

Audience Reception of Othman Alibrahim's Kun Fayakun: A Reader-Response Study

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how digital audiences construct meaning around Othman Alibrahim's Arabic acapella nasheed Kun Fayakun through Wolfgang Iser's reader-response framework. Using a qualitative interpretive design, the study analyzes fifteen public YouTube comments documented from the performance's comment section and selected purposively because they directly address the singer, the nasheed's spiritual message, or affective-symbolic reactions. The comments were anonymized and coded according to response focus, shared repertoire, textual indeterminacy, and audience concretization. The findings identify three interconnected reception patterns. First, aesthetic-performative responses foreground vocal clarity, acapella delivery, and the singer's expressive quality. Second, spiritual-textual responses interpret the nasheed through an Islamic repertoire of divine power, supplication, hope, and healing. Third, symbolic-affective responses use emojis and brief expressions to condense admiration, grief, serenity, and spiritual comfort. The study argues that YouTube comments make visible forms of concretization that remain largely implicit in conventional literary reading. It extends Iser's framework to digital musical reception while emphasizing that a small purposive comment corpus cannot represent the entire audience.

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana audiens digital membangun makna terhadap nasyid akapela Arab Kun Fayakun karya Othman Alibrahim melalui kerangka respons pembaca Wolfgang Iser. Penelitian menggunakan desain kualitatif interpretatif dengan menganalisis lima belas komentar publik YouTube yang didokumentasikan dari kolom komentar pertunjukan dan dipilih secara purposif karena secara langsung membahas penyanyi, pesan spiritual nasyid, atau respons afektif-simbolik. Identitas pengguna dianonimkan dan data dikodekan berdasarkan fokus respons, repertoar bersama, ketaktertentuan teks, dan konkretisasi audiens. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga pola resepsi yang saling berkaitan. Pertama, respons estetis-performatif menonjolkan kejernihan vokal, penyajian akapela, dan ekspresivitas penyanyi. Kedua, respons spiritual-tekstual memaknai nasyid melalui repertoar Islam tentang kekuasaan Ilahi, doa, harapan, dan penyembuhan. Ketiga, respons simbolik-afektif menggunakan emoji serta ungkapan singkat untuk memadatkan kekaguman, kesedihan, ketenangan, dan kenyamanan spiritual. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa komentar YouTube dapat memperlihatkan proses konkretisasi makna yang sering tidak terlihat dalam praktik pembacaan konvensional. Kajian ini

memperluas penerapan teori Iser pada resepsi musik digital, sekaligus menegaskan bahwa korpus komentar purposif yang kecil tidak dapat mewakili seluruh audiens.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Digital platforms have changed the conditions under which literary and musical reception can be observed. Audience responses that were once available mainly through interviews, reviews, or letters now appear immediately in comment sections, reaction posts, and other forms of participatory media. YouTube comments are particularly useful because viewers often externalize judgments about performance, emotion, memory, identity, and personal experience; however, not every comment is analytically relevant, and researchers must distinguish direct engagement with the cultural object from spam, repetition, or unrelated interaction (Möller et al., 2024). Research on music-related comments further shows that online responses frequently articulate emotions that listeners find difficult to express elsewhere, while collective commenting can amplify memories and affect around cultural products (Lamont et al., 2023; Mattfeldt, 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

This development is especially significant for Arabic religious music and *nasheed*, where reception involves more than aesthetic judgment. Musical religious expression may function as a vehicle for reflection, spiritual attachment, and the circulation of Islamic messages, and its emotional effect is shaped by the audience's cultural and religious repertoire (Karimullah, 2024). Studies of online da'wah similarly show that audience reception on YouTube is related to thematic relevance, audience needs, and the communicative relationship established around religious content (Anshar et al., 2024). These findings suggest that comments on religious musical performances can be read not merely as spontaneous praise but as traces of meaning-making in which listeners connect textual, sonic, cultural, and spiritual cues with their own experience.

