



Politics in Social Media Activism: A Case Study of Netizens' Reactions to Gibran's Demographic Bonus Video

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the dynamics of digital politics through a case study of netizens' reaction to Gibran Rakabuming Raka's video speech with the theme "Demographic Bonus". YouTube's comment column is used as a discursive arena where netizens express symbolic resistance to the narrative of the political elite. Netizens' comments are analyzed as expressions of digital civil society that not only voice public opinion but also create affective solidarity and micro-political participation in the context of digital democracy in Indonesia. This study uses a mixed methods approach, that combines qualitative-descriptive analysis based on critical discourse analysis with quantitative methods based on Large Language Models (LLM). Qualitatively, the analysis focused on substantive criticism, sarcasm, and moral delegitimization in purposively selected comments. Meanwhile, the quantitative analysis used three API-based models, namely OpenAI, Grok, and Gemini, to process more than 44,000 comments collected through Python web scraping techniques. The dimensions analyzed included sentiment, sentiment objects, emotion categories, writing styles, cognitive engagement levels, and potential bot engagement. The results of the quantitative analysis showed a significant dominance of negative sentiment based on manual validation. These results reveal a significant gap between LLM analysis and manual validation, which is a key finding that AI models currently struggle to capture the nuances of sarcasm and irony that characterize digital political resistance in Indonesia. The comments mostly use informal language and a critical and humorous style, representing a subtle pattern of resistance in the context of cyberactivism. These findings show that the comment column functions as a spontaneous deliberative space that reflects a crisis of substantive legitimacy, in which the public builds horizontal solidarity through political affection based on ethical values and social justice. By integrating in-depth discourse analysis and generalization of quantitative findings, this study contributes to understanding how public moral judgment challenges procedural authority within Indonesia's evolving digital political landscape.

Keywords: cyberactivism; political legitimacy; digital civil society; elite-people polarization; Large Language Models (LLMs)

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, social media has revolutionized forms of political participation around the world, including Indonesia. The development of internet-based communication technologies has enabled individuals to not only become consumers of political information, but also producers and spreaders of political narratives in a very short time. This change marks a fundamental transformation in people's political behavior, from passive to participatory, from institutional to social network-based, and from vertical to more horizontal and dispersed.

Globally, social media has become a major arena in political campaigns and the electoral process. Political candidates can now establish direct and personal interactions with voters through various digital platforms (Ahmad & Popa, 2014; Wei et al., 2024). However, this dynamic also brings serious challenges, such as the spread of disinformation and manipulation of information that can jeopardize the integrity of elections (Carr et al., 2020). On the other hand, social media has also opened up new spaces for young people around the world to voice political opinions, organize protests, and raise awareness of social and environmental issues (Ida et al., 2020; Saud et al., 2023). The ability of social media to convey public opinion in a positive way real time It has even been used by policymakers as a tool to capture faster social dynamics (Latif et al., 2024). However, challenges such as echo chambers and filter bubbles

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controlled by algorithms also limits the diversity of discourse and strengthens socio-political polarization (Octavianne et al., 2024).

Indonesia's context is inseparable from this global trend. Social media has become a major instrument in citizen political participation, especially among the younger generation. In this context, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have been used for political mobilization, both in elections and in protests. This phenomenon was most prominent in the 2019 student demonstrations against the revision of the KPK Law, where social media played a central role in mobilizing and spreading issues (Saud & Margono, 2021; Wahyuningroem et al., 2024). In addition, social media also plays a role in shaping voter preferences, especially for novice voters who make social media the main source of political information (Intyaswati et al., 2021).

However, this digital transformation also poses a new dilemma in Indonesian democracy. Social media not only expands the space for participation, but also deepens political polarization. Elections and political contests such as the Jakarta Regional Elections show how issues of religion and identity are politicized and strengthened through social media (Rumata et al., 2024). The phenomenon of political personalization, the tendency for public attention to focus more on individual political figures than on substantive policy, further underscores the shift from collective policy discourse toward narrative-driven personification (Masduki, 2024). In practice, elite narratives are increasingly wrapped in the form of emotional political symbolism and disseminated massively to build legitimacy.

In response, cyberactivism has emerged as a significant counterforce. Defined as using social media to express political discontent, advocate social justice, and build online solidarity, cyberactivism represents a shift of symbolic power from formal institutions to digital spaces. Diverse forms of cyberactivism have developed in Indonesia. One of the forms is Islamic clicktivism, which is online activism that uses social media to disseminate Islamic values and certain political agendas. This movement emerged at the same time as the process of democratization and modernization of Indonesia's Muslim society, and reached its peak in the 212 action, which utilized social media algorithms to massively shape public opinion (Ahyar, 2017; Ahyar & Alfitri, 2019). In addition, movements such as "Save the KPK" are also an important example of the use of Cyberactivism to oppose the weakening of state institutions by the political elite (Hermawan, 2024; Suwana, 2020; Wijayanto et al., 2022). In the context of the environment, digital activism carried out by environmental NGOs uses the internet to connect local communities with global networks and expand the reach of the campaign (Kurniawan & Rye, 2014). Young Indonesians use platforms such as TikTok to highlight social justice issues through accessible visual content, despite facing algorithmic obstacles and online harassment (Jalli, 2025).

One critical dimension of Cyberactivism is its ability to be a tool of resistance to the dominance of the narrative of the political elite. The public uses digital spaces to fight political oligarchs, spread alternative narratives, and even organize mass mobilizations quickly and effectively. Fictitious campaigns like Nurhadi-Aldo's in the 2019 election show how humor and satire are used as a form of criticism of the rigidity of the political system and the choice of candidates that are considered inadequate (Duile, 2021). This shows that citizens are no longer passive in facing power structures, but actively shaping political discourse through platform digital.

This study specifically examines public reactions to Gibran Rakabuming Raka's video speech with the theme of "demographic bonus". The videos are uploaded on the YouTube platform and compiled in a visual and narrative format that prioritizes the spirit of the younger

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generation, technology (especially artificial intelligence), and cross-sector collaboration. However, instead of accepting the narrative positively, the public showed a mostly negative reaction. Netizens' comments in the digital space not only contain substantive criticism of the content of speeches, but also voice sarcasm, irony, and resistance to political symbolism that is considered manipulative.

