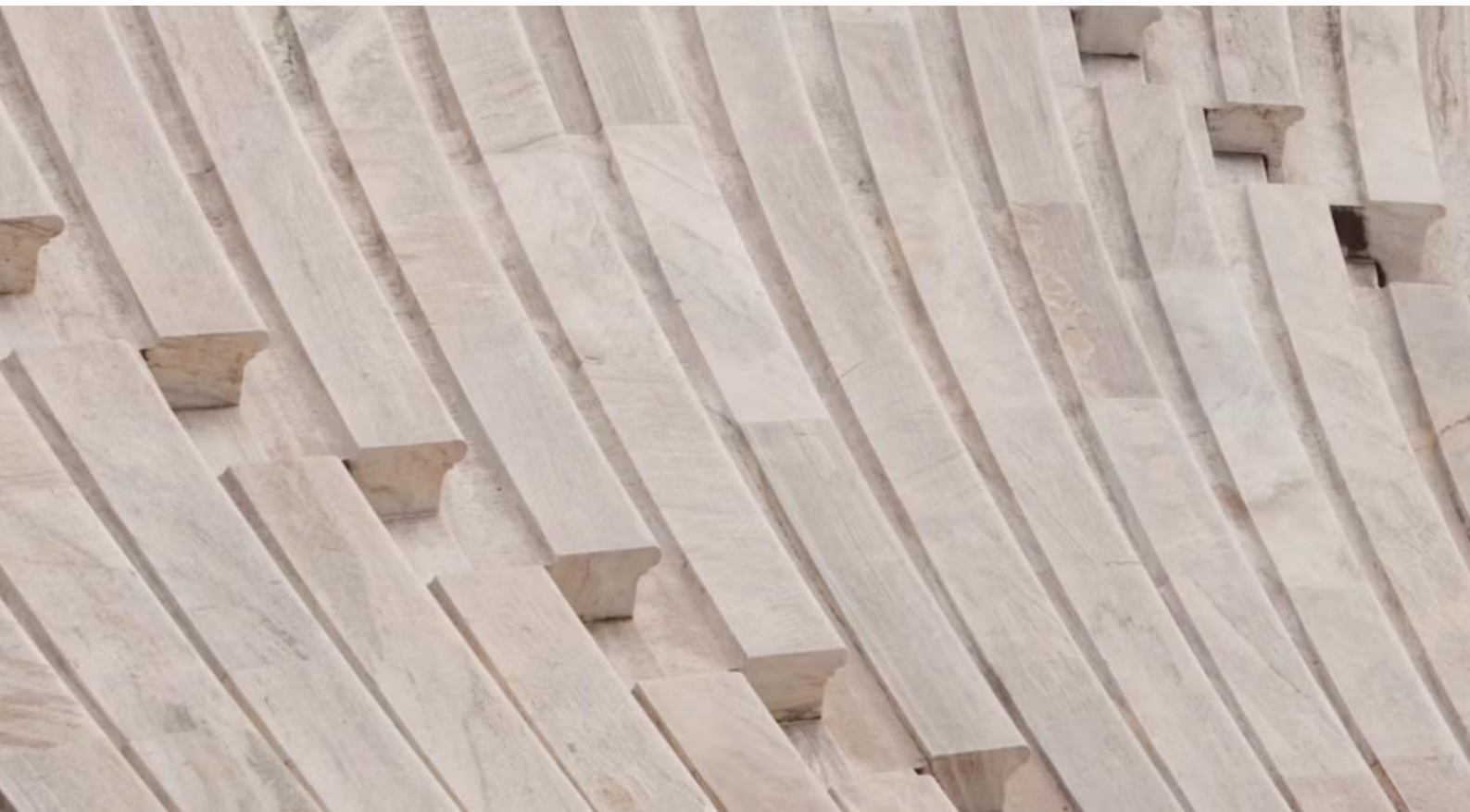


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The Influence of Gender Identity on Eating Disorders: Differences Between Gender Groups

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Abstract

This study focused on exploring the relationship between gender identity and eating disorders in high school students, in order to clarify the differences in rates, manifestations and levels of influence between different gender groups. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods with 170 students participating in the survey in Hanoi, the results showed that the rate of eating disorders was highest in females, followed by males and the other gender group. In particular, the other gender group had the most severe and diverse levels of eating disorders. Factors such as body dissatisfaction, social pressure on body standards, gender discrimination and internalization of appearance standards had a significant impact on eating disorder behavior. The study also showed that eating disorders negatively affected students' mental health, while coping ability was limited and there was a lack of appropriate support. On that basis, the study proposes educational, communication and school psychological support solutions for effective prevention and intervention, with special attention to gender-diverse student groups.

Keywords: Gender Identity, Eating Disorders, Mental Health, High School Students, Gender Diversity, Body Image, Social Stigma

1. Problem statement

1.1. Reason for choosing the topic

Eating disorders have become a very common problem in recent times and are increasingly prevalent among young people. However, most of the research on this issue often revolves around women, leading to the disease being overlooked by other genders such as men, transgender people, non-binary people and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Eating Disorders (EDs) are increasingly becoming a serious mental health concern among young people, especially high school students. At this age, students are in a period of strong physical and psychological development, and are easily affected by social factors such as body image standards, social media influence, academic pressure, and peer relationships. Many studies have shown that the onset of eating disorders is often between 15 and 25 years old - this is also a key period that requires early intervention to prevent long-term physical and mental consequences.

While eating disorders have long been studied from a psychological and sociological perspective, a less-explored but important factor—gender identity—has a profound impact on the risk of developing these disorders. Gender identity includes gender identity, biological sex, and social gender roles—all of which contribute to self-image and eating-related behaviors. However, other disorders, such as binge eating disorder, are more common in both sexes, and there is growing evidence that people who are non-binary, transgender, or exploring their gender identity are at increased risk for eating disorders but are often overlooked in current research and interventions.

In Vietnam, most of the existing research still focuses mainly on the common causes of eating disorders without really deeply analyzing gender identity as an independent and important variable. Especially, in the context of Vietnamese society being more and more open to gender diversity/LGBTQIA+ community, but still having many prejudices and lack of understanding, studying the relationship between gender identity and eating disorders is extremely necessary at this time. Although this topic has been studied in other places in the world, it has never been deeply exploited in a country where issues related to LGBTQIA+ and mental health are still sensitive but in the development stage, like Vietnam, especially in the context of gradually increasing social awareness, this is a valuable opportunity to contribute to the domestic knowledge base, while opening up new approaches to psychological support in the school environment.