The object examined in this study is *Kun Fayakun*, an Arabic acapella performance by Othman Alibrahim. The artist's official page records the release date as 27 May 2021, identifies Mohammed Bin Dahi as the writer, and describes the work as a Maroon 5 *Memories* acapella cover with a duration of 2:38 (Alibrahim, 2021). The performance is constructed entirely around vocal arrangement rather than conventional instrumental accompaniment. Its lyrics present supplication, vulnerability, illness, hope, divine mercy, and the Qur'anic formula *kun fayakun* ('Be, and it is') as a central sign of God's absolute power. Choironi et al. (2023), using Riffaterre's semiotics, demonstrate that the song's indirect expressions, metaphors, repetitions, and Qur'anic hypogram generate meanings associated with prayer and collective anxiety (Choironi et al., 2023). Their study clarifies the textual-semantic dimension of *Kun Fayakun*, but it does not focus on how actual digital audiences concretize those meanings in public responses.

Reader-response theory provides a productive framework for addressing that problem because it shifts attention from a work as a closed container of meaning to the interaction between textual structures and the recipient. Iser (1978) argues that meaning emerges through the reader's active engagement with what a text offers, withholds, presupposes, and leaves indeterminate (Iser, 1978). The repertoire available to a recipient including familiar cultural conventions, prior texts, beliefs, and social knowledge supports interpretation, while gaps and indeterminacies invite the recipient to concretize the work. In contemporary reception studies, this orientation is increasingly relevant because internet commentary makes parts of that interpretive activity publicly visible. Rokib (2023) emphasizes that reception theory remains useful for understanding interactive literary response in digital contexts, particularly through Iser's concepts of repertoire and reader-text interaction (Rokib, 2023).

Previous research has applied Iser's reader-response perspective to song lyrics and listener interpretation. Santoso and Rengganis (2022) show that listeners construct varied meanings from the lyrics of Hindia's *Menari Dengan Bayangan* through personal experience and self-healing narratives (Santoso & Rengganis, 2022). Maulidah and Abror (2024) likewise report that listeners connect Dere's songs with sadness, identity, and social reflection, demonstrating that minimal musical arrangements can open interpretive space for personal concretization (Maulidah & Abror, 2024). These studies establish the relevance of reader-response theory to songs, yet their data rely primarily on interviews or surveys. Conversely, studies of YouTube and music investigate emotional comments and audience

engagement but generally do not operationalize Iser's concepts in relation to an Arabic Islamic *nasheed* (Lamont et al., 2023; Möller et al., 2024).

This intersection reveals a specific research gap. Existing work on *Kun Fayakun* has examined the song's semiotic structure, while reader-response research on songs has largely emphasized interview-based listener interpretation, and digital-comment studies have focused on general music engagement. What remains underexplored is how public YouTube comments around an Arabic religious acapella performance can be understood as visible acts of concretization shaped by aesthetic experience, religious repertoire, and symbolic-affective expression. The present study therefore asks: (1) What patterns of audience reception appear in the selected YouTube comments on *Kun Fayakun*? and (2) How can Iser's concepts of repertoire, indeterminacy, and concretization explain those responses? The study contributes by extending reader-response analysis from print-centered reception to a multimodal digital environment, while retaining methodological caution: the selected comments are treated as an interpretive corpus, not as a statistically representative measure of all viewers.

Reader-Response and Digital Musical Reception

For Iser, a literary work is neither identical with the printed text nor reducible to the reader's subjective reaction. It is actualized through an interaction between textual structures and the acts performed by the recipient during reading (Iser, 1978). Three concepts are especially relevant to the present study. First, repertoire refers to familiar norms, conventions, beliefs, and earlier texts that the recipient brings into the interpretive process. Second, indeterminacy or textual gaps refers to elements that are not fully specified and therefore require inferential completion. Third, concretization describes the temporary realization of meaning produced when the recipient connects textual cues with prior experience and expectation.