This phenomenon shows that social media is not only a one-way political communication channel, but a complex arena for contesting discourse. Criticism of the video can be understood as a form of expression of cyberactivism, where people use digital space to assert the distance between the aspirations of the people and the narrative of the elite. In this case, social media serves as an extension of civil society (Wnuk-Lipiński, 2007), a place where public opinion can be organically formed, as well as a space for articulating substantive democratic values such as justice, equality, and transparency (Thomassen, 1995).

Thus, it is important to critically examine how the public produces and disseminates political resistance through social media in the context of contemporary Indonesia. This study aims to analyze the forms of cyberactivism that emerge in netizens' responses to elite political narratives, as well as how these digital expressions reflect the dynamics of digital democracy in Indonesia. This approach is not only relevant in understanding the politics of new media, but it is also important to assess whether digital participation can really be a counterweight in a democratic system that is facing oligarchic and populist pressure.

Although social media has opened up a wide space for political participation for the public, the emergence of digital political expressions such as cyberactivism has also exposed the tension between elite narratives and the aspirations of digital citizens.

A key problem in this dynamic lies in the inequality between political messages constructed visually and rhetorically by political elites and public perceptions, responses, and affections expressed through digital commentary. In the case of Gibran Rakabuming Raka's video speech on the demographic bonus, it can be seen how the narrative of the elite framed in optimism, technology, and nationalism was instead greeted by a wave of public comment dominated by criticism, cynicism, and symbolic rejection. Therefore, this phenomenon is crucial to be analyzed as a form of authentic political participation, which reflects the emergence of a new morality-based political cleavage between digital public aspirations and elite legitimacy. In many contexts, this kind of expression is often reduced to a form of momentary dislike, whereas when examined more deeply, it is a political articulation involving the logic of affection, ethical positions, and even resistance to structural legitimacy.

The development of digital technology has given rise to a new form of political participation known as cyberactivism—political activism carried out via digital media, particularly the internet. Cyberactivism It includes various activities such as spreading political messages, organizing social movements, mobilizing the masses, and conducting forms of online protests (McCaughy & Ayers, 2013). Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube have become key arenas for citizens to express political opinions, build collective solidarity, and challenge dominant state or elite political narratives. Digital activism not only broadens the scope of political participation but also blurs traditional boundaries between private and public spaces, and between personal and political communication.

Some of the key characteristics of Cyberactivism reflects a fundamental transformation in the way society does politics. First, technological integration is the key to expanding the

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reach and effectiveness of the political message conveyed. Activists no longer depend solely on mainstream media; instead, they independently produce and distribute diverse, real-time digital content (McCaughey & Ayers, 2013). Second, social media serves as a space for collective identity formation, a place where individuals can join virtual communities that share the same political aspirations. Third, Cyberactivism utilizing a variety of methods—from conventional online campaigns to more radical forms such as hacktivism or the use of political memes as a counter-narrative medium (McCaughey & Ayers, 2013). Finally, this phenomenon shows a shift in political participation from conventional forms to a more fluid, flexible, and horizontal digital format (Prados, 2012).

Along with the development of digital technology, the pattern of political participation has also undergone a significant transformation. Where previously political participation was limited to formal actions such as voting in elections, individuals can now engage in politics through simple actions such as liking, sharing, or commenting on political content on social media (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017). This shift signifies the emergence of micro-participation (nano-level participation), which, despite appearing trivial, significantly contributes to discourse creation and political communication networks (Lonkila & Jokivuori, 2023). In addition, social media also provides space for open discussion and the rapid and widespread dissemination of political information, allowing for more inclusive political engagement, especially for marginalized groups or young voters (Bailey, 2021; Choi, 2016).

This phenomenon is also driven by increasing access to information technology. The Internet facilitates cross-class and geographic political engagement, although there are still participation gaps based on factors such as education level and digital literacy (The Participation Gap, 2017). On the other hand, the network effects caused by social media strengthen the pattern of political mobilization; when someone shares a particular issue, he encourages others in his network to do the same, creating a domino effect in the dissemination of political messages (Macafee, 2019).

Thus, cyberactivism and social media have become new faces of contemporary political participation that not only facilitate individual expression, but also shape the dynamics of increasingly complex and dynamic public discourse in the context of digital democracy.

To understand the dynamics of digital political expression in this study, several theoretical approaches were used in the study of political behavior that are relevant to the context of social media and Cyberactivism. The first theory used is the concept Social Capital developed by Robert Putnam and James Coleman. Putnam (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993) look Social Capital as a network of mutual trust and norms that support the effectiveness of democratic institutions. In the digital context, erosion occurs Social Capital vertical—that is, the decline in public trust in state institutions or political elites—which is simultaneously strengthening Social Capital horizontal in the form of solidarity between citizens in an online network (Stolle, 2025). Coleman (1988; 1990) also emphasizes that social capital does not lie in individuals, but in social relations that facilitate information exchange and social control, which today occur within digital interaction spaces such as comment sections and online campaigns.

Second, the democratic values described by Thomassen (Thomassen, 1995) It is important to examine the tension between procedural and substantive legitimacy in a democracy. Democracy is not only about electoral mechanisms, but also about the moral acceptance of the people towards the legitimacy of a leader. Public reaction to the elite narrative, as in the case of Gibran Rakabuming's speech, reflects the tension, with many

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netizens rejecting the official narrative despite the political actor's procedural legitimacy. This shows that the perception of legitimacy is strongly influenced by the values of justice, openness, and public ethics inherent in substantive democracy.

Third, the theory of civil society as put forward by Wnuk-Lipiński (Wnuk-Lipiński, 2007) underlines the important role of social media as a New public spaces which expands the function of civil society in democracy. In a democratic system, civil society plays a role not only as a complement to political institutions, but as a controlling entity, educator, and articulation of public interests. In the digital realm, these functions are carried out by citizens who use social media to criticize, debate, and assert their political positions actively and openly. Therefore, netizens' comments can be seen as a form of political articulation of digital civil society that strengthens the deliberative function in contemporary democracy.

