocacy.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the effectiveness of *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* in promoting breastfeeding awareness and influencing social perceptions. Qualitative content analysis was selected due to its strength in identifying latent themes within textual and performative data. Narrative inquiry complements this by tracing the transformation of characters and audience perceptions, aligning with the study's goal of understanding behaviour change through theatre. This content analysis is employed to systematically examine the script, song lyrics, and character development, identifying recurring themes such as workplace barriers, cultural stigmas, and misinformation surrounding breastfeeding. This method allows for an in-depth understanding of how storytelling and musical elements convey advocacy messages. Additionally, narrative inquiry is used to analyse character transformations and audience engagement, aligning with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that individuals learn by observing and modelling behaviours demonstrated by relatable figures. The study examines how audience members identify with the characters' journey from scepticism to advocacy and whether this identification translates into greater empathy and behavioural change.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals learn behaviors by observing models within a social context. In this case study, the characters in the musical serve as relatable models whose transformation from skepticism to advocacy mirrors the desired behavioral shift in the audience. By observing these character journeys, audience members are expected to internalize positive attitudes and support toward breastfeeding practices. To complement this analysis, pre- and post-performance surveys and focus group discussions were conducted to measure changes in perception, engagement, and emotional impact, further reinforcing the theory's relevance. A comparative analysis with traditional health campaigns adds context to the theatre's efficacy as an advocacy tool.

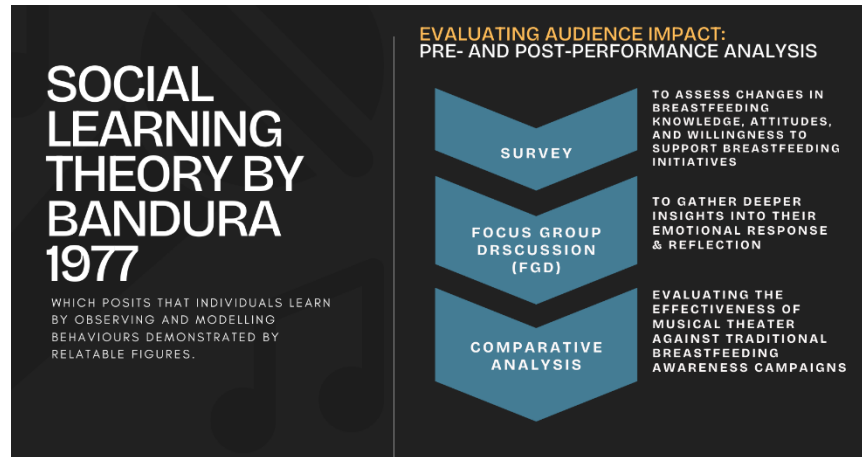


Fig. 1 Evaluating audience impact based on Social Learning Theory by Bandura
(Source: Researcher)

Fig. 1 shows that to evaluate the impact on the audience, pre- and post-performance surveys are administered to assess changes in breastfeeding knowledge, attitudes, and willingness to support breastfeeding initiatives. Focus group discussions (FGDs) are held with selected audience members to gather deeper insights into their emotional responses and reflections on the musical's message. A comparative analysis is also carried out, evaluating the effectiveness of musical theater against traditional breastfeeding awareness campaigns such as health pamphlets and public service announcements. This comparison examines message retention, engagement levels, and long-term behavioural influence. By integrating these theoretical frameworks, the research offers a comprehensive analysis of how *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* serves as a vehicle for social advocacy, enhancing awareness, fostering empathy, and promoting collective action in the context of public health communication. The combination of qualitative content analysis, narrative inquiry, surveys, focus group discussions, and comparative analysis was chosen to holistically examine the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural impact of the musical, ensuring alignment with the study's aim to evaluate its effectiveness as a tool for public health advocacy.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal how *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* effectively utilises musical theatre as a medium for social advocacy, particularly in promoting breastfeeding awareness. By analysing the narrative structure, character development, audience impact, and the role of music, this section explores how the musical fosters empathy, challenges societal stigmas, and encourages behavioural change. The study's results indicate that the production not only enhances public understanding of breastfeeding but also inspires collective action by engaging audiences emotionally. The following subsections provide a detailed examination of how the musical's storytelling, characters, and music contribute to its advocacy goals.

