

**LOCAL WISDOM VS MODERN:  
Perception Analysis Study On The Rara Istiani Wulandari Depiction In The Mandalika  
Circuit Motogp Event 2022**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article discusses the perception of Rara Istiani Wulandari as a rain handler at the MotoGP event held at the Mandalika circuit. Rain handler is a term for someone who is believed to be able to control the rain. Rara Istiani Wulandari is a very phenomenal figure because of her action that attracts attention when controlling rainy weather in the middle of the Mandalika circuit field. In this study, researchers will examine people's perceptions of the rain handler carried out by Rara Istiani Wulandari. Researchers used data sources from Instagram and YouTube. These two platforms were chosen considering that the majority of the community is very close and intensively uses these platforms as part of finding and providing information to the public. The process of selecting data sources is based on a random sampling technique. Researchers will see the level of interaction on each news content, such as the number of significant likes, comments, and viewers. In its implementation, the researcher will use the perception theory proposed by Verderber (1978). This perception theory aims to see how people view the current era of the existence of the rain handler described by the figure of Rara Istiani Wulandari. Furthermore, the researcher also uses the media ecology theory proposed by Marshall McLuhan as a supporting theory, which aims to see the relationship between the media and the perception of Rara Istiani Wulandari as a rain handler. The findings obtained from the research are that people today tend to generalize something practically and realistically by looking at various sides before being poured into an opinion.

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**Abstrak**

Artikel ini membahas tentang persepsi Rara Istiani Wulandari sebagai pawang hujan di ajang MotoGP yang digelar di sirkuit Mandalika. Pawang hujan adalah sebutan untuk seseorang yang dipercaya mampu mengendalikan hujan. Rara Istiani Wulandari merupakan sosok yang sangat fenomenal karena aksinya yang menarik perhatian saat mengendalikan cuaca hujan di tengah lapangan sirkuit Mandalika. Dalam penelitian ini peneliti akan mengkaji bagaimana persepsi masyarakat terhadap pawang hujan yang dilakukan oleh Rara Istiani Wulandari. Peneliti menggunakan sumber data dari Instagram dan YouTube. Kedua platform ini dipilih mengingat mayoritas masyarakat sangat dekat dan intensif menggunakan platform tersebut sebagai bagian dari pencarian dan pemberian informasi kepada publik. Proses pemilihan sumber data didasarkan pada teknik random sampling, dimana peneliti akan melihat tingkat interaksi pada setiap konten berita seperti jumlah like, komentar, dan viewer yang signifikan. Dalam implementasinya, peneliti akan menggunakan teori persepsi yang dikemukakan oleh Verderber (1978). Teori persepsi ini bertujuan untuk melihat bagaimana masyarakat memandang eksistensi pawang hujan saat ini yang digambarkan oleh sosok Rara Istiani Wulandari. Selanjutnya peneliti juga menggunakan teori ekologi media yang dikemukakan oleh Marshall McLuhan sebagai teori pendukung, yang bertujuan untuk melihat hubungan antara media dengan persepsi Rara Istiani Wulandari sebagai pawang hujan. Temuan yang diperoleh dari penelitian tersebut adalah bahwa masyarakat saat ini cenderung menggeneralisasi sesuatu secara praktis dan realistik dengan melihat dari berbagai sisi sebelum dituangkan dalam sebuah opini.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Recently, news about the figure of Rara Istiani Wulandari has been widely discussed by various circles of society, especially on social media. This is inseparable from her actions in controlling lousy weather during the MotoGP event in Mandalika some time ago. Not surprisingly, the action received various positive and negative responses from the community. Not a few Indonesian people criticize and make jokes about the rain handler's action because it is considered a shame for the nation, considering that people from other countries also witnessed this MotoGP performance. It is different from foreign media, which praises because the action shows the local wisdom of the Indonesian people.

In line with current developments, it is not surprising that many people in Indonesia still do not believe in mystical acts. This is because what is done cannot be adequately digested by human reason. However, when viewed from a flashback to the past, things that smell mystical, myths and beliefs cannot be separated from the people of Indonesia. Based on the facts on the ground, not a few people in Indonesia still believe in mystical things/rituals carried out by rain handlers that have existed since time immemorial. Belief about something irrational can be called mystical belief. Mystical is irrational knowledge, i.e. knowledge (teachings or beliefs) about God that is acquired through meditation or spiritual practice, free from dependence on senses or reason. Mystical knowledge is the knowledge that cannot be understood by the ratio (Hambali, 2011).