Fourth, the theory cleavage from Lipset and Rokkan (1967) explain how social divisions such as class, religion, and ethnicity shape party systems and voter behavior. In a digital context, cleavage What is relevant actually arises in the form of generational conflicts, disconnections between elites and people, and clashes between different political moral values. The negative comments against Gibran, for example, are not merely about policy, but also a symbolic form of resistance to the political oligarchy and the political legacy of the dynasty, which is seen as a form of injustice in the power structure (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967a).

Fifth, the approach of Holbrook et al. (2000) regarding Political behavior emphasizing the importance of the role of perception, symbolism, and affection in shaping public political responses. In the realm of social media, the visual imagery, narratives, and symbols used by political elites can trigger strong emotional resonances—both positive and negative. The public response to symbols such as the "demographic bonus" or the mention of AI technology in Gibran's speech, shows how affection can play a role in forming resistance or support for political figures (Holbrook & others, 2000).

Finally, the theory of political information understanding from Lau and Redlawsk (2006) highlights how voters do not always make decisions rationally and deliberatively, but often rely on Heuristics, intuition, and affection. In this context, netizens' comments are a form of understanding political information that is influenced by emotional perceptions of symbols, gestures, and narratives presented by political elites. The use of memes, satire, and affective criticism can be understood as a way for the public to manage and articulate their assessment of elite discourse, which is formed not only through logical arguments, but also through affective experiences and symbolic representations (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006).

Using this theoretical framework, this study places netizens' comments not as spontaneous expressions without meaning, but as important representations of digital political behavior that reflect the crisis of legitimacy, resistance to oligarchy, and the transformation of civil society in the digital political space.

As part of the study of contemporary political behavior, this research requires the integration of diverse theories to understand the dynamics of cyberactivism, digital resistance, and socio-political fragmentation that take place in the social media space. Therefore, the preparation of the theoretical framework is prepared in a multidimensional manner, covering aspects of political affect, social capital, information understanding, and the articulation of digital civil society. This framework not only represents an interdisciplinary approach to online political phenomena, but also emphasizes the importance of the interplay between elite symbolism and affectation-based public responses and moral legitimacy.

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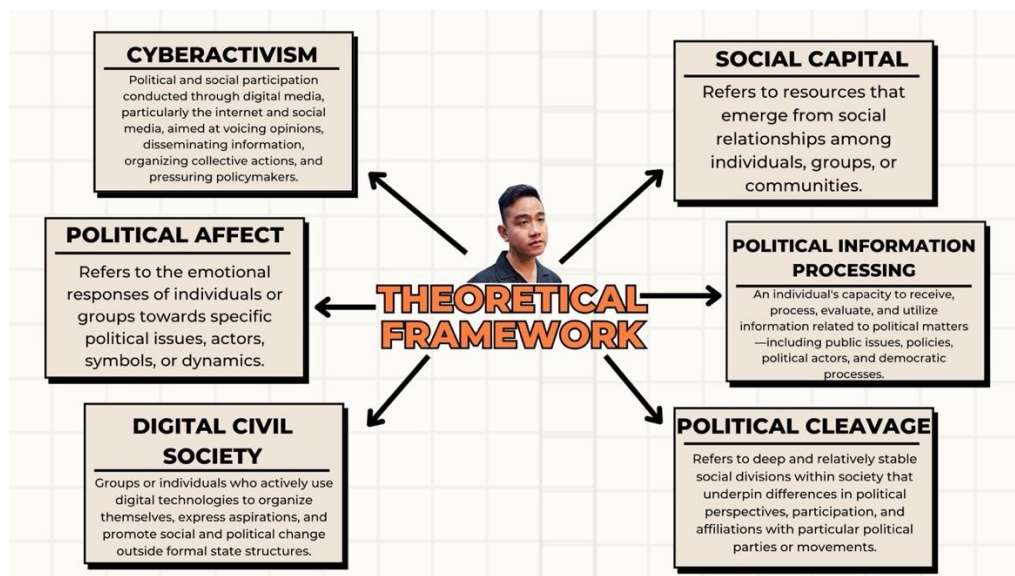


Figure 1. Research Theoretical Framework: Cyberactivism, Political Affect, Social Capital, Understanding Political Information, Political Cleavage and Digital Civil Society

Based on Figure 1, the theoretical framework used in this study focuses on Cyberactivism as the main form of digital political participation, which arises from the articulation of citizens' political emotions (political affect). Political affect refers to a form of resistance that is not purely rational but is instead triggered by perceptions of injustice, symbolic manipulation, and value discrepancies between elites and citizens. Additionally, social capital theory is utilized to explain how horizontal solidarity among citizens emerges through digital interactions, forming a critical foundation for collective resistance to established power structures.

Furthermore, political information processing theory (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006) is applied to interpret how netizens decode political symbols not only through logical arguments, but through affective and heuristic-based judgments. At the same time, the other two concepts, political cleavage and digital civil society, explain the transformation of elite-people conflicts in the online realm, as well as how social media allows for the emergence of expressions of social control and the informal articulation of democratic values. In addition, the research also uses Large Language Models (LLMs) such as OpenAI, Gemini, and Grok, as well as topic modeling with BERTopic, to explore themes that emerge organically while showing how elite narratives are reshaped, criticized, or collectively responded to by the digital public. This approach is in line with the understanding that digital texts are a political articulation field that can be systematically processed through semantic representation algorithms and topic clustering (Jurafsky & Martin, 2024). The integration of LLM-based methods expands theoretical analyses of symbolic resistance and political affect within Indonesia's digital democracy. This theoretical combination strengthens analytical frameworks, clearly illustrating elite-public interactions and their organic traceability within digital democratic ecosystems.

Therefore, this research is important to examine how netizens' expressions in response to elite political narratives, especially through comments on social media, can be categorized as part of cyberactivism and digital political behavior. This study aims to critically analyze the dynamics between elite narratives and digital citizen responses in the social media space, as well as interpret public comment patterns as part of the discourse of resistance in Indonesia's

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digital democracy. By understanding the character of this expression, we can assess the potential and limitations of social media as a channel for democratization as well as an arena for contesting political legitimacy.