4.1 Narrative and Character Development

Narrative plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and social attitudes. In musical theatre, storytelling is interwoven with music and character development to create an emotional and intellectual impact on the audience (Ahmad, 2021). *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* presents a structured narrative depicting a group of journalists who evolve from scepticism to advocacy, reflecting the broader societal shift toward increased acceptance and support for breastfeeding. This transformation highlights how storytelling can challenge preconceptions, foster empathy, and encourage behavioural change. Each character in *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* represents a different societal perspective on breastfeeding. Their development throughout the musical serves as a reflection of common attitudes, struggles, and eventual enlightenment regarding breastfeeding advocacy.

Table 1. Character roles and their significance in advocating for breastfeeding awareness.

Character	Initial View on Breastfeeding	Transformation and Final Perspective
Fitri (lead journalist)	Professional, neutral, focused on news quality rather than message impact.	Becomes a passionate advocate for breastfeeding after understanding its health benefits.
Najwa (young reporter)	Uncomfortable discussing breastfeeding; sees it as a taboo subject.	Realises the importance of awareness and actively supports the campaign.
Aiman (senior journalist)	Dismissive, sees breastfeeding as a private issue.	Gains empathy after witnessing mother's struggles and advocates for supportive policies.
Fauzi (new journalist)	Finds breastfeeding discussions embarrassing and irrelevant.	Overcomes discomfort and recognises breastfeeding as a vital health issue.

Kak Melah (cleaning staff, representing traditional wisdom)	Strong proponent of breastfeeding from personal experience.	Maintains her role as a guiding voice, helping the journalists understand its significance.
Mothers (interviewees in the story)	Struggling with workplace challenges, stigma, and misinformation.	Empowered through the campaign's message, advocating for their rights.

(Source: Researcher)

These character transformations mirror real-world social change, where individuals who are initially indifferent or resistant to discussing breastfeeding become active supporters once they are educated and emotionally engaged. In musical theatre, lyrics serve as a conduit between intellectual comprehension and emotional engagement, facilitating empathy and deeper audience connection. When addressing sensitive topics such as public health, social justice, or cultural taboos, musicals offer a unique way to make abstract issues tangible and relatable (Leavy, 2015). This is particularly evident in *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu*, where the lyrics function as an advocacy tool to dismantle myths, challenge social stigmas, and promote breastfeeding awareness. The structured narrative of the musical, delivered through its songs, takes the audience on a journey from scepticism to enlightenment, ultimately shaping a more informed and supportive society.

The narrative structure of *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* aligns with the stages of social change, moving from ignorance and resistance to understanding, empathy, and action. This journey unfolds in distinct narrative phases, each tied to specific character developments. The musical explores key themes that contribute to societal reluctance toward breastfeeding, including workplace challenges, cultural stigmas, and the prevalence of misinformation, which limits many mothers' access to accurate information about its benefits. At the beginning of the story, the journalists react negatively to their assignment to cover the breastfeeding campaign. The lyrics in *Tugasan* express their discomfort:

Aiman:
Tugasan yang datang ini mengusik rasa, tentang ibu dan susu, aduh, malunya.
(This upcoming task is teasing, about mother and milk, oh, what a shame.)

This phase reflects the real-world reluctance to discuss breastfeeding publicly due to cultural norms and embarrassment. Najwa, representing younger professionals, expresses scepticism, which is common in workplaces where breastfeeding awareness is low. This initial resistance serves as a realistic entry point into the discussion, making the audience relate to or recognise similar attitudes in their own communities. The pivotal moment arises when journalists initiate interviews with mothers and subject matter experts. Kak Melah, representing lived experience and traditional knowledge, delivers the song *Anugerah Tiada Tara*, passionately explaining the unparalleled benefits of breastfeeding:

*Susu ibu, anugerah yang tiada tara, penuh nutrisi, antibodi sempurna,
Memberi kekuatan, imunisasi luar biasa*
(Mother's milk, an incomparable gift, full of nutrition, perfect antibodies,
Gives strength, extraordinary immunity)

This phase highlights how personal storytelling and real-life testimonies can dismantle myths and prejudices, a key strategy in social change movements. The character development in this act aligns with transformational learning theory, where individuals shift their perspectives when confronted with new, compelling information (Mezirow, 1991). As the journalists dive deeper into their research, they encounter stories of working mothers who struggle to continue breastfeeding due to workplace constraints. The song *Alasan Semata* showcases real concerns:

Ibu 1:
Masa yang tiada, kerja sibuk setiap hari, susu ibu terpaksa saya tinggalkan.
(No time, busy work every day, breast milk cannot be given)