When this framework is applied to a musical performance on YouTube, 'reading' must be understood broadly. Listeners encounter lyrics, vocal timbre, rhythm, visual presentation, platform context, and other users' comments at the same time. The object of reception is therefore multimodal, while the public comment becomes a partial record of how a viewer has concretized that experience. This does not mean that every comment is an exhaustive interpretation. A brief statement such as 'a song that fills the heart with peace,' or even a sequence of emojis, may represent a compressed response to several interacting cues. Research on YouTube comments supports treating such contributions as meaningful

evidence when they directly express an experience of the content or its performer (Möller et al., 2024).

This study uses Iser's concepts analytically rather than assuming that commenters are equivalent to the abstract 'implied reader.' The public commenter is an empirical audience member whose response can be observed, whereas the implied reader is a textual structure that anticipates interpretive participation. The analysis therefore asks how empirical comments disclose acts of concretization and what repertoires appear to organize them. This distinction prevents the theory from being reduced to a simple classification of positive and negative opinions and allows the study to examine how meaning is produced through the interaction of the *nasheed*'s textual-spiritual cues and audience experience.

2. METHOD

a. Research Design and Context

This study uses a qualitative interpretive design within literary reception studies. Its purpose is not to measure the popularity of *Kun Fayakun* or to estimate the proportion of positive and negative reactions, but to explain how selected audience responses construct meaning. The primary cultural object is Othman Alibrahim's 2021 acapella performance *Kun Fayakun*, while the primary reception data consist of public comments documented from the YouTube comment section associated with the performance. Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory provides the interpretive framework, particularly the concepts of repertoire, indeterminacy, concretization, and aesthetic effect (Iser, 1978).

b. Data Sources and Sampling

The analytical corpus contains fifteen comments preserved in the author's research documentation. The comments were selected purposively because they directly reflected one of three empirically visible response foci: evaluation of the singer and performance, interpretation of the *nasheed* and its spiritual message, or affective-symbolic response expressed through short verbal forms and emojis. Comments were included when they referred directly to the performance, the song's meaning, or the commenter's emotional-spiritual experience. Off-topic interaction, advertising, duplicate messages, and comments that did not contain an interpretable response to the cultural object were excluded. This relevance-based principle follows methodological concerns in YouTube comment research that not all publicly visible comments provide evidence of viewers' attitudes or experiences toward the video itself (Möller et al., 2024).

The original documentation contained multilingual responses in Arabic, English, and Turkish, as well as emoji-only comments. For publication, usernames and profile identifiers were removed and each item was assigned a code (C1-C15). Short quotations were retained only when necessary to show the form of the response; longer comments were paraphrased to minimize unnecessary reproduction of user-generated content. Because the source

manuscript did not preserve a complete timestamped export of the full YouTube comment population, the fifteen-comment corpus is treated as a purposive qualitative dataset. No claim is made that it represents the prevalence of particular attitudes among all viewers.

c. Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Analysis proceeded in four stages. First, each comment was read in relation to its immediate referent: singer/performance, *nasheed*/message, or affective-symbolic expression. Second, open codes were assigned to recurring meanings such as vocal admiration, serenity, prayer, divine power, sadness, hope, transnational solidarity, and nonverbal approval. Third, these codes were mapped to Iserian concepts: shared religious or cultural repertoire, textual indeterminacy, audience concretization, and aesthetic effect. Fourth, cases were compared across the three response patterns to identify both convergences and differences. The analysis was checked against the original comment descriptions and screenshots in the source manuscript to ensure that the revised coding did not add meanings unsupported by the documented data. The study also distinguishes description from interpretation so that theoretical claims remain traceable to the corpus.

Ethically, the analysis uses comments posted in a publicly accessible digital setting and involves no direct intervention or interaction with commenters. Nevertheless, public availability does not eliminate privacy concerns. The revised article therefore anonymizes usernames, removes profile screenshots, and reports only the minimum textual material needed for scholarly analysis. The dataset contains no deliberately collected sensitive personal information. Researchers seeking to replicate or extend this study should document the date of data harvesting, platform terms, and institutional ethics requirements applicable at the time of collection.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Result

The fifteen comments form three analytically distinct but overlapping reception patterns: aesthetic-performative reception, spiritual-textual reception, and symbolic-affective reception. Table 1 summarizes the corpus without reproducing usernames or unnecessary personal identifiers. The categories are not statistical measures of the entire YouTube audience; they organize the meanings visible in the purposively selected material.