This research has novelty in two main aspects. First, in substance, this study presents a micro approach to cyberactivism by using netizens' comments as the primary analytical unit to capture political affect in digital society. This approach extends beyond conventional frameworks that emphasize large-scale campaigns or viral movements, by elevating micro-expressions as valid and meaningful forms of political articulation. Second, methodologically, this study integrates the analysis of critical discourse on netizens' comments with classical and contemporary political behavior theoretical frameworks—such as democratic values, cleavage structures, and political affect—to re-read the dynamics of the relationship between elites and citizens in Indonesia's digital democracy. Thus, this research enriches our understanding of how elite narratives are actively contested rather than merely produced within digital public spaces.

Second, methodologically, this study introduces Large Language Model (LLM) technology as an innovative quantitative approach in digital political studies, complementing manually conducted critical discourse analysis. This quantitative approach based on Large Language Models (LLMs) uses Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) from OpenAI, Grok, and Gemini to process more than 44,000 YouTube comments. This quantitative analysis includes sentiment dimensions, sentiment objects, emotion categories, writing styles, cognitive engagement levels, and potential bot engagement. The use of three APIs ensures cross-model validity testing, reducing algorithmic biases in interpreting complex and nuanced informal language on Indonesian YouTube channels. This quantitative approach systematically identifies patterns of political expression while emphasizing the need for cautious interpretation, given LLMs' limitations in accurately capturing sarcasm, irony, and affective heuristics commonly employed by Indonesian netizens (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006).

Integrating these qualitative and quantitative methods allows the research to produce a comprehensive analysis of how political elite narratives are constructed and contested by Indonesia's digital public. To examine these dynamics more specifically, this study is focused on a case study of netizens' reaction to Gibran Rakabuming Raka's speech video about the demographic bonus uploaded on YouTube.

The objectives of this research are to; (1) analyze the forms and characteristics of netizens' reactions to the political elite narrative in Gibran Rakabuming Raka's speech on the demographic bonus, and to (2) examine how these public expressions reflect shifts in cyberactivism and digital political behavior in Indonesia. The benefits of this research include offering insights into the evolving role of digital platforms in shaping political opinions and behaviors, particularly among Indonesian youth. Furthermore, it contributes to understanding the broader implications of online political engagement and how it influences public policy debates and democratic processes in Indonesia.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative-descriptive approach aimed at understanding social and political meanings embedded in digital interactions between political elites and digital citizens on social media. The research does not prioritize quantifying behavior but emphasizes in-depth analysis of symbols, narratives, affects, and power dynamics mediated by digital platforms. Therefore, this method was selected for its capacity to uncover deep discursive meanings concealed within public speech in social media comment spaces.

Specifically, the research utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to examine two main types of data: (1) the content of the narrative in Gibran Rakabuming Raka's speech video about the demographic bonus uploaded on YouTube, and (2) netizens' comments as a public response to the speech. CDA allows researchers to uncover the relationship between language, power, ideology, and resistance in the construction of digital political discourse. Gibran's speech is analyzed as a visual and symbolic text that contains an elite narrative, while public commentary is interpreted as a digital civil society articulation that contains expressions of affection, political criticism, and symbols of resistance.

The data collection technique was carried out through documentation of the official YouTube video entitled "Gibran Demographic Bonus", as well as the collection of public comments listed below. The selected comments were considered purposively based on the criteria of political representation—that is, comments that (1) reflect substantive criticism, (2) contain explicit support, (3) contain sarcasm or irony, and (4) have symbolic elements or collective representation. In addition to comments, non-verbal elements such as memes or visual forms used in public reactions are also noticed as part of the practice of cyberactivism.

The first unit of analysis is the content of Gibran's speech. The speech was analyzed by highlighting how political elites frame the younger generation, demographic bonuses, and the use of technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) as part of political legitimacy and branding strategies. From a theoretical perspective, this reading uses the perspective of Democratic Values (Thomassen, 1995) to assess the tension between procedural legitimacy (electoral victory) and substantive legitimacy (ethical acceptance by society). In addition, the Political Behavior approach (Holbrook et al., 2000) is used to identify symbolic and emotional content in speech aimed at building affective bonds with young audiences.

The second unit of analysis is public comments as an expression of cyberactivism. Comments that are critical of communication styles, accusations of nepotism, generational inequality, and sarcasm towards symbols such as "demographic bonus" are analyzed using the theory of Cleavage Structures (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), which explains how polarization between elites and people as well as between generations is manifested in digital opinion. Meanwhile, comments based on horizontal solidarity and collective irony were analyzed with the Social Capital approach (Putnam, 2000), which showed a shift from vertical to horizontal trust in the context of online society.

To support this analysis, thematic coding was carried out on public comments that have been categorized into themes: (1) substantial criticism of the content of speeches, (2) delegitimization of the elite through sarcasm, (3) resistance to the symbolization of power, and (4) minor support. Each category is analyzed not only on the basis of frequency, but also the depth of the discourse's meaning and its political resonance on power structures and legitimacy.

In addition, the Information Processing in Election Campaigns framework (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006) is used to understand how netizens heuristically process symbols, narratives, and affections in shaping attitudes towards the speech. Comments that appear spontaneous,

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emotional, or meme-based can be seen as part of an understanding of political information that is influenced by affection and symbolic perception rather than rational calculations.

This methodological approach enabled the research to intricately dissect speech and commentary texts, relating them directly to contemporary political behavior theory structures. Consequently, it offers comprehensive insights into how elite narratives are produced, contested, and redefined through digital political interactions in contemporary Indonesia.

Complementing the qualitative approach, this study employed quantitative methods leveraging Large Language Models (LLMs) to systematically analyze extensive public commentary data. The quantitative analysis sought to methodically identify sentiment patterns, sentiment objects, emotional categories, cognitive engagement levels, writing styles, linguistic forms, comment relevance to the video topic, and potential bot involvement in netizen responses to Gibran Rakabuming Raka's YouTube speech.

Data consisted of 44,249 comments collected via Python-based web scraping techniques from the video titled "Young Generation, Demographic Bonus, and the Future of Indonesia," capturing text content, upload times, and like counts.

Three LLM-based models—OpenAI, Gemini, and Grok—were utilized to perform quantitative analyses. This cross-model approach was designed not only to validate findings but also critically explore inherent strengths and biases of advanced AI technologies in analyzing culturally rich political discourse specific to Indonesia. These models classified comments across multiple analytical dimensions, including sentiment (positive, negative, neutral), sentiment objects, emotional categories (disgust, anger, delight, sadness, fear, surprise), cognitive engagement levels (low, medium, high), writing styles (critical, humorous, neutral), linguistic forms (informal, slang, formal), relevance to video topics (relevant or irrelevant), and bot detection.