This study is not only of academic significance, but also of practical significance – helping educators, school psychologists and parents better understand the potential risks, thereby building psychological support programs suitable for each group of students according to gender and gender identity. This is also the first step towards a comprehensive school environment, where all students – regardless of gender or identity – are listened to, understood and properly supported. For these reasons, the authors conducted a study entitled “ *The influence of gender identity on eating disorders: Differences between gender groups* ”. Accordingly, this study will emphasize the importance of considering the intersectionality of students’ experiences, recognizing the many social and gender factors that play an important role in their experiences and their consequences on body image, which can even lead to eating disorders.

1.2. Research purpose

- Determine the relationship between gender identity and risk of eating disorders in high school students.
- The study will compare the prevalence of eating disorders across different gender groups, including men, women, and non-binary gender identities.
- From there, we hope to clarify the differences in psychological experiences and social pressures that each group faces. The research results will be the basis for proposing more appropriate, diverse and inclusive psychological support solutions in the school environment. At the same time, we propose to build a gender-sensitive psychological support system to help prevent and intervene early in eating disorders for all students.

1.3. Research object and scope

1.3.1. Research subjects

The research subjects of the topic are high school students, including different gender and gender identity groups such as: **Male** (cisgender male) ; **Female** (cisgender female) ; **Transgender** male/female ; Non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid,...)

In addition, the study also focused on:

- + Symptoms and severity of eating disorders in target groups.
- + Body awareness, social pressures related to appearance and gender.
- + Social factors (gender discrimination, pressure to conform to gender norms, appearance expectations) influence eating disorders.

1.3.2. Scope of research

- Scope of content:

- + Explore the relationship between gender identity and eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and atypical eating disorder (OSFED).
- + Compare the differences in the severity and manifestation of eating disorders between different gender groups.
- + Explore some mediating or moderating factors (such as social stigma, internalized self-stigma, body image) in the relationship between gender identity and eating disorders.

- Spatial scope: The study was conducted mainly in high schools in Hanoi.

- Time range: The study was conducted between **February 2025** and **June 2025**.

1.4. Research questions

- (1) How does gender identity influence the risk and manifestation of eating disorders?
- (2) Are there differences in the prevalence of eating disorders between gender groups?
- (3) What factors mediate or moderate the relationship between gender identity and eating disorders?

1.5. Organization and research methods

1.5.1. Research organization

The study was organized in the following phases:

Phase 1: Building theoretical foundation and research overview : Studying theories about gender identity, eating disorders and the relationship between them. Synthesis of domestic and foreign studies on the influence of gender identity on eating disorders.

Phase 2: Design research tools : Build a survey form including tested scales on:

Degree of eating disorder (using the EAT-26 scale or equivalent).

Gender identity recognition.

Feelings about body image.

Level of stigma and social pressure related to gender and appearance.

Design in-depth interview scenarios for a number of typical subjects belonging to different gender identity groups.

Phase 3: Data collection: Publish online and offline surveys to ensure gender identity diversity. Conduct in-depth interviews with 2-3 people representing gender groups to further explore personal experiences and social factors.

Phase 4: Data processing and analysis : Quantitative analysis using SPSS statistical software or equivalent to:

Comparison of eating disorder levels between gender groups (T-test, ANOVA).

Regression analysis to examine the impact of gender identity, social stigma on eating disorders

Qualitative analysis of interview content using coding and thematic analysis.

Phase 5: Writing a report and making recommendations : Synthesize research results ; discuss results based on theory and practice and make recommendations for psychological counseling, community support and policy making.

1.5.2. Research methods

- Theoretical research method: Collect and analyze documents and theories related to gender identity, eating disorders, and influencing social factors.

- **Quantitative research method:** Using a survey questionnaire with standardized scales to assess the level of eating disorders and related variables. Descriptive, comparative and regression statistical analysis.
- **Qualitative research method:** In-depth interviews to collect information about personal experiences related to gender, body image, social pressure and eating behavior.

1.6. Scientific and practical significan

- **Scientific significance :** The research contributes to supplementing and perfecting the theoretical basis of the relationship between gender identity and eating disorders in the fields of psychology and sociology. Through analyzing the differences between gender groups, the research helps clarify the psychological and social mechanisms that affect eating behavior and body image, especially in the context of Vietnamese culture - where research on gender identity and mental health has not received enough attention. The research results also provide reference data for subsequent research projects related to mental health in diverse gender groups.

- **Practical significance :** The study provides an important basis for developing eating disorder prevention and intervention programs appropriate for each gender identity group. At the same time, the research results can help psychologists, educators and health professionals better understand the impact of social pressure and gender discrimination on mental health, thereby providing effective support solutions for adolescents and young people, especially vulnerable groups in terms of gender identity.

2. Research Results

2.1.1. Research abroad

The history of international research on the influence of gender identity on eating disorders has gone through several stages of development, reflecting the changing scientific and social perceptions of gender and mental health. Initially, eating disorder research focused primarily on young women in Western countries from the late 19th century, when Sir William Gull first described anorexia nervosa in 1873. Throughout the 20th century, eating disorders were viewed as a “female-specific” problem and were limited to the cultural norms of body image and femininity in Western industrialized societies. International research during this period paid little attention to the role of gender identity and largely ignored diverse gender groups.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, with the development of gender and gender identity research, scientists began to realize that eating disorders are not only a problem for cisgender women, but are also common and have specific manifestations in transgender and gender diverse (TGD) people. Diemer et al.'s (2015) study of a sample of university students in the United States showed that the prevalence of eating disorders in transgender and gender diverse people is significantly higher than in the cisgender group. Rasmussen's (2024) study in Denmark also confirmed that transgender people, especially transgender men, are at higher risk of eating disorder symptoms than the control group. Rasmussen also highlights the positive impact of gender-affirming medical interventions in alleviating these symptoms, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of the link between gender identity and mental health.

Additionally, Matthews (2024) in her dissertation synthesized qualitative studies and found that gender diverse people often face a variety of social pressures, stigma, and lack of support within the healthcare system, leading to a higher risk of developing eating disorders and related mental health problems. Similarly, Schepis (2022) also emphasized the role of gender dysphoria, social stigma, and lack of access to appropriate health services as factors that promote eating disorders in the transgender and gender diverse community.

Research by Budge, Adelson, and Howard (2013) has shown that transgender people have higher rates of eating disorders than non-transgender people, and that incongruence between gender identity and biological sex may be a risk factor. Impact of stigma and discrimination on mental health: A study by Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, and Walters (2011) showed that stigma and discrimination can lead to mental health problems, including eating disorders, in LGBTQ+ people. Gender differences in eating disorders: Research by McHugh, Whitlock, and Lacey

(2013) has shown that eating disorders not only affect women but also occur in men and transgender people, with different manifestations and risk factors. In many individuals, the lack of congruence between biological sex and gender identity leads to eating as a tool to modify their appearance to “better fit” themselves or to cope with social pressure, stigma, and non-acceptance.