The use of the rain handler certainly opens a new discourse for us in seeing the juxtaposition between modernity and local wisdom. These two things are likened to two magnetic poles that repel each other, as is known; basically, the Indonesian people's ancestors still adhere to metaphysical and supernatural beliefs. This is considered local wisdom that is still trying to be maintained until the times. Thus, even though science and mysticism have separate worlds, it is undeniable that mystical elements are still inherent in Indonesian society.

Rain handler is a profession or service that some still use for certain purposes such as big events, parties, etc. The existence of this rain handler ritual still contains mythological and even magical values. This is because the rain handler is considered capable of helping the community to withstand or even move the rain to another place so that the event held does not experience rain disturbances. In carrying out his/her rituals, the rain handler uses a metaphysical method, which is difficult for us to digest with common sense (Kurnia, 2017).

In each region, of course, rain handlers have their own uniqueness, whether unique in dress, unique in rituals and so forth. The development of this profession is not very audible because it is not too familiar and is not a job many people aim to make a livelihood for their daily life. However, many still use these services because of their very high trust in controlling the weather.

The rain handlers are very difficult to explain scientifically because the rain handler is local wisdom. Apart from this, if it is understood more deeply, the actual existence of the rain handler involves a belief system in which such practices have existed since ancient times and will continue to exist until today, even though currently divination equipment has developed more sophisticated weather.

These various perceptions have triggered the name Rara Istiani Wulandari or who is familiarly called "Rara the rain handler", to become a hot topic in various media. No doubt, this has sparked debate in various circles because, in the current era, society is dominated by realistic and modern thinking. However, not a few also support Rara Istiani Wulandari's action when she was a rain handler in Mandalika because it can show the local wisdom of the Indonesian people that still exists today. The debate over trust in the rain handler is getting increasingly commotion with the advancement of media technology that brings people to express their opinions in the media, for example, Instagram and YouTube social media.

The existence of this social media, of course, has a significant impact on something that is being hotly discussed, where people can easily access it to interact with each other to express their opinions. According to Boyd in Sari (2018), social media is a collection of software that

allows individuals and communities to gather, share, communicate, and in some instances, collaborate or play with each other. Social media has power in user-generated content (UGC), not by editors as in mass media agencies.

Given this, it is not surprising that social media is a place to communicate/interact with each other virtually, which gives birth to a new topic to be discussed. According to Shannon and Weaver (1949), communication is a form of human interaction that influences each other, intentionally or unintentionally—not limited to forms of communication using verbal language, but also in terms of facial expressions, painting, art, and technology (Cangara, 2016) in (Sari, 2018). Judging from this understanding, the power of communication on social media makes the name Rara Istiani Wulandari increasingly a conversation.

The action was taken by Rara Istiani Wulandari as a rain handler certainly attracts attention in all circles because the perception among the public is different, especially on social media. Perception can be said as a process of entering messages or information into the human brain that is integrated with thoughts, feelings, and individual experiences (Akbar, 2015). Perception is a general or global view of an object from several aspects someone can understand. Public perception is the process of observing objects through the senses and then organising and interpreting through forms of stimulation of an object or event based on the background of each individual so that responses or reactions will appear, which are manifested in the form of the ability to discriminate, classify, conclude information and interpret messages and the realization of communication between humans and objects (Soelaeman, 2006) in (Syahputra, 2020).

Different perceptions about the rain handler certainly lead to a different understanding in responding to something. This can be seen from the action of Rara Istiani Wulandari as a rain handler in the MotoGP event at the Mandalika Circuit. Departing from the problems described above, the researchers will discuss how Rara Istiani Wulandari carries out the public's perception of the rain handler. This is done to determine the existence of the rain handler as one of the local wisdom in Indonesia. The researchers will use the theory of perception proposed by Verderber (1978) to obtain accurate results. Furthermore, the researcher also uses the media ecology theory proposed by Marshall McLuhan as a supporting theory in this research process.

#### **a. Rain Handler**

Rain handler is the name given by the community to a person or group of people who can move and delay rain-producing clouds. The community is very close to that title without a special term to call the profession a rain handler. Rain handler is a profession or service that some still use for certain purposes (Kurnia, 2017). This rain-related ritual has been passed down from generation to generation. For so long, the early history of the tradition that continues to take root today has been unknown. Although it is believed to be able to stop the rain, the rain handler only moves the cloudy clouds to another place so that an event can run smoothly (Kurnia, 2017). One example of a rain handler that is currently viral in various media was Rara Istiani Wulandari when she was controlling lousy weather during the Mandalika MotoGP event some time ago. Rara shows her action in controlling the rain with local wisdom following her beliefs.