This LLM-based quantitative approach complements the analysis of critical discourse that has been carried out qualitatively. While the qualitative analysis delves deeply into symbolic meanings and political affect, the quantitative analysis provides insight into broader patterns, prevalence, and acceptance of political expressions across digital spaces. By integrating these approaches, the research offers a comprehensive understanding of public resistance dynamics against political elite narratives in Indonesia's digital democracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Qualitative Results

Elite Narratives in Video: Political Symbolism and Legitimacy Strategies

Gibran Rakabuming Raka's speech video entitled Demographic Bonus is an example of an elite narrative that is visually and rhetorically designed to build an image of optimistic, adaptive, and collaborative young leadership. The content of the speech strategically emphasized three main pillars: the demographic bonus as a historical opportunity, technology (especially artificial intelligence), and the collaboration of all elements of the nation. All three are packaged in a communication style that emphasizes the collective spirit of the younger generation. This narrative not only conveys a substantive message, but also plays a symbolic role as a political branding tool aimed at shaping public perception of Gibran's figure as a representation of a new generation of national leaders.

The visual framing in the video reinforces the narrative through the insertion of footage of the success of young Indonesian animators, the success of the U-17 National Team in qualifying for the World Cup, and the mention of AI as a future technology. These three

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elements serve as a symbol of young people's achievements which are claimed to be a representation of collective success which is also associated with Gibran's leadership. The selection of these symbols is part of the construction of symbolic legitimacy—an attempt to form a positive association between public figures and achievements that have already gained public sympathy. This symbolization is a prevalent political communication strategy in the era of personalist democracy, where the success of a character's narrative often depends on his ability to associate himself with emotional and collective achievements (Holbrook et al., 2000).

From the rhetorical side, Gibran's speech used a motivational style with a measurable affective intensity. The use of phrases of invitation such as "we must be ready", "we must be the driving force", as well as phrases such as "generation of fighters" and "golden opportunity" indicate an attempt to instill confidence and emotional engagement among young audiences. This narrative presents Gibran not only as a political leader, but as a visionary role model of the digital generation. This is a manifestation of the personalization of politics, which is a shift in the style of political communication that focuses on the personalities and lifestyles of the elite, rather than on the content of rational and technocratic policies (Holbrook et al., 2000). Thus, this speech not only contains an institutional message, but is a medium for the formation of political personas.

However, from the point of view of democratic values theory (Thomassen, 1995), this legitimacy strategy emphasizes more on procedural aspects than on substance. Gibran comes across as a figure who wants to represent the spirit of a new democracy—young, inclusive, and technology-based—but is not accompanied by critical reflection on how he got to his position. In the framework of substantive democracy, legitimacy is not only based on formal positions or positive narratives, but on people's ethical and moral acceptance of the political process that underlies it. In this context, video narratives can be understood as an attempt to reclaim moral legitimacy through aspirational-sounding symbols and language.

As an elite narrative, this video also shows an effort to adapt to the digital socio-political context. By emphasizing keywords such as AI, collaboration, and demographic bonuses, Gibran seems to want to respond to the demands of the times that require leaders to appear tech-savvy, adaptive, and open to multi-stakeholder participation. However, if examined critically, this narrative lacks a concrete policy context that supports the symbols raised. For example, the success of local animated films and youth soccer teams is more of a community or individual achievement, rather than the result of a clear design of state policies. This raises questions about the authenticity of the collective claims used in the narrative.

From this analysis, it can be concluded that the elite narrative in the Demographic Bonus video is a form of symbolic political communication packaged to build procedural legitimacy and strengthen the image of young leaders that are relevant to the digital era. This strategy combines positive symbols, collective affection, and a personalist communication style to create a strong impression in the public mind. But their effectiveness depends largely on the extent to which the public accepts the symbols as authentic, not manipulative, representations. It is this tension between elite symbolism and public acceptance that will be the focus of the next subsection regarding netizens' reactions.

Netizens' Reactions: Resistance, Sarcasm, and Political Delegitimization

The public response to the video of the "Demographic Bonus" speech delivered by Gibran Rakabuming Raka showed a very dominant pattern of reaction in the form of symbolic resistance, political sarcasm, and moral delegitimization. The majority of the comments that appeared showed public dissatisfaction not only with the content of the message in the video,

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but also with Gibran's own political position. These responses cannot be understood as mere momentary emotional expressions, but must be read as articulation of political affect and a concrete form of distrust of the elite in the digital democratic space.

Thematic analysis of netizens' comments shows three dominant categories. First, substantive criticism is mostly directed at the narrative inconsistencies in Gibran's speech. For example, claims of support for the local animation industry are considered inauthentic because they are not accompanied by real policies or concrete forms of support from the government. Netizens such as @GSwantoh and @naufalfaldh criticized that the elite only "went on to fame" after the animation was internationally successful, without being involved in the struggle of local creators. This inequality reflects public resistance to elite symbolism that is perceived as manipulative and opportunistic, especially when such symbols are used for purposes of personal legitimacy.

The second category is sarcasm towards Gibran's communication style and political background. Many comments touch on the rigid narrative style, read prompts, and seem artificial. This kind of criticism comes in the form of satirical, such as the comment @julianessal6889: "I salute the editor... can be strong edit without vomiting" or @HNRVlog40: "urgent need click the dislike button". This form of sarcasm is part of the expression of political humor, which in the digital context functions as a subtle form of cyberactivism that still has high resistance. This humor is not just entertainment, but becomes a safe and collective channel of political criticism.

Third, the emergence of moral delegitimization that leads directly to Gibran's figure as vice president. Comments such as "you without your father are just ordinary people" (@muhammadardhaugraha3996) or "the majority of negative comments = positions obtained in an incorrect way will not be heard by the people" (@elokyosef697) show the public's rejection of the political process which is considered unfair and privileged. This is a manifestation of the crisis of substantive legitimacy as described by Thomassen (1995), in which political actors may be procedurally legitimate, but lose moral authority and public trust.