Globally, studies have shown that the spread of Western body ideals has increased eating disorder rates in many Asian, African, and Latin American countries, which previously had much lower rates. A study published in *Nature Communications Medicine* (2024) also found that gender-affirming medical interventions can reduce the risk of eating disorders in the TGD community, opening up new avenues for more effective treatment. International health organizations such as the WHO have updated their classification of gender identity disorders, shifting from a pathological perspective to one that protects the rights and health of gender-diverse people, contributing to promoting more inclusive global health research and policies.

It is clear from this that gender identity plays an important role in the risk and manifestation of eating disorders. Awareness and extensive research on this relationship will not only help expand the scope of research from cisgender women to diverse gender groups, but also contribute to the development of more appropriate and effective prevention and intervention strategies for each target group worldwide.

2.1.2. Research in Vietnam

In recent years, mental health issues have received increasing attention, of which eating disorders have emerged as an alarming phenomenon, especially among young people. Eating disorders are not simply a nutritional problem but also a profound manifestation of psychological imbalance, closely related to body image, self-perception and the relationship between individuals and society. According to a study by Duong Minh Tam and Tran Nguyen Ngoc (2022), using a cross-sectional descriptive method, 68 patients were diagnosed with mild, moderate and severe depression according to the diagnostic criteria according to the F32 code of ICD - 10 for examination and treatment at the Institute of Mental Health - Bach Mai Hospital. The study results showed that patients with depression with eating disorders had an average age of about 40.01 ± 15.79 and were mainly female (64.7%). Up to 95.6% of people had eating symptoms. Most of the symptoms appeared simultaneously with depression (63.2%). 16.2% of patients with depression had the habit of eating alone and 64.7% of patients had unhealthy eating habits. In patients with unhealthy eating habits, the rate of emotional eating was the highest (50%). In particular, the group of female patients who ate emotionally and ate more sweets accounted for a higher rate than the group of male patients.

In Vietnam, eating disorders in children and adolescents are an emerging problem. According to a UNICEF study, 8% to 29% of Vietnamese adolescents experience mental health problems, including eating disorders. Girls are at higher risk of emotional disorders such as anxiety and depression, while boys are more likely to develop behavioral disorders. A study conducted by Doan Duy Tan and colleagues (2020) examined the prevalence of eating disorders in high school students in Vietnam. The results showed that factors such as gender, social pressure, body image, school stress, and body image all influence the risk of eating disorders. Specifically: “Female students are at higher risk than male students”; “Students who are considered “fat” by others are 1.4 times more likely to have an eating disorder than students who are considered thin”. Another study published in the *Vietnam Journal of Preventive Medicine*, which surveyed 362 high school students, noted: The rate of students with eating disorders is 44.5%. Related factors include: female gender, not eating breakfast regularly, having symptoms of depression, anxiety and high levels of school stress.

In a 2018 study, Nguyen Thi Thu Ha examined eating disorders among female high school students in Hanoi. The results showed that there was a clear link between negative body image and negative eating behaviors. Students with distorted body image often felt “fat” despite having a completely normal body mass index (BMI). As a result, they tended to apply unhealthy measures to control their weight, such as prolonged fasting, extreme dieting, using diet pills, or trying to vomit after eating. The study also found that peer pressure and media contributed to this negative perception. The study highlighted the importance of educating about healthy body image, and suggested the need for school counseling programs to intervene early and prevent eating disorders in female students. One

of the factors that has a clear influence on eating disorders but has not been studied extensively in Vietnam is gender identity. While most traditional research focuses on women, recent studies around the world have shown that men, transgender people and people of non-binary gender groups are also at high risk of eating disorders, with specific manifestations and causes. Gender identity – that is, how a person perceives and expresses their gender – can strongly influence how they view their body, their experience with beauty standards, and the level of social pressure they face. Incongruence between gender identity and social expectations about body shape can lead to negative eating behaviors, anxiety, depression or other forms of mental disorders. Transgender people, for example, may use eating control as a way to change their body shape to better match their gender identity, whereas men tend to hide their psychological problems and are less likely to seek help for eating disorder symptoms.

In Vietnam, research on eating disorders is still quite limited, especially in relation to gender identity. Most of the literature focuses on adolescent and college girls, while other gender groups have not been fully exploited. This leads to a significant research gap, but also an opportunity to expand understanding and develop more appropriate, comprehensive and gender-equitable interventions. In a study by Ruusunen et al. (2014) in Finland, it was shown that an unhealthy diet can increase the risk of depression by up to 41%.³ With the desire to clarify the characteristics of eating habits and diet of patients during the depressive phase, we conducted this topic. The objective of the topic is to "describe the characteristics of eating habits and diet of patients during the depressive phase treated as inpatients at the Institute of Mental Health - Bach Mai Hospital"

According to Sam Vinh Loc's research (2017): "It can be affirmed that eating disorders (Eating Disorders - EDs) are a form of mental disorder, or at least a mild form of psychological and behavioral disorder. Currently, the widely used set of criteria for diagnosing specialized mental disorders is DSM-5 developed by APA (The National Institute of Mental Health, 2013). Eating disorders (EDs) are classified into the group of feeding and eating disorders (Feeding and Eating Disorders). In addition, according to the standard set of criteria for classifying mental and behavioral disorders (The ICD-10) published by the World Health Organization (WHO), eating disorders (EDs) are also classified into the Classification of Mental and Behavioral Disorders (Classification of Mental and Behavioral Disorders) related to biological problems. Correctly identifying the cause and assessing the impacts of this type of disorder will help guide research as well as choose treatment approaches. reasonable treatment."

2.2. Prevalence of eating disorders in gender groups

According to another study in the US, there are about 30 million people in the US who have experienced eating disorders. Of these, about 20 million are women and about 10 million are men. (According to Very Well Health). In the world, the total lifetime rate of eating disorders is: 8.4% in women, 2.2% in men. According to research by the American Journal of Psychiatry, the rate of eating disorders has a clear difference between gender groups with the rate: 2.0% for men and 4.8% for women.

Conducting a survey of high school students in Hanoi, the gender ratio of participants in the survey is shown in the table below:

Table 1: Number of male, female and third gender students participating in the survey.