In this regard, in general, people perceive that the rain handler is identical to someone who wears black clothes, smokes, and is scary. It has been embedded in the minds of the people that the rain handler is closely related to mystical elements. People sometimes see, when they are at an event when there are people who have these characteristics, they will think of that person as someone who controls the weather.

#### **b. Social Media**

Social media is online media that supports social interaction; social media uses web-based technology that turns communication into interactive dialogue. Van Dijk in Sari (2018) states that social media is a media platform that focuses on the existence of users who facilitates them in doing activities and collaborating. Therefore, social media can be seen as an online medium (facilitator) that strengthens users' relationships and social bonds.

It can be concluded that social media is a medium on the internet that allows users to represent themselves and interact, collaborate, share, communicate with other users and form virtual social bonds (Nasrullah, 2015:11) (Puspitarini, 2019).

In this regard, the existence of social media today indeed significantly impacts various issues, problems, and topics that develop in society. The existence of this social media can give color to the various perceptions that arise to give birth to critical thoughts/ideas, one of which is the view of the existence of the rain handler in the current era. This appearance went viral because of the actions carried out by Rara Istiani Wulandari and disseminated by various media, so this kind of action gave rise to various views from various parties.

### c. Perception

Sarlito W. Sarwono (2009:24) in (Listyana, 2015) says that perception, in general, is a process of acquiring, interpreting, selecting and arranging sensory information. Perception is the process of seeking information to understand using sensing devices.

According to Mulyana (2000:168) in (Arifin, 2017), perception is the core of communication, while interpretation (interpretation) is the core of perception, which is identical to decoding in the communication process. Furthermore, Mulyana suggests that perception determines the selection of a message and ignores other messages.

From the definition, in general, it can be understood that perception can be defined as the process of giving meaning and interpretation of stimuli and sensations received by individuals and is strongly influenced by internal and external factors of each individual.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative descriptive research type. This approach is used to obtain accurate research results because it can describe various viewpoints. In this study, the author uses the Perception theory proposed by Verderber (1978). According to Rudolph F. Verderber, perception is the process of interpreting sensory information (Zaini, 2011). However, this perception depends not only on physical stimuli but also on the surrounding stimuli and conditions that exist in a person. Then, to support this theory, the author also uses the media ecology theory proposed by Marshall McLuhan as a supporting theory in this study. What is meant by media ecology theory is how media and communication processes affect human perceptions, feelings, emotions, and technological values that affect communication through new technologies.

Perceptions and theories of media ecology are two things that cannot be separated in seeing the phenomenon of the existence of a rain handler carried out by Rara Istiani Wulandari when controlling rain at the Mandalika MotoGP event in March 2022. Various public perceptions of pros and cons appear on almost all social media platforms, such as Instagram and YouTube. Rara Istiani Wulandari emerged after her actions in the middle of the field in controlling the rainy weather by performing rituals according to her beliefs. Because her actions were shown in public, her name became viral among the public.

To discuss this topic, the researcher uses data sources obtained from Instagram and YouTube content regarding the actions taken by Rara Istiani Wulandari during the Mandalika MotoGP event in March 2022. The technique used in selecting this content is based on the random sampling technique by looking at the number of levels of interactions between users, such as the number of comments, the number of likes, and the quality of the content. The time span of this research starts from July 5, 2022, to July 17, 2022. There are three stages in this research. First, the authors collect, select and sort data sources from both media. Second, the author analyzes the findings obtained by using an approach to perception theory and media ecology theory as supporting theories. Third, the researcher concludes the research results.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The emergence of the name Rara Istiani Wulandari into the public sphere because of her action as a rain handler at the Mandalika circuit during the MotoGP event made various groups

of people have different perceptions in seeing the action. This perception appears as part of the response to the understanding that each individual has. People often express their various perceptions through social media, Instagram and YouTube. This difference in perception can be seen in the news content presented and the level of interaction in the comments column between platform users. From here, we can see the various perceptions that are formed inadvertently, inviting other users to provide their respective views. This is in accordance with Rudolph F Verderber's statement that perception is the process of interpreting sensory information.