This netizen's reaction also shows a decrease in vertical social capital between citizens and political elites. Within the framework of Putnam's (2000) theory, this condition reflects the failure of state institutions in building trust and creating a sense of collective representation. On the contrary, the comments that received thousands of likes and replies formed horizontal social capital, namely the solidarity of fellow digital citizens who felt they had the same political position and affection. The comment space became a spontaneous deliberative forum where the public voiced criticism, shared irony, and built a sense of togetherness in political discontent.

Furthermore, based on the perspective of information processing theory from Lau and Redlawsk (2006), these comments are not always generated through rational reasoning, but through heuristic and affective understanding. In the context of digital politics, netizens tend to respond based on certain impressions, symbols, or affections—such as facial expressions, speaking styles, or narratives that are considered inauthentic. Therefore, the negative reaction to the speech is not solely due to the content of the policy discussed, but rather because of the symbolic perception inherent in the messenger.

Thus, netizens' comments on this video are not just ordinary forms of opinion, but are representations of political resistance organized horizontally through digital space. They articulate crises of trust, expressions of dislike, and criticism of symbols of power in an affective, sarcastic, and collective format. This shows that in a digital democracy, the

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commentary space can serve as an arena for legitimacy contestation, where citizens renegotiate who is worthy of speaking, and who is considered legitimate to represent the public. This qualitatively identified pattern of resistance and delegitimization is not a sporadic phenomenon. Quantitative analysis (see Table 1) confirms the massive scale of this sentiment, where manual validation shows 95.38% of negative-toned comments, proving that the examples below are later representations of the dominant majority vote.

Social Media as a Digital Civil Society Space

In the context of contemporary politics, social media has transformed into an important arena for the formation of a digital civil society. This space not only functions as a medium of communication or entertainment, but also as a field of political articulation, where citizens express their attitudes, form solidarity, and perform socio-political functions that have only been associated with conventional civil society organizations. The comment column in Gibran Rakabuming Raka's video speech is one of the manifestations of this phenomenon—namely how the digital society expresses opinions, makes symbolic resistance, and builds a counter-narrative to the elite narrative horizontally, non-hierarchistically, and participatory.

The comment column in the video shows the arena of spontaneous public deliberation. Although not structured like academic forums or formal public hearings, the comments that appear show debate, expression of collective affection, clarification of information, and the formation of shared political opinions. It reflects the deliberative function of civil society in a form that has undergone digitalization. Wnuk-Lipiński (2007) stated that civil society has four main functions in democracy: protection of power, control, socialization of democratic values, and articulation of interests. In this case, the comment column acts as a control medium, where citizens show dissatisfaction with symbols of power that are considered illegitimate or manipulative.

A more interesting phenomenon is the emergence of netizens solidarity as a horizontal form of digital civil society. There is no formal organization, no formal structure, but the comments that garner thousands of "likes" and positive responses form a kind of affective consensus. Sentences such as "we are all equally disappointed", "it turns out that we are of the same mind", or "this video unites us in disgust" show the similarity of attitudes that lead to a form of digital political solidarity. This is a form of affective alliance that functions to strengthen the moral position of civil society in the online public space, and is the basis of horizontal social capital (Putnam, 2000).

This kind of participation falls into the category of micro-political participation or nano-participation. Actions such as liking comments, writing a single sentence of criticism, or resharing video clips with sarcastic narratives, are all part of an ecosystem of digital political participation that, while seemingly lightweight, collectively has a major impact on the formation of public opinion and the delegitimization of elites. Theocharis & van Deth (2017) note that this form of participation is very common among the younger generation and has reach and resonance that cannot be underestimated. This means that the comment space on social media has become a field of political engagement that functions as an informal but essential channel for political expression, but essential in digital democracy.

Furthermore, this phenomenon also shows a form of cyberactivism as an unconventional political practice based on digital technology. Netizens do not have to be in a formal organization to be able to do politics. They can form collective action through sarcastic language, memes, irony, and emotional expressions packaged in a digital format. Although informal, the practice has a significant role in expanding the scope of political articulation,

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strengthening critical awareness, and filling the void of public representation that is not channeled by mainstream media or formal institutions.

Thus, social media—in this case especially the comment column—serves as an extension of the civil society space. It becomes a platform where citizens control the narrative of the elite, convey their ethical and affective values, and build a political community based on shared experience and assessment of power. In an increasingly digitized democratic landscape, the recognition of these spaces as part of a legitimate political process is important, so that political participation is measured not only by attendance in voting booths, but also by active involvement in digital discourse spaces.

Digital Polarization and New Political Cleavage

The main findings of this analysis are the manifestation of a Moral Politics a new one, where digital polarization is no longer just based on traditional identities, but rather on the contradiction between the ethics of meritocracy versus the privileges of power. This profound shift in the structure of socio-political conflict can be understood through the lens of Cleavage Theory (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967b). In Indonesia's current digital context, the lines of political division (cleavages) that shift from traditional issues such as social class, religion, or ethnicity, to new forms that are more symbolic and moralistic: between the people and the elite, as well as between the working generation versus the generation of the heir to power.

Comments such as "you without your father are just ordinary people" or "demographic bonus: jobs are looking for parents" indicate a rejection of forms of privilege that are considered unfair. Here, the public identifies itself as a working generation, and places elites like Gibran as representatives of the inherited power generation—that is, individuals who gain positions not through meritocracy, but through family connections and power. It is a new form of moral cleavage that places ethics, social justice, and personal credibility as the primary basis of political legitimacy, and not just electoral victories or technocratic claims.

This phenomenon also shows the emergence of a form of resistance to symbolic oligarchy. Many netizens' comments not only rejected the content of the speech, but also mocked the symbols used: ranging from the use of local animation, AI imaging, to the style of delivering speeches that were considered inauthentic. These forms of resistance are symbolic, but they are very powerful in shaping collective opinion. For example, comments like "it's cooler for my older brother who is still in elementary school presentation" or "I salute the editor... can be strong to edit without vomiting" reflects a form of political humor as an expression of delegitimization. In the realm of cyberactivism, humor, irony, and sarcasm are not trivial forms of resistance, but rather effective channels for expressing collective emotions, uniting political affections, and expanding the reach of messages without having to use formal or academic language.