STT	Sex	Quantity	Percent (100%)
1	Male	64	36.6%
2	Female	102	60%
3	Third gender	4	2.4%
<i>N = 170</i>			

In this study, the total number of students participating in the survey was *170 students*, of which *64 were male students (37.6%)*, *102 female students (60%)* and *4 students of other gender groups (2.4%)*. Examining diverse gender groups allows research to have a more comprehensive view of the relationship between gender identity and eating disorder risk.

The survey results showed that the rate of eating disorders in female students was the highest, with common manifestations such as weight anxiety, body dissatisfaction, and the application of negative eating control measures such as fasting, weight loss or irregular eating. In the male group, although the rate of incidence was lower than in female students, there were also recorded behaviors related to eating disorders, often associated with the desire to gain muscle and develop a body according to the ideal masculine model.

In particular, in the other gender group (2.4% of the total survey), although the number is small, 100% of participants showed high levels of disordered eating, with extreme control over eating to conform to their desired gender identity. This group also faced greater social stigma and body dissatisfaction, leading to a higher risk of severe disordered eating.

Thereby, it can be seen that eating disorders are an increasing problem among adolescents , especially among women and people with different gender identities. This raises an urgent need to raise public awareness, build prevention programs, and provide psychological support appropriate to each gender group to minimize the consequences on physical and mental health for young people today.

2.3. Manifestations of eating disorders in gender groups

Many studies around the world have shown the link between gender identity and eating disorders with significant differences between gender groups. According to Dakanalis et al. (2015), women have a significantly higher rate of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa than men, due to the strong influence of thin body standards in society. In contrast, men tend to pursue a muscular body, leading to abnormal eating behaviors to gain muscle and lose fat.

Research by Watson et al. (2017) on the mental health of transgender people also shows that this group is at higher risk of eating disorders than cisgender people (people whose gender identity matches their biological sex). Body dissatisfaction, the desire to change their appearance to match their gender identity, along with social stigma are factors that increase negative eating control behaviors in this group.

In Vietnam, research on the relationship between gender identity and eating disorders is still relatively limited. However, research by Nguyen Thi Minh Phuong (2021) showed that the proportion of female students who show signs of anxiety about weight and body shape is high, leading to unhealthy eating behaviors. On the other hand, the rise of social media and modern appearance standards also contributes to promoting eating disorders in both men and other gender identity groups.

Based on theoretical foundations and previous studies, the authors surveyed *170 students , including 64 males, 102 females and 4 students of other gender groups* , to find out the rate and manifestation of eating disorders in each group. Detailed results are shown in the table below:

Table 2: Symptoms of eating disorders by gender group

STT	Expression	Female		Male		Other gender	
		SL	TS	SL	TS	SL	TS
1	Worry about weight and body shape	66	65%	26	40%	4	100%
2	Fasting or excessive dieting	59	58%	12	18%	4	100%
3	Irregular eating	53	52%	13	20%	4	100%
4	Self-induced vomiting after eating	18	18%	3	5%	2	50%
5	Use weight loss pills, detox tea	15	15%	2	3%	2	50%

6	Force yourself to eat a lot to gain muscle	10	10%	23	36%	1	25%
7	Use muscle gain supplements	5 friends	5%	18	28%	1	25%
8	Overtraining to change your body shape	12	12%	14	22%	3	75%
$N = 170 = 100\%$							

Survey results show clear differences in eating disorder symptoms between gender groups, reflecting the link between gender identity and ways of controlling body image.

In the female group, the most common eating disorder symptoms are concerns about weight and body shape (65%), along with negative behaviors such as fasting or excessively reducing food intake (58%) and irregular eating (52%). Notably, a significant number of female students choose to self-induce vomiting after eating (18%) or use diet pills or detox teas (15%) to control their weight. These symptoms clearly reflect the pressure of societal beauty standards on women, where a slim body is often considered the ideal.

Meanwhile, in men, the rate of eating disorders is lower than in women but has different characteristics. 36% of boys force themselves to eat a lot to gain muscle, 28% use muscle-building supplements, and 22% overwork to achieve a "standard masculine" body shape. This shows that boys are also under pressure from stereotypes of healthy, muscular bodies, although they rarely admit to worrying about their weight like women.

In particular, in the other gender group, although the number of students participating in the survey was only 4, all of them showed signs of eating disorders at a high and serious level. 100% of them had fasted, eaten irregularly, and most of them over-exercised (75%) or self-induced vomiting, used extreme weight loss measures (50%). This reflects a strong need to control their body shape to match their desired gender identity, while also being under a lot of pressure from gender discrimination and dissatisfaction with their current body.

This shows that eating disorders are no longer a problem for women alone, but have spread to both men and other gender groups, but the ways and motivations of each group are very different. This result shows the need to design prevention and intervention measures that are differentiated by gender and gender identity, to more effectively support each group in improving mental health and healthy eating behaviors.

2.4. Gender identity factors influence eating disorders

- Model showing the relationship between gender identity factors and eating disorders:

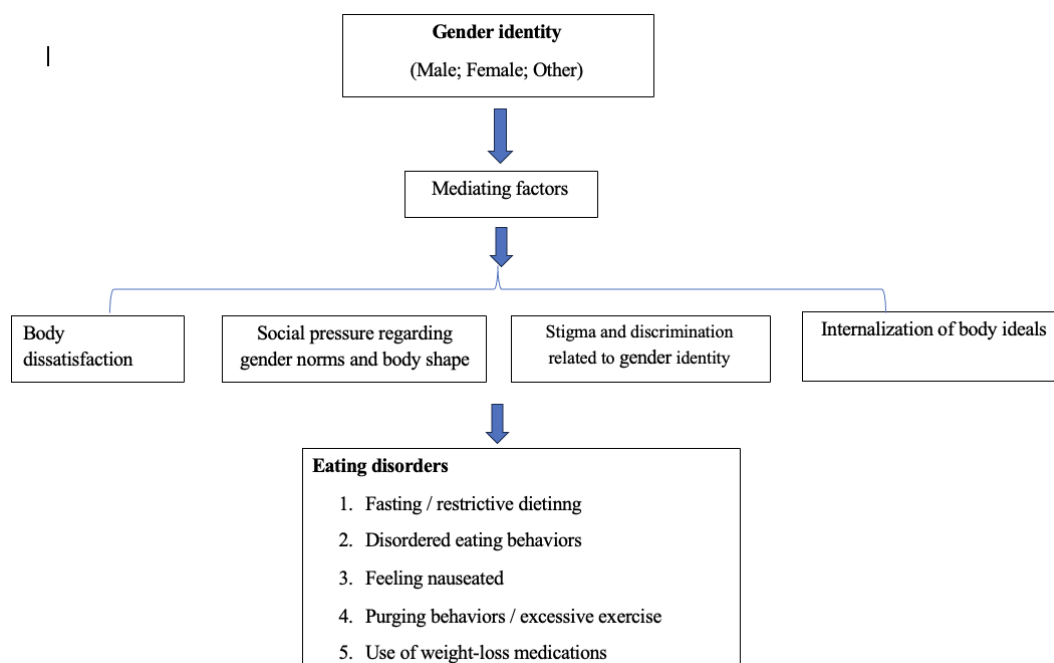


Figure 1: Theoretical Model: The Influence of Gender Identity on Eating Disorders