To see these various points of view, here are some data sources that have been obtained from both social media platforms, namely Instagram and YouTube.

**I. Instagram**

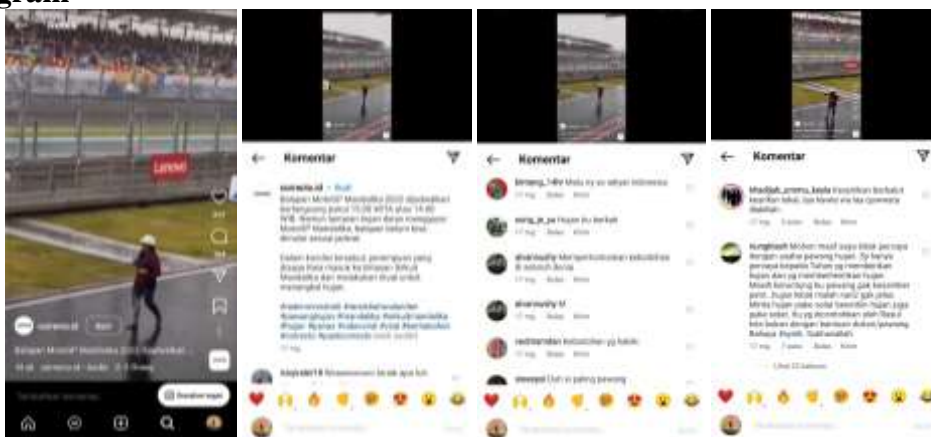


Figure 1.1 Rara Istiani Wulandari action in controlling the weather in the middle of the Mandalika circuit field invites various negative perceptions

Based on figure 1.1 that has been presented above, which was sourced from the content uploaded by correcto.id, Rara Istiani Wulandari's action as a rain handler at the Mandalika MotoGP event invited various negative perceptions, as stated in the comments column. Researchers found that most social media users who commented on this post were from the millennial generation and tended to think realistically with an approach to religious values. This emerging perception is expressed based on the personal understanding of each Instagram social media user. The personal understanding in question is how he can see from various sides, so he concludes his views and then puts them in the comment column.

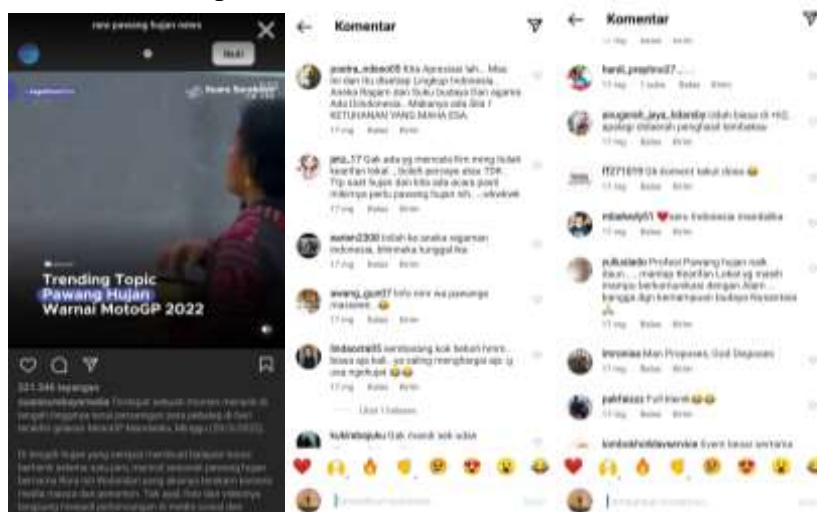
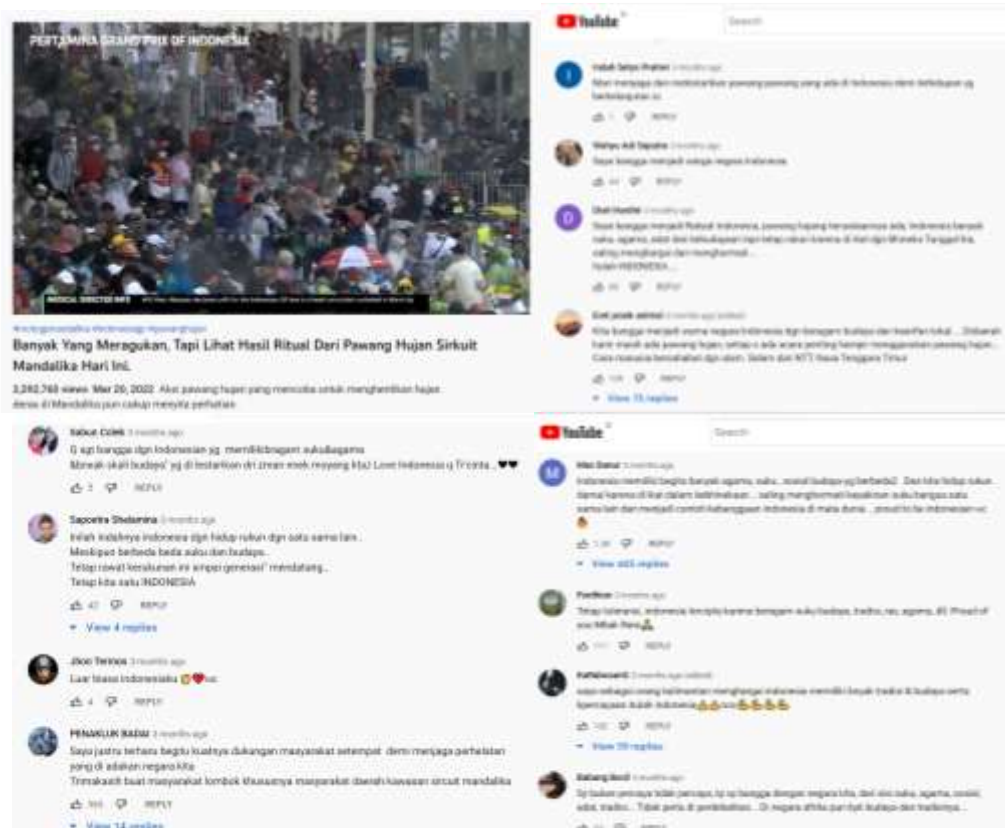