This digital polarization is also exacerbated by social media formats that algorithmically strengthen echo chambers. This means that negative comments against the political elite do not only become personal opinions, but form a common space that unites netizens in the identity of the resistance. They share experiences, reinforce narratives, and reproduce the same humor, forming what is referred to as an online moral community. Despite being informal, this community has the power to shift public perception broadly.

From a theoretical point of view, this condition shows how Cleavage Theory (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967) remains relevant but needs to be extended into the digital dimension. Polarization is no longer produced by institutional conflicts, but by the fragmentation of values

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and perceptions in the digital discourse space. On the one hand, there are elites who try to build legitimacy through technocratic symbols and development languages, while on the other hand, there are digital citizens who prioritize the values of honesty, openness, and ethical alignment as the new standard for judging leaders.

Thus, the narrative of resistance that dominates public commentary in this video not only reflects dislike for one figure, but is a reflection of the structural tension between two forms of politics: top-down legitimacy building and bottom-up ethical judgment). Social media, in this case, is the main arena where these two forces face each other, while showing that digital democracy in Indonesia is facing the challenge of identity fragmentation and legitimacy that cannot be ignored.

Quantitative Results

Sentiments and Emotions

The following quantitative findings give empirical weight and scale to the patterns of symbolic resistance and political affection that have been described qualitatively in the previous section. Sentiment analysis showed the dominance of negative sentiment based on manual validation of random sampling of 2,000 comments out of a total of 44,249 comments that were scraped. The results of manual validation showed that 95.38% of comments were classified negative, while positive and neutral sentiment were much lower at 2.76% and 1.46%, respectively. In contrast to manual results, the Large Language Models (LLMs) models show significantly lower negative sentiment (Gemini: 46.74%, OpenAI: 45.78%, Grok: 61.24%), with relatively high neutral sentiment, especially according to OpenAI (45.88%) and Gemini (35.64%).

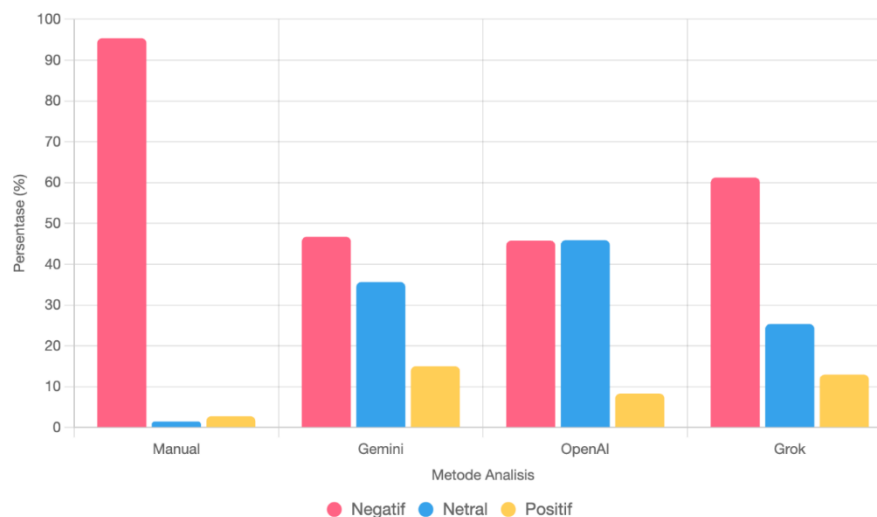


Figure 2. Comparison of Sentiment Analysis Results based on Analysis Methods

These discrepancies highlight LLMs' limitations in capturing the nuances of informal language, sarcasm, and irony characteristic of Indonesian digital communication. This finding aligns with Information Processing theory (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006), which argues that humans frequently employ affective heuristics when interpreting political symbols. Consequently, these models often misclassify negative comments as neutral, relying excessively on literal linguistic patterns. This manual validation showed the highest accuracy by Grok (63.68%), followed by Gemini (49.45%) and OpenAI (48.79%), which confirms the need for careful interpretation of the sentiment results generated by LLMs. However, manual validation is only done on sentiment analysis as the main focus dimension.

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The findings also show that the main sentiment objects of the commenters were Gibran personally (Gemini: 31.88%, OpenAI: 30.56%, Grok: 48.33%) and video content about demographic/youth bonuses (Gemini: 32.18%, Grok: 19.19%). This reflects the moral cleavage in netizens' rejection of political personalization and elite symbols that are considered manipulative (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). The ambiguity of sentiment objects is also quite high (Gemini: 28.14%, OpenAI: 33.98%, Grok: 20.60%), reflecting challenges in interpreting ambiguous contexts in digital commentary.

Negative emotions such as Disgust (OpenAI: 30.10%, Grok: 40.99%) and Anger (Gemini: 19.91%) are dominant in the comment column of this Youtube video. Interestingly, positive emotions such as Joy are also significant (Gemini: 19.26%, OpenAI: 26.02%, Grok: 15.93%), indicating the emotional polarization of netizens. Comments without emotion are also clearly high (Gemini: 38.61%, Grok: 23.17%), confirming the difficulty of LLMs in detecting implicit emotions in digital expression. These challenges correspond to the concept of political affect (Holbrook et al., 2000), emphasizing that political attitudes are often influenced by emotions not explicitly articulated, complicating literal detection by LLMs.

Engagement and Content

The majority of comments showed a nano-level participation pattern with spontaneous, emotive expression, and tended to have a low level of cognitive involvement (Gemini: 81.17%, OpenAI: 83.06%, Grok: 87.33%), which reflects prevalent in the digital space (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017). The comment column also shows the dominance of comments about Gibran's personality personally (Gemini: 24.44%, OpenAI: 34.53%, Grok: 43.09%) confirming dissatisfaction with Gibran personally. Comments related to the substance of video content are also significant (Gemini: 23.81%, Grok: 16.99%), but the ambiguity of the topic remains high especially according to OpenAI (30.06%). The majority of comments showed relevance to the video (Gemini: 78.92%, OpenAI: 84.28%), while Grok was lower (54.87%), indicating variations in interpretation between models. Nevertheless, given sentiment analysis inaccuracies, relevance to video content often overlapped with personal critiques of Gibran.