The research model on the influence of gender identity on eating disorders is built on the integration of fundamental theories in social psychology and health psychology, including: **Body dissatisfaction theory** , **Internalized body standards theory** , **Minority stress theory** , and **Gender role theory** . People whose gender identity does not match their biological sex often feel that their bodies do not reflect who they are, leading to body dissatisfaction. When gender identity is different, individuals are not only confronted with traditional gender norms but also have to adjust themselves to fit their desired gender identity. Internalizing these standards increases pressure to change their body shape, leading to eating disorders such as fasting, binge eating, or abusing unhealthy weight loss methods. Sexual and gender minorities often face stigma, discrimination, and rejection from their families and society. The prolonged stress caused by these negative experiences not only harms mental health but also indirectly increases eating disorder behaviors as a way to control oneself in a psychologically unsafe environment.

Theoretical models suggest that gender **identity does not directly cause eating disorders** , but rather acts through mediating factors such as body dissatisfaction, internalized body standards, gender role pressures, and social stigma. These factors not only increase the risk of eating disorders but also cause the severity and manifestation of the disorder to differ significantly between different gender groups.

Research conducted on students showed that:

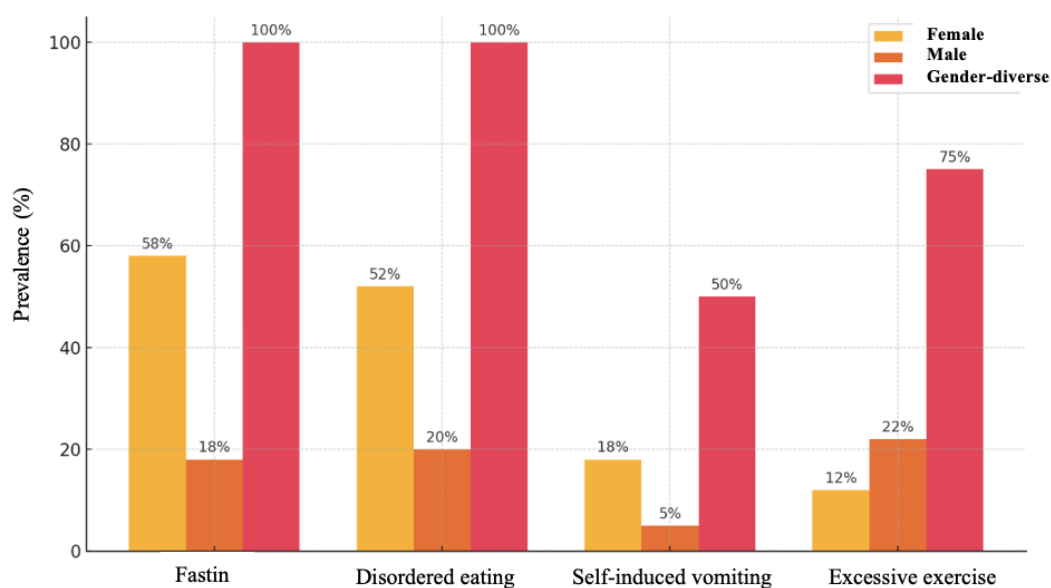


Figure 2: Prevalence of Eating Disorder Behaviors by Gender Group

The results showed eating disorder symptoms in three gender groups: females, males, and other gender groups. The results showed significant differences in the severity and type of symptoms between the groups.

In females, the rate of behaviors related to eating disorders is high. Specifically, 58% of female students fast or reduce their food intake, 52% eat irregularly , and 18% have self-induced vomiting behavior after eating . In addition, 12% of female students exercise excessively with the aim of controlling their weight and body shape. This clearly reflects the pressure from social beauty standards placed on females, in which a slim figure is still the ideal model, leading to girls easily tending to control their eating negatively.

In men , the rates of fasting and self-induced vomiting are relatively low, 18% and 5% respectively , but the most prominent are overtraining (22%) and force-feeding to gain muscle (36% - previous data) . This shows that male students also face physical pressures but in a different direction, that is, the desire to have a toned, muscular body, consistent with the masculine model.

At In the other gender groups, the rates of manifestations were all very high. 100% of students in this group said they had fasted and eaten irregularly, 50% self-induced vomiting after eating, and 75% overtrained. These figures show the serious level of damage to the physical and psychological health of this group, when they were not only dissatisfied with their bodies, but also suffered from social pressure about their appearance as well as discrimination related to their gender identity.

Overall, the survey results show that gender identity is closely related to eating disorder manifestations, with females and other gender groups being the most at risk. Although the manifestations in males are different in characteristics, they cannot be ignored, as body image pressure in this group is increasingly evident. This result is an important basis for proposing appropriate prevention and intervention measures for each gender group in the current school context.

2.5. The impact of eating disorders on students' mental health

Eating disorders not only affect physical health but also have many serious consequences for students' mental health. Negative eating control behaviors, prolonged obsession with body shape and weight can easily lead to negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness, low self-esteem or even sleep disorders. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the level of impact of eating disorders on students' mental life in order to identify potential risks early and have appropriate intervention solutions. Specific survey results on this content are presented in the table below.

Table 3: Manifestations of the impact of eating disorders on students' mental health

STT	Expression of influence	Number of students	Proportion
1	Chronic anxiety about body shape and weight	40	23.5%
2	Sad, depressed because of not achieving the desired body shape	35	20.5%
3	Self-consciousness, inferiority complex, avoidance of social interaction	25	14.7%
4	Sleep disturbance, irritability, emotional	10	5.9%
5	No noticeable effect	60	35.4%
<i>N = 170</i>			

The survey results show that the impact of eating disorders on students' mental health is very worrying . Of the 170 students, up to 92 students (about 54%) admitted that they had experienced negative emotions associated with eating behavior, including: 40 students (23.5%) felt prolonged anxiety about their body shape and weight; 35 students (20.5%) fell into a state of sadness and depression because they did not achieve their desired body shape; 25 students (14.7%) showed signs of low self-esteem, self-consciousness, and avoidance of social interaction due to body image disorders; 10 students (5.9%) showed signs of sleep disorders, irritability or emotionality related to pressure about eating and body shape. In particular, in the other gender group, all students shared that eating disorders not only affect physical health but also cause serious mental health problems, accompanied by feelings of helplessness, isolation and prolonged stress.