Figure 1.2 Rara Istiani Wulandari action in controlling the weather in the middle of the Mandalika circuit field invites positive perceptions from several circles

The content uploaded by the "Suara Surabaya Media" about Rara Istiani Wulandari has a relatively significant level of interaction between users, which can be seen from the number of views, comments, and likes. From the results of the analysis, the researchers found that several

Instagram social media users gave a supportive perception of the actions taken by Rara as a rain handler. Based on the analysis, these Instagram users tend to see from both sides, namely the modern side and local wisdom. This kind of thing is not new but has existed since ancient times and has always existed in every region of Indonesia. They believe this kind of thing should not be disputed compared to religious beliefs. However, it is better to respect and respect each other's local beliefs because such things cannot be separated from the cultural diversity of the Indonesian people.

**II. YouTube**



**Figure 2.1** Positive perception based on tolerance  
 Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDYDA2th-Gk>

From the data presented above, the researcher found that the people who gave these comments gave their perceptions based on respect for the nature of tolerance. The emergence of this perception is associated with the value of local wisdom that is still positively held and understood. Researchers found this kind of perception arises based on thinking by looking in all directions, not thinking realistically and practically, creating a counter perception without looking at historical elements. Furthermore, the researchers found that the majority of commenters on this video post also came from millennial, meaning that the current generation can see the actions of rain handlers from various perspectives and conclude with perceptions that they think are following current conditions.