Table 1. Overview of the analytical corpus and reception patterns

Reception pattern	Comment codes	Representative evidence	Interpretive emphasis
Aesthetic-performative	C1-C5	Praise of a “beautiful” or “amazing” voice; appreciation of vocal clarity, repeated listening, peace, and cross-national greetings.	The performance is concretized as aesthetically pleasing, ethically acceptable, and emotionally calming.
Spiritual-textual	C6-C10	Prayer for the performer; “a song that makes you smile while your eyes are filled with tears”; “fills the heart with	Listeners activate an Islamic repertoire of supplication, hope, divine

Reception pattern	Comment codes	Representative evidence	Interpretive emphasis
Symbolic-affective	C11-C15	peace"; references to divine power and spiritual comfort.	agency, healing, and solidarity.
		Rose symbols, thumbs-up symbols, broken-heart and sparkling-star symbols, smiling faces, and halo-smile symbols without extended verbal explanation.	Nonverbal signs compress admiration, grief, approval, serenity, and spiritual affect into platform-native forms.

Source: Author's analysis of the documented YouTube comment corpus.

1. Aesthetic-Performative Reception

The first pattern centers on the singer's voice and the quality of the acapella performance. Comments C1-C5 repeatedly evaluate vocal beauty, clarity, emotional delivery, and the pleasure of repeated listening. Two comments explicitly locate the response across national boundaries by mentioning India and Türkiye, suggesting that appreciation of the performance is not restricted to Arabic-speaking listeners. Another response associates the voice with peace and tranquility and extends prayers and greetings to Muslims more broadly. In these comments, the audience initially approaches the work through an aesthetic route: timbre, vocal control, sonic cleanliness, and expressive delivery become the main cues through which the *nasheed* is valued.

From an Iserian perspective, these comments are acts of concretization rather than neutral descriptions of acoustic properties. The phrase 'beautiful voice,' for example, summarizes a listener's interaction with culturally familiar expectations about appropriate religious vocal performance. The absence of conventional instruments also contributes to the perceived moral and spiritual suitability of the work for some respondents. Thus, aesthetic evaluation and religious acceptability are not separate layers; they intersect within the repertoire that listeners bring to the performance. The same vocal arrangement can therefore be concretized as technically impressive, spiritually safe, emotionally peaceful, or all three at once.

2. Spiritual-Textual Reception

The second pattern is more explicitly interpretive. Comments C6-C10 connect the performance with prayer, divine power, serenity, tears, hope, and emotional transformation. One respondent combines emphatic admiration with a prayer for the performer and invokes the idea that when God wills something, it comes into being. Another describes the *nasheed* as producing simultaneous smiling and tears, while a Turkish comment characterizes it as filling the heart with peace. A longer response explains that the listener does not usually listen to songs but was unexpectedly moved by the lyrics and melody. These comments show that reception extends beyond liking the sound: listeners translate the work into personally and religiously meaningful states.

The central phrase *Kun Fayakun* is crucial to this pattern because it activates a dense shared repertoire. Within Islamic discourse, the formula is associated with divine creative command and absolute power. The lyrics, however, do not specify a single

biography for the suffering speaker or a single concrete problem that every listener must imagine. References to affliction, weakness, forgiveness, healing, and hope leave interpretive spaces that audiences can connect with illness, anxiety, repentance, personal hardship, or collective crisis. Choironi et al. (2023) identify the Qur'anic hypogram and pandemic context as important to the song's semiotic meaning (Choironi et al., 2023). The present data add a receptional dimension: listeners do not merely recognize those signs; they concretize them as peace, hope, tears, healing, and confidence in divine intervention.