This act of the narrative introduces structural obstacles, such as inadequate maternity leave, lack of breastfeeding-friendly workplace policies, and social pressures that discourage extended breastfeeding. Fauzi, initially dismissive, begins to empathise as he learns about these struggles. His transformation represents the growing awareness among men regarding the need to support breastfeeding women, highlighting the role of male allies in gendered health issues. In the next phase, the consequences of social neglect convey a profound message regarding the health risks associated with not breastfeeding. Through the song *Mangsa Si Kecil*, the characters and the audience are confronted with the consequences of formula feeding due to misinformation or lack of support:

Bayi yang tidak disusukan, mudah dijangkiti, usus, cirit-birit, dan jangkitan telinga, Setiap penyakit datang, mengancam nyawa.
(Babies who are not breastfed are easily infected, intestinal, diarrhoea, and ear infections, every disease comes with life-threatening)

This emotionally charged moment forces the characters to move beyond awareness into action, reflecting how advocacy efforts often begin with emotional realisation before transitioning into activism. Aiman, the senior journalist who previously dismissed the topic, undergoes a complete shift in perspective, vowing to use his influence to push for better policies. The climax of the musical sees the

journalists becoming active advocates for breastfeeding, realising that societal support is essential for mothers to succeed. The final song, *Nutrisi Formula Terbaik*, unites all characters:

Mulakan dengan sentuhan kulit ke kulit, suami perlu sokong, demi anak tercinta.
(Start with skin-to-skin contact, the husband needs support for the sake of his beloved child)

The message is clear that breastfeeding is not just a mother's responsibility but a societal effort that requires policy change, workplace support, and community encouragement. Fitri, the lead journalist, delivers a powerful closing statement, reinforcing that knowledge alone is insufficient; action is necessary to drive social transformation. By structuring the story around character transformations, the musical ensures that audiences experience an emotional and intellectual journey alongside the protagonists. Audiences are more likely to model behaviour change when they see relatable figures undergo transformations. Additionally, it supports the Applied Theatre Theory (Boal, 1995), which emphasises theatre as a mechanism for stimulating public discourse and inspiring activism. Ultimately, the musical illustrates that social change is initiated through dialogue. Through the strategic integration of music, narrative, and character development, *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* effectively promotes a deeper understanding of breastfeeding and its critical role in public health advocacy. Fig. 2 scene illustrates the turning point where characters begin to empathize with breastfeeding struggles, aligning with Bandura's Social Learning Theory.



Fig. 2 Journalists Interviewing Mothers in *Nutrisi Cinta Ibu*
(Source: Researcher)

4.2 Audience Impact, Emotional Engagement, and the Role of Theatre Musical in Advocacy

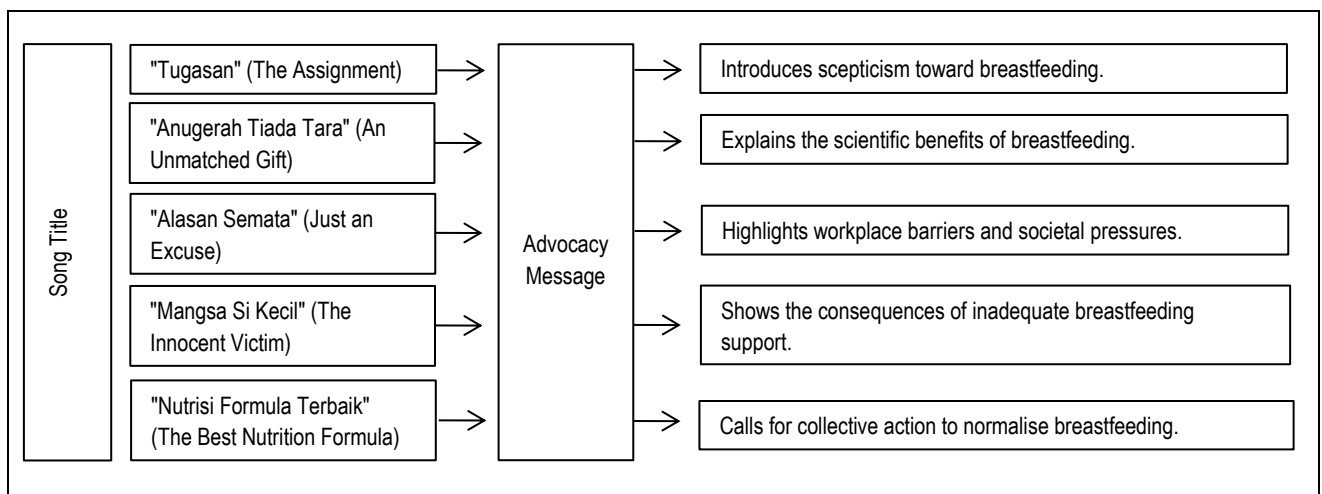


Fig. 3 The impact of different musical numbers on audience engagement.
(Source: Researcher)