2.6. Students' ability to cope with eating disorders

In addition to recording the level of impact on mental health, the study also looked at students' ability to cope when they noticed signs of an eating disorder. Students' proactive efforts to seek support, adjust their eating behaviors, or have appropriate coping strategies will help minimize long-term consequences. Conversely, if students lack awareness, hide, or do not know how to cope, the eating disorder can persist and become more serious. The survey results on students' ability to cope are shown in the table below.

Table 4: Students' ability to cope with eating disorders

STT	How to cope	Number of students	Proportion
1	Seek support from friends, teachers, experts	28	16.5%
2	Adjust your eating and exercise habits to be healthier	47	27.6%
3	No specific response strategy	75	44.1%
4	Conceal or deny the problem	20	11.8%
<i>N = 170</i>			

The survey also showed that students' ability to cope with eating disorders is still limited . Specifically: 28 students (16.5%) said they had sought support from friends, teachers or psychologists when they noticed signs of eating disorders; 47 students (27.6%) shared that they tried to adjust their eating habits and exercise more healthily , but there was no specific method and it was easy to relapse;

Notably, 75 students (44.1%) had no coping strategies at all , were not even aware of their condition, and let their eating disorder behaviors continue; 20 students (11.8%) tended to hide or deny the problem , fearing stigma or negative evaluation if they shared it with others.

These figures show that the majority of students do not have adequate skills and knowledge to cope with eating disorders , and there is also a lack of effective psychological support systems in the school environment.

3. Conclusion and recommendations

Research on the influence of gender identity on eating disorders and differences between gender groups in students has shown that eating disorders are a real and growing problem in schools today. The survey results of 170 students showed clear differences in the rate and manifestation of eating disorders between gender groups. Females were the group with the highest rate of behaviors such as fasting, irregular eating and self-induced vomiting, while males tended to force-feed and over-exercise to gain muscle. In particular, the other gender group revealed a more severe level of eating disorders, accompanied by profound mental health damage.

In addition, the study also highlighted the negative impact of eating disorders on mental health, with symptoms of anxiety, sadness, low self-esteem, and sleep disturbances at alarming levels. However, students' ability to cope with this problem is still limited, as most of them have not proactively sought help or lack the skills to adjust healthy eating behaviors.

These results suggest that there is a need for psychological education, nutrition, and body awareness programs in schools, with particular attention to students with diverse gender identities. Creating safe, non-discriminatory school environments, while enhancing school counseling services and specialized psychological support are necessary solutions to prevent and intervene early on eating disorders and their associated mental health consequences.

From the above results, the group The study proposes the following recommendations:

For schools:

It is necessary to strengthen propaganda and education activities on mental health, nutrition, and proper awareness of body shape for students.

Develop life skills programs to help students identify and cope with psychological disorders, including eating disorders.

Develop and strengthen school psychological counseling services to provide timely support to students with psychological difficulties.

For family: It is important to pay attention, monitor and create a safe space for children to share psychological problems, academic pressure and body image. Educate children that self-worth does not depend on body shape or unrealistic beauty standards.

For society: Strengthen communication campaigns on gender and body diversity, to reduce stigma and social pressure about rigid body standards. Collaboration between schools, psychologists and social organizations to build a friendly school environment that respects gender and gender identity diversity.

The above recommendations are an important premise for effective prevention and intervention of eating disorders, contributing to protecting the physical and mental health of students, especially groups of students in gender-diverse communities.

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Social Media Driven Rumours and Communal Violence in Bangladesh: Patterns, Catalysts, and Mitigation Strategies

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Abstract

The swift growth of social media use in Bangladesh has strengthened communication but has also lightning the diffusion of rumours. In several latest events, unverified posts framed around political, religious, and identity-based outrage have moved quickly from online spaces into offline vandalism and communal violences. The transition from rumour to violence is not automatic and unavoidable. It depends on how digital content is articulated, who disseminates it where it spreads, and how authorities respond. This study develops a sequential explanation of social media driven rumour spread in Bangladesh and analyses a risk-reduction model. Using a mixed-methods design, this study combines content analysis of viral rumour incidents, interviews with journalists, diffusion pathway mapping within closed networks, influencer, and digital security stakeholders. Presenting information suggests that escalation is most likely when identity threats circulate through trusted local networks and confusing institutional responses. Employing Social Exchange Theory, the study argues that perceived institutional failure facilitates negative reciprocity and accumulation. This study also suggests a mitigation strategy structured around early detection, rapid institutional communication, and locally credible counter-narratives.

Keywords: Rumours, Misinformation, Communal Violence, Bangladesh, Facebook, Diffusion Networks, Institutional Trust, Social Exchange Theory, Mitigation Strategies

1. Introduction

Social networking site especially Facebook and messaging applications are now deeply influencing public conversation and opinion in Bangladesh. This has clear positive effects like faster news sharing, stakeholders' coordination, and greater political participation. People can uplift concerns, share information and render support with great ease. The same systems also present emotionally charged and sensational content, often promoting speed over reliability. In Bangladesh, a repeated pattern has appeared where rumours frequently linked to political and religious indifference, alleged disrespect, circulate rapidly and then translate into community tension. These rumours are often spread in ways that initiate panic, making it difficult to mitigate calmly and smoothly. Studies focused on Bangladesh note that religious misinformation and high levels of online engagement can undermine

interreligious harmony and may connect directly to offline incidents, including attacks on communities and property (Al-Zaman, 2024).

The main purpose is not to establish that rumours exist. It explains why some rumours fade quickly while others escalate into violence or tension. Existing research suggests that online hate or inflammatory language can sometimes foster offline harm, but this connection is neither automatic nor uniform. It appears to depend heavily on political context, institutional credibility, and community-level dynamics (Castaño-Pulgarin et al., 2021; Arcila-Calderón et al., 2024). In Bangladesh, intense political rivalry, the mix of dense social networks and uneven trust in formal communication protocols may facilitate intensification of threats. During politically sensitive periods, reports can gain further meaning and urgency. This study therefore focuses the patterns and catalysts that fuel online news into offline communal violence, and mitigation strategies appear workable in the Bangladesh perspective.