3. Symbolic-Affective Reception

The third pattern consists of comments C11-C15, which rely predominantly on platform-native symbols rather than developed sentences. Rose symbols communicate admiration and affection; thumbs-up symbols indicate approval; a broken-heart symbol accompanied by sparkling stars suggests an affective combination of sorrow and beauty or hope; smiling faces communicate pleasure and comfort; and halo-smile symbols suggest innocence, goodness, or spiritual serenity. These responses are semantically sparse but not meaningless. They demonstrate that digital reception can be expressed through visual shorthand that condenses an emotional judgment into a small number of signs.

In conventional reader-response analysis, meaning-making is often reconstructed through extended verbal statements from readers. The emoji-only comments complicate that expectation. Their interpretive content is less explicit, yet their placement in the comment section and their conventional platform meanings allow them to function as minimal concretizations of affect. They do not explain why a listener felt admiration, sadness, or peace, but they register that an affective response occurred. This supports a broader understanding of digital reception in which linguistic and nonlinguistic signs jointly participate in audience meaning-making.

Table 2. Mapping the findings to Iser's reader-response concepts

Iserian concept	Evidence in Kun Fayakun	Receptional function
Repertoire	Qur'anic formula, supplication, divine mercy, healing, expectations about religious vocal performance.	Provides culturally available frames through which listeners recognize and organize the work.
Indeterminacy / gaps	The speaker's affliction, personal history, and specific situation are not fully specified.	Allows audiences to project personal hardship, collective crisis, repentance, illness, or hope onto the lyrics.
Concretization	Comments describe peace, tears, spiritual comfort, admiration, healing, and symbolic approval.	Makes visible how audiences temporarily realize the work's meaning through their own experience.
Aesthetic effect	Acapella texture, vocal clarity, expressive delivery, familiar melody.	Connects formal performance qualities with emotional and spiritual response.

Source: Author's interpretation based on Iser (1978).

b. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that digital audience reception of *Kun Fayakun* is organized through a movement from aesthetic perception to spiritual and affective concretization. This pattern is consistent with research showing that music comments on YouTube frequently contain more than simple evaluation: they articulate emotional experiences, personal resonance, and forms of social connection (Lamont et al., 2023). In the present corpus, praise for vocal quality is often inseparable from peace, moral acceptability, prayer, and spiritual admiration. The audience does not receive the performance as an isolated sonic object; instead, sound becomes a gateway through which religious and emotional meanings are activated.

This interaction helps clarify the relevance of Iser's concept of repertoire. The phrase *Kun Fayakun*, supplicatory diction, and the expectation of divine mercy are already meaningful within an Islamic cultural horizon. Listeners who recognize this repertoire can connect the song's verbal and sonic cues with familiar religious ideas without requiring the lyrics to explain every theological implication. Rokib (2023) stresses that repertoire is central to understanding how readers activate culturally available knowledge in reception (Rokib, 2023). The comments analyzed here show this process in digital form: brief references to prayer, divine power, peace, and healing presuppose a shared symbolic field that allows a short public comment to carry substantial interpretive meaning.

At the same time, the song's indeterminacies make personal projection possible. The lyrical speaker is weak, afflicted, hopeful, and dependent on God, yet the precise circumstances remain open enough for listeners to align the text with their own experiences. This explains why one comment can foreground tears, another serenity, another healing, and another admiration for the performer. Reader-response studies of popular songs have likewise found that listeners attach broad lyrical themes to personal histories, identity, and self-healing (Maulidah & Abror, 2024; Santoso & Rengganis, 2022). The present study extends that insight by showing that the mechanism also operates in an Arabic religious *nasheed* and can be observed in naturally occurring digital comments rather than only elicited interview responses.

The spiritual dimension of the findings also aligns with scholarship on religious communication through music. Karimullah (2024) argues that music used in Islamic da'wah can evoke emotional engagement and spiritual reflection (Karimullah, 2024), while Anshar et al. (2024) show that reception of online religious content is shaped by thematic relevance and audience needs (Anshar et al., 2024). In *Kun Fayakun*, the audience responses suggest that the work is received simultaneously as an aesthetic performance and as a spiritually functional text. This dual status is important: the same comment may praise the voice while also interpreting the performance as comforting, ethically appropriate, or spiritually beneficial. Such overlap challenges analytical models that separate form, message, and audience effect too sharply.