Music has long been recognised as a catalyst for emotional and behavioural change, making it an essential tool in advocacy and public awareness campaigns (Leavy, 2015). In *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu*, music plays a central role in delivering the message of breastfeeding

advocacy, reinforcing key themes, and ensuring audience engagement. Through emotionally charged lyrics and memorable melodies, the musical successfully connects with audiences on an emotional level, making abstract public health concerns tangible and personally relevant. This section examines how the music's structure, lyrical content, and audience reception contribute to the effectiveness of the musical in shaping public awareness and attitudes. Music serves as a key element in reinforcing the campaign's message (Jones, L., & Patel, R., 2022). The emotional response elicited by these songs was evident in audience reactions, with many citing specific lyrics as moments of realisation. Fig. 3 shows the impact of different musical numbers on audience engagement.

The findings of this study underscore the profound impact of musical theatre as a tool for public health advocacy. The results of the audience survey indicate that the emotional engagement elicited by *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* contributed to substantial changes in perceptions of breastfeeding, workplace support, and societal attitudes. The role of music in advocacy was particularly notable, as it allowed for a deeper, more personal connection to the message, ensuring that audiences not only understood the importance of breastfeeding but also felt compelled to act. Beyond this production, findings suggest that integrating musical theatre into national public health campaigns could amplify message retention and emotional resonance, particularly in culturally sensitive health topics.

By harnessing the power of music to create empathy, reinforce key messages, and inspire action, *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* demonstrates that musical theatre is an effective and impactful medium for social advocacy. Future public health campaigns could benefit greatly from incorporating arts-based strategies, recognising that emotional engagement is just as crucial as informational accuracy in driving meaningful social change.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings reveal that audience engagement and emotional investment in the storyline significantly contribute to shifting public perceptions and increasing support for breastfeeding mothers. Compared to traditional health campaigns, musical theatre provides a more immersive and impactful approach, ensuring higher message retention and inspiring action. By depicting real-life struggles, cultural taboos, and systemic barriers, the musical highlights the importance of workplace policies, family support, and community engagement in creating a breastfeeding-friendly society. Ultimately, this research underscores the power of performing arts in public health communication, reinforcing the need for creative, arts-based advocacy strategies to address critical health and social issues.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that arts-based advocacy, particularly musical theatre, be integrated into public health campaigns to enhance emotional engagement and message retention. Expanding performances to rural areas, workplaces, and schools, along with leveraging digital platforms for broader accessibility, can significantly increase the impact of breastfeeding awareness efforts. Additionally, policymakers should strengthen workplace accommodations and legal protections to support breastfeeding mothers, ensuring a more breastfeeding-friendly environment. Future research should focus on long-term behavioural and policy changes resulting from theatre-based interventions. Ultimately, *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* highlights the transformative power of musical theatre in fostering empathy, challenging societal norms, and inspiring collective action, proving that art and advocacy can work hand in hand to create meaningful social change. This study is limited by its reliance on qualitative self-reported data, which may not capture long-term behavioural changes. Future research should employ longitudinal methods to assess sustained impact and compare multiple artistic formats across demographic groups. It is recommended that policymakers consider funding arts-based health interventions for broader societal reach.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) Malaysia through the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme 2021-0143-107-02 (FRGS/1/2021/SS10/UPSI/02/24).

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper contributes to the field of arts-based public health advocacy by demonstrating how musical theatre can effectively communicate health messages and influence societal attitudes toward breastfeeding. *Muzikal Nutrisi Cinta Ibu* utilises narrative-driven storytelling, character development, and music to foster empathy, increase message retention, and inspire behavioural change. By aligning with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), This research also bridges the gap between health communication and the performing arts, reinforcing the cognitive and emotional impact of musical storytelling in public health education. By providing a framework for future theatre-based advocacy, this study offers valuable insights for health policymakers, educators, and community leaders on integrating creative storytelling into public health campaigns. Ultimately, this research highlights the transformative power of musical theatre in fostering awareness, empathy, and collective action, positioning the performing arts as a vital tool for social change and health education.

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