2. Literature Review

Recent research on online misinformation and harm broadly portrays three recurring claims. First, platforms tend to amplify content that triggers strong emotional reactions, which increases exposure to misleading, polarising, or hateful narratives (Castaño-Pulgarin et al., 2021). Second, the online-to-offline link appears more likely when content frames a target group as dangerous, immoral, or existentially threatening, and when such messages circulate within trusted social networks where verification is social rather than factual (Arcila-Calderón et al., 2024). Third, Bangladesh-focused studies suggest that religious misinformation is not rare, often attracts high engagement, and that this engagement shapes how messages are interpreted and acted upon in offline settings (Al-Zaman, 2024; Al-Zaman, 2023). Still, there is debate regarding the main focus. Some studies prioritise platform-level causation, like algorithmic amplification and virality, while others stress local level conditions, including political entrepreneurs, weak disagreement resolution mechanisms, and low institutional trust. This, study considers these dynamics as interacting factors rather than alternative explanations, arguing that amplification without receptive local conditions is inadequate to explain escalation.

2.1 Theoretical Literature

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is helpful here because communal peace is partly sustained by repeated everyday exchanges like trust, protection, and fairness. When people believe institutions will eliminate risk quickly and fairly, communities may wait before acting. But when exchanges fail due to delayed response or perceived bias, people may look for equity restoration on their own. In SET terms, perceived injustice can initiate negative reciprocity like retaliation or deviant behavior aimed at restoring balance. In rumour incidents, this can show up as collective punishment based on union that formal systems will ensure justice.

SET also helps to identify the risks of private networks. In close groups, social rewards for reaction can be strong, and verification appears social rather than factual. If community members share a rumour and receive agreement, the exchange reinforces belief seriously. If outsiders or authorities respond late, the community may translate that as disrespect or weakness, which enhances enthusiasm to act. In practice, this means institutional response time and reputation are elements of the causal chain, not side issues.

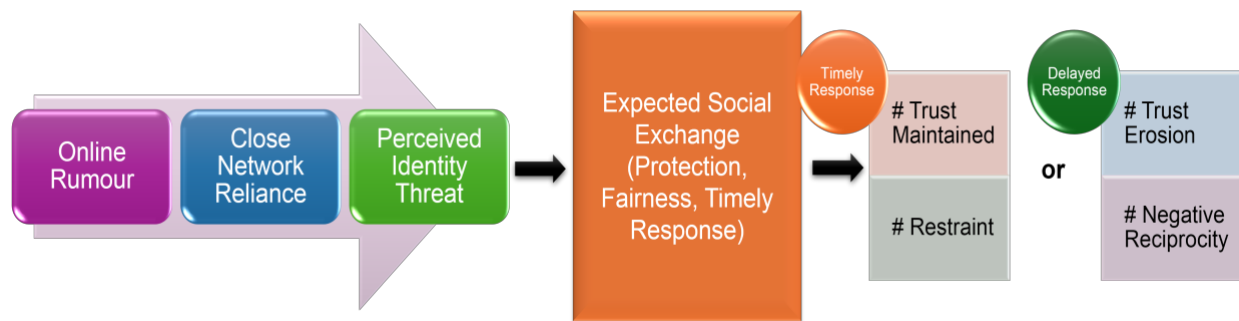


Figure 1: SET Applied to Rumour Driven Communal Violence

[Source: Researcher's own construct]

2.2 Empirical Literature

Bangladesh-specific empirical work increasingly shows how religious misinformation can drive intense engagement and polarised reactions, and why that matters for intergroup relations (Al-Zaman, 2024). A related dataset paper also highlights that religious misinformation is implicated in interreligious tension and can support systematic analysis of engagement patterns in Bangladesh (Al-Zaman, 2023).

Beyond Bangladesh, research connecting online hate to offline hate crime finds that inflammatory language and online hate dynamics can have predictive capacity for offline incidents (Arcila-Calderón et al, 2024). This does not confirm direct causation in every case, but it proposes a risk-monitoring approach.

A further thread is the study of misinformation propagation in messaging systems. Work on WhatsApp groups shows that misinformation spread is shaped by group structure and community clustering, and that platform affordances influence correction behaviour (Nobre et al, 2022; Villamil et al, 2022). These findings are significant for Bangladesh because rumour escalation often appears strongly in trusted groups where people think messages come from known sources. The main arguments are how these platform and network factors merge with Bangladesh's local dispute politics, policing capacity, and trust in formal communication facilities.

3. Research Gap

A few gaps were found out in the research studied. First, many studies on Bangladesh were carried out based on narratives or descriptive accounts of individual incidents. While these contributions are relevant, they often stop short of mapping a sequential pathway which explains how rumours shift from initial digital framing to diffusion and then to offline mobilisation and violence. As a result, the escalation process continues to remain fragmented and analytically inadequate. Second, although a few studies assess patterns of misinformation engagement and online virality, they hardly synthesise institutional response latency and public legitimacy in authorities as measurable variables within the same analysis. This omission limits the understanding of how delayed, unclear, disjointed or fragmented responses may increase communal tension and facilitate escalation. Third, mitigation proposals in the existing research are likely to remain broad and normative. Recommendations like awareness building or fact checking are often proposed in isolation, with limited empirical policy guidance on how different interventions like early detection, rapid institutional communication, platform coordination, and community level counter narratives should be integrated and sequenced. This paper addresses these identified gaps by formulating a structured, context sensitive framework that connects rumour dynamics, political and institutional conditions, and propose practical mitigation strategies in the Bangladesh perspective.

4. Conceptual Framework

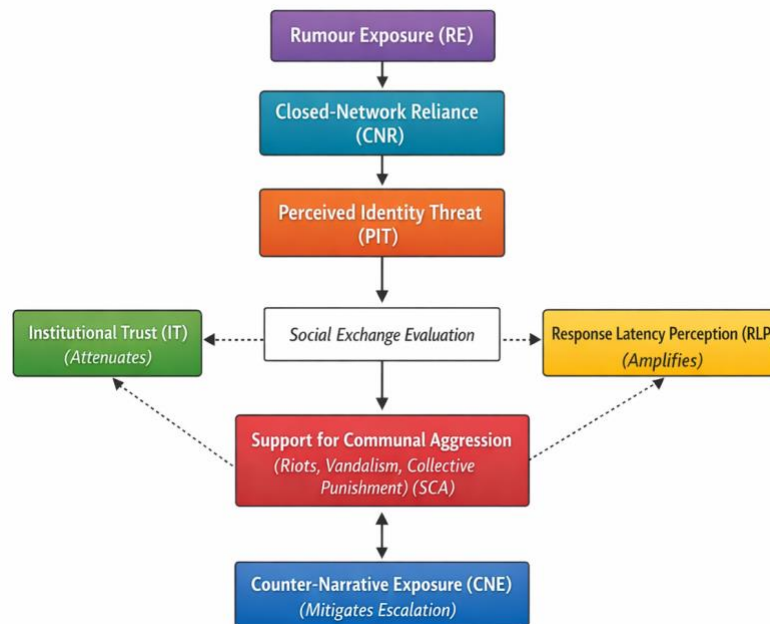


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of Social Media Driven Rumour Escalation and Mitigation