The symbolic-affective comments add a second contribution. Digital reception is not always discursive in the conventional sense. Emoji-only responses compress emotion into visual signs, and their interpretive value depends on platform conventions and context. Mattfeldt (2024) demonstrates that comments on YouTube music videos can serve as spaces for linguistic remembrance and personal identity, including moments where language approaches speechlessness (Mattfeldt, 2024). The present corpus suggests a related phenomenon: when listeners respond only with roses, approval signs, broken-heart and sparkle symbols, or halo-smiles, they produce minimal but socially legible acts of affective reception. These signs cannot support detailed claims about motivation, but they show that digital concretization may be multimodal and extremely condensed.

The findings also resonate with Wang et al. (2024), who show that audience comments around digital cultural products can amplify emotions, memories, and engagement through collective storytelling (Wang et al., 2024). Although the present dataset is much smaller and cannot test platform-level effects, the transnational references in the comments—such as greetings from India and Türkiye—indicate that a shared digital reception space can connect culturally dispersed listeners around a common aesthetic-spiritual object. The familiar melody, Arabic religious lyrics, acapella form, and global platform together create a hybrid reception environment in which local religious repertoire and transnational digital culture intersect.

Theoretically, the study contributes by treating public comments as partial records of concretization rather than as straightforward proxies for ‘audience opinion.’ This distinction matters. A YouTube comment is selective, performative, and shaped by platform affordances; silent viewers and people who choose not to comment remain invisible. Möller et al. (2024) similarly caution that comment corpora contain varying degrees of relevance to researchers’ questions (Möller et al., 2024). Therefore, reader-response analysis of digital comments should not assume representativeness. Its strength lies instead in making observable how particular audience members articulate the meanings they construct from a cultural object.

Several limitations follow from this design. First, the purposive corpus contains only fifteen comments and cannot establish frequency, prevalence, or demographic patterns. Second, the source manuscript did not preserve a complete timestamped export of the entire comment stream, which limits reproducibility at the population level. Third, the study analyzes public textual and symbolic responses without interviewing commenters, so interpretations of emojis and brief expressions remain context-sensitive. Fourth, the study does not experimentally separate the effects of lyrics, melody, vocal timbre, visual presentation, and prior familiarity with the melody. Future research should combine a documented comment harvest with multilingual discourse analysis, interviews or surveys, and comparative reception of different Arabic *nasheeds* to test how textual gaps, cultural repertoire, and platform affordances interact across audience groups.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that audience reception of Othman Alibrahim's *Kun Fayakun* on YouTube can be understood through three interconnected patterns: aesthetic-performative, spiritual-textual, and symbolic-affective reception. Listeners first respond to features such as vocal clarity, acapella texture, and expressive delivery, but these aesthetic judgments frequently develop into spiritual concretizations involving prayer, divine power, hope, healing, peace, and emotional release. Emoji-only responses further demonstrate that digital reception may be expressed through condensed nonverbal signs as well as extended commentary.

Through Wolfgang Iser's framework, these responses can be explained as interactions among repertoire, indeterminacy, and concretization. The Islamic repertoire surrounding supplication and the formula *Kun Fayakun* provides a shared interpretive frame, while the lyrics' open references to affliction, weakness, mercy, and healing enable listeners to connect the work with different personal experiences. The study therefore extends reader-response analysis into a digital musical environment and shows how public comments can reveal selected acts of meaning construction that would otherwise remain private.

The contribution is interpretive rather than representative. The fifteen purposively selected comments do not describe the entire audience and should not be used to infer population-level sentiment. Future studies should build reproducible multilingual datasets, record harvesting dates and sampling procedures, and combine comment analysis with direct audience research. Such work would strengthen understanding of how Arabic religious music circulates across linguistic and cultural boundaries and how digital audiences

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