Communication style

The results showed that communication styles were found to be predominantly critical (Gemini: 37.15%, OpenAI: 40.59%, Grok: 51.58%) and humorous or sarcastic (Gemini: 16.03%, OpenAI: 31.55%, Grok: 18.16%), reflecting strong negative sentiment. Informal language was found to be very dominant (Gemini: 97.21%, OpenAI: 67.32%, Grok: 99.44%), reflecting the spontaneity of digital commentary. Both critical, humorous and informal communication styles towards the incumbent authorities are in line with the pattern of cyberactivism by McCaughey and Ayers (2013) who argue that political humor is an effective form of subtle resistance. The LLM model found that the use of foul language was relatively low (Gemini: 4.30%, OpenAI: 4.60%), indicating relatively polite criticism. However, the findings could be due to LLM's failure to identify word abbreviations and regional languages.

Authenticity and Position

The results showed that the majority of comments were neutral or negative towards Gibran (Gemini: neutral 60.41%, negative 31.94%; OpenAI: critical 56.41%; Grok: neutral 46.57%, negative 45.34%), while positive comments are minimal, reflecting public skepticism

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of Gibran. This emphasizes the existence of a shared unrest that organically dominates manifested as negative comments (Putnam, 2000). The results of the LLM analysis show that the majority of comments are authentic/written by humans (Gemini: 99.70%, OpenAI: 95.51%, Grok: 99.49%), but positive comments have a slightly higher tendency as bots. The cause is a pattern of positive comments that tend to use formal language and uniform emojis ("❤️"), which indicate a possible astroturfing or artificial mobilization of support for elite narratives. This contrasts sharply with the more informal, diverse, and authentic character of negative commentary, reinforcing the argument that the emerging resistance is organic and born out of digital civil society, not the result of engineering.

Discussion

This study contributes to the understanding of how social media platforms function as crucial arenas for political participation, particularly through cyberactivism in Indonesia. The qualitative analysis reveals a nuanced picture of symbolic resistance, reflecting deep-seated public disillusionment with political elites. Netizens' use of sarcasm, irony, and moral delegitimization underscores a shift from traditional forms of political participation toward affective, informal expressions rooted in shared ethical values and justice-based perceptions. This shift aligns with Holbrook et al. (2000), who highlight the role of emotions and symbolism in contemporary political behavior.

Moreover, our quantitative findings significantly expand on these qualitative insights. The overwhelming prevalence of negative sentiment—95.38% through manual validation—clearly reflects widespread public skepticism towards the political symbolism employed by Gibran Rakabuming Raka. However, the notable discrepancies between manual validation and sentiment analysis by LLM models such as OpenAI, Gemini, and Grok suggest crucial limitations in automated tools for accurately capturing political nuances in informal communication contexts (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006). Such gaps emphasize the complexity of interpreting digital political expressions, where sarcastic and ironic comments often elude algorithmic detection due to their subtle, context-dependent nature.

This study also confirms the emerging pattern of digital polarization, characterized by new forms of moral cleavage. The findings indicate that Indonesian digital political discourse increasingly pivots around ethical legitimacy, meritocracy, and perceptions of privilege. These findings extend Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) classical cleavage theory into the digital context, highlighting how traditional institutional conflicts evolve into value-driven symbolic battles facilitated by social media dynamics.

Furthermore, this research reinforces the notion of digital civil society, illustrating how platforms such as YouTube comment sections have become significant spontaneous deliberative forums. Echoing Wnuk-Lipiński (2007), these spaces serve as mechanisms of social control and articulation of democratic values, providing vital counterbalances against political elites. The patterns of nano-level participation observed, through likes, comments, and shares, are powerful precisely because of their cumulative effect—small acts aggregating into influential collective expressions of political dissent (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017).

Thus, by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, this research enriches scholarly discourse on digital politics, showing how elite narratives encounter profound resistance through informal digital solidarity and symbolic critique. It offers empirical evidence that, while social media significantly expands democratic participation, it also amplifies emotional and symbolic dimensions that traditional democratic frameworks have yet to adequately accommodate.

Limitations

While this study provides comprehensive insights into digital political activism in Indonesia, several methodological and theoretical limitations should be acknowledged. First, although our mixed-method approach offers both depth and scale, the inherent limitations of automated analysis tools (LLMs) restrict the accuracy of sentiment and emotion classification, particularly in capturing nuanced informal language, sarcasm, and regional dialects. Manual validation remains necessary, but due to practical constraints, we only validated sentiment analysis on a limited subset (2,000 out of over 44,000 comments).

Second, the research's case study nature, focusing exclusively on reactions to Gibran Rakabuming Raka's "Demographic Bonus" video, may limit generalizability. Patterns observed in this case might differ from reactions to other political figures or broader national issues. Future research should therefore examine multiple case studies across diverse platforms and political contexts.

Third, the anonymous nature of YouTube comments provides limited demographic data about commenters, thus constraining deeper socio-demographic analyses. Additional demographic or longitudinal data would significantly enrich the understanding of who engages in digital activism and how engagement patterns evolve over time.

Lastly, this research does not explore the direct political consequences of online activism. While symbolic resistance is clearly articulated, measuring its practical impact on policy changes, electoral outcomes, or elite behavior remains beyond the scope of this study. Further research could explore these tangible effects to more completely assess the transformative potential of digital political expressions.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that social media platforms, particularly YouTube comment sections, serve as vital arenas for cyberactivism where symbolic resistance, emotional expression, and moral critique challenge elite political narratives in contemporary Indonesia. Netizens predominantly express dissatisfaction through informal language marked by sarcasm, irony, and moral delegitimization, signaling a shift from formal, rational political participation to affect-driven engagement. Quantitative analysis reveals current limitations of automated methods like Large Language Models (LLMs) in capturing these nuanced expressions, emphasizing the continued necessity of human interpretation. Manual validation confirms a public crisis of elite legitimacy, highlighting the influential role of digital humor, symbolic critique, and ethical judgment in shaping Indonesia's digital democracy. Overall, the study underlines how digital spaces function as forums for renegotiating political legitimacy, reshaping political divides along ethical and symbolic lines and calling for more genuine political engagement. Future research should further explore the evolving dynamics of digital activism, particularly the relationship between symbolic political expression and concrete political outcomes, to better understand the transformative impact of digital democracy in Indonesia and comparable contexts.

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