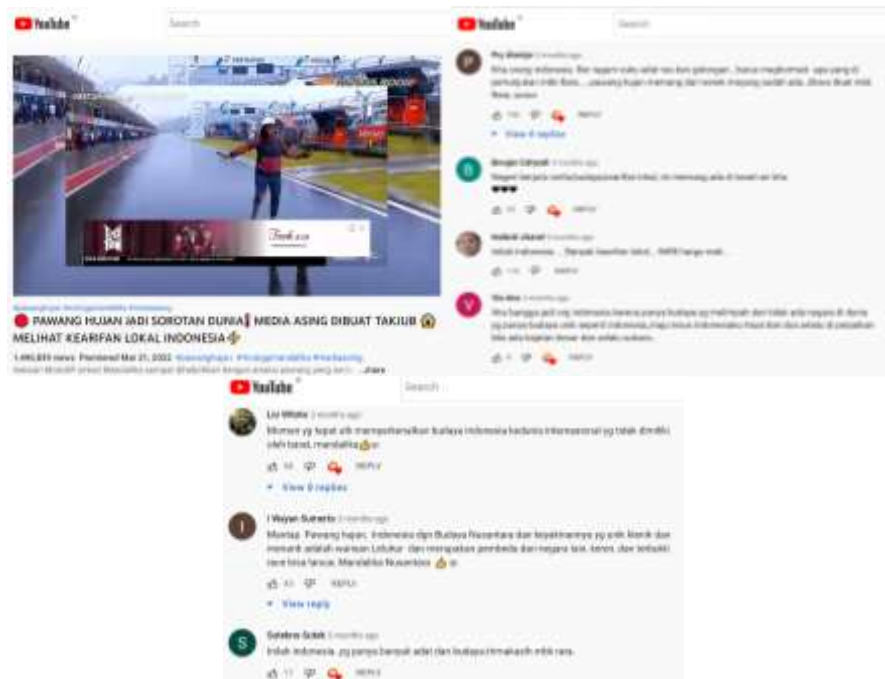


Figure 2.2 Foreign media also highlighted the uniqueness of Rara Istiani Wulandari action as a rain handler  
 Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRsjxBLYXOM>

One thing that went viral and gave an extraordinary impression from the MotoGP event in Mandalika was Rara Istiani Wulandari's action, highlighted by foreign media. This action certainly invites everyone's attention to know what a rain handler is because this kind of belief is difficult to find in other countries. It is not surprising that foreign media also highlighted this action because it is a new thing and tends to think realistically for them.

Based on the analysis presented above, the role of the rain handler is expected to be a path to good intentions, namely to make the event a success so that it is not hampered by rain. As a rain handler, carrying out his/her duties is challenging because he/she must be able to divert and disperse rain so that it does not fall on location while monitoring the weather.

The rain handler is inseparable from the local wisdom aspect of the Indonesian people because the Indonesian people consist of various ethnic groups and diverse cultures. Rain handler is not a profession because this activity has existed since ancient times. Along with the development of the times and technology, the activities of rain handlers increasingly give rise to various perceptions because the nature of individuals now tends to think realistically and rationally. It sparked a difference of opinion when Rara Istiani Wulandari became a rain handler at the Mandalika circuit.

Many people relate the action with religious beliefs. They contradicted, discredited, harassed, and even stated that what Rara had done was unlawful. The negative comments towards Rara mostly come from the majority of social and religious groups who often have a strong enough influence in developing narratives that negate traditional knowledge.

Verderber (1978) states that perception is the process of interpreting sensory information. This is also in line with Robbins (2003) in Rizky (2022), which state that perception is a process that each individual takes to organize and interpret the impressions from the senses that you have in order to give meaning to the surrounding environment. The social reality in people's lives is seen as having a double reality, not just a single one. This is because individuals have experience and understanding of their respective realities. Therefore, the difference in perception regarding Rara Istiani Wulandari's action as a rain handler is hot for debate, considering the different perceptions of each individual.

If it is related to this time, not a few think that the rain handler is contrary to the religious values taught. This is true because religion is not allowed to teach mystical things. However, if it is widely understood, the activities of the rain handler have existed since ancient times and

have always existed in every area. It's just that this kind of activity needs to be addressed with tolerance and each other's beliefs without looking at it negatively.

The emergence of the name Rara Istiani Wulandari certainly cannot be separated from the large influence of social media on new and hot information to discuss, given the very instant nature of social media. In media ecology theory, Marshall McLuhan states that media, technology and communication processes affect the human environment. The media seem to bind the world into a unified political, economic, social and cultural system. Therefore, there will no longer be any boundaries between any parts of the world to know each other's activities. Due to the very nature of the media, it creates various perceptions from various people around the world to express their views on the existence of the rain handler.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis that has been carried out, the researchers found that the current perception of the rain handler is influenced by the progress of the times and the nature of the realistic and reasonable view of society so that when the media highlight Rara Istiani Wulandari's action as a rain handler at the Mandalika MotoGP event, they automatically generalize that This action is against religion. The growing perception of Rara Istiani Wulandari should not be seen from only one side but must be seen from various sides because the Indonesian nation consists of cultural diversity.

On the other hand, Rara Istiani Wulandari's action as a rain handler attracted international attention because this kind of thing was foreign to them. Through this moment, foreign media indirectly highlight the local wisdom of the Indonesian nation so that it can attract the attention of other nations to see the diversity of the Indonesian nation from a social and cultural perspective.

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