[Source: Researcher's own construct]

5. Materials and Methods

5.1 Ethical Consideration

The study complies with standard human-subject protections, like voluntary participation, informed consent, and the protection of participant confidentiality. All participants were clearly informed and adequately briefed regarding the study objective, the nature of their involvement, and the types of questions they would be asked before the start of data collection. Interviewees were also fully informed about audio recording procedures, and how recordings would be utilised, and their right to withdraw audio recording from the study at any stage without any negative effects. To protect privacy, personal identifiers were excluded from interview transcripts and survey data, and pseudonyms or coded labels were also used. All digital data were password protected, with access restricted to the research team only. Sensitive information that could potentially reveal individuals or communities to harm was handled with particular attention and excluded from publication. The study avoided collecting operational or location specific data that could intensify tensions or compromise safety. Overall, these steps are consistent with widely accepted ethical standards for survey and interview based social science research, and concentrate on the protection, dignity, and autonomy of participants throughout the research process.

5.2 Research Design and Measurement of Variables

The study uses an exploratory sequential mixed methods approach to carry out study both on the contextual depth and the analytical patterns of social media driven rumour violences. In Phase 1, qualitative analysis is conducted to develop actual understanding on emergence and circulation, dissemination, and interpretation of rumours. This phase works on multiple sources, including viral social media posts or contents, user comments or reactions, and mainstream news reports, alongside semi structured interviewees like journalists, community leaders, and digital security practitioners. Qualitative outcomes assist in formulating recurring themes, framing patterns, and response dynamics, which significantly influence the selection and application of variables for the quantitative phase.

In Phase 2, a structured survey is conducted based on findings from Phase 1 and established literature on misinformation, political communication, and communal violence. The target audience for analysis is the social media user aged 18 years and above. The survey measures exposure to rumours, understands the pattern or type of identity based threat, trust in institutions, and behavioural orientations connected to collective action by the appropriate authority. The dependent variable, Support for Communal Aggression (SCA), is measured using Likert Scale items that measure endorsement with statements justifying collective punishment, mob action, or violence to protect the interests. This variable does not measure and determine actual violent behaviour, rather, it acts as a safer and widely accepted proxy for attitudes associated with escalation of risk.

All key constructions are framed as reflective variables, each measured using three to five items to ensure reliability and confirm validity. The independent variables include Rumour Exposure (RE), projecting the frequency and intensity of getting unverified claims; Closed Network Reliance (CNR), capturing dependence on private groups or trusted circles for information; and Perceived Identity Threat (PIT), proposing the limit to which individuals believe their religious or communal identity is under threat. Institutional factors are depicted by Institutional Trust (IT) and Response Latency Perception (RLP), while exposure to corrective messaging is described through Counter Narrative Exposure (CNE).

5.3 Hypothesized Model

The proposed PLS-SEM model assumes a sequential escalation process. Rumour Exposure (RE) and Closed Network Reliance (CNR) are assumed to increase Perceived Identity Threat (PIT). Besides, higher PIT is expected to intensify Support for Communal Aggression (SCA). Institutional Trust (IT) and Counter Narrative Exposure (CNE) are assumed to reduce SCA by attenuating fear and uncertainty. Moreover, Response Latency Perception (RLP) is expected to extend SCA and to influence the relationship between IT and SCA, where delayed or doubtful responses weaken the protective effect of trust.

5.4 Hypotheses

- H1= RE → PIT (positive).
- H2= CNR → PIT (positive).
- H3= PIT → SCA (positive).
- H4= IT → SCA (negative).
- H5= RLP → SCA (positive).
- H6= CNE → SCA (negative).
- H7= IT × RLP → SCA (positive moderation).

5.5 Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling approach is adopted to confirm contextual relevance and demographic diversity. In Stage 1, districts are carefully selected depending on two criteria: documented incidents of rumour linked communal tension or violence and high levels of social media penetration. This approach allows the study to concentrate on areas where rumour dynamics and escalation risks are most prominent and frequent. In Stage 2, both urban and semiurban upazilas within each selected district are sampled to gather variation in digital access, political activity, and community structure. Semiurban areas merit particular and detailed attention because they frequently experience quick spread of rumour through social media along with limited institutional resources. In Stage 3, respondents are recruited using a mixed method. Offline recruitment is carried out through community organizations, educational institutions, and local networks to include participants from different digital exposure levels. Online recruitment concentrates on active and vibrant social media users through platform based outreach. This combined method lowers sampling bias and increases representativeness. Overall, the strategy focuses on confirming diversity across age, gender, education, occupation, and religious identity, which enables a meaningful comparative study across social groups.

5.8 Sample Size Determination

Minimum sample is estimated using Cochran's formula for proportions with 95% confidence and 5% margin of error, giving $n = 384$ for large populations. To support SEM paths and subgroup checks, this study target $n = 450$ -600 respondents.

5.9 Data Collection

Data collection proceeds through three interrelated steps to capture both depth and breadth of evidence. First, a case corpus containing viral social media posts, associated comment threads, screenshots, and relevant mainstream online reports are compiled. These materials are sampled considering their reach, engagement level, documented connection to communal tension or violence, and offline incidents. The case corpus facilitates systematic and sequential analysis of rumour framing, emotional tone, and diffusion patterns across social media networks. Second, semi structured interviews are conducted with journalists, community leaders, and digital security practitioners who have experienced and witnessed rumour related incidents or violence directly and closely. These interviews assist in constructing the contextual bases on rumour interpretation, communities' response, and involvement of institutional actors during periods of tension. Third, a structured, close and open-ended survey is conducted to gather quantitative data on individual exposure, perceptions, and attitudes. This mixed approach allows inclusiveness, reduces response bias, and enhances the overall validity and strength of the data.

6. Result And Discussion

6.1 Qualitative Findings. Patterns of Rumour Escalation

Qualitative analysis of the case study and interview data suggests consistent patterns in how social media influenced rumours aggravate into communal tension and violence in Bangladesh. Rumours that spread beyond online circulation and result in offline tension typically include moral shock framing, identity based threat issues, and religious symbolism. Moral shock occurred by framing the rumour as an urgent violation of sacred values, such as alleged desecration of religious texts, insults to religious figures, moral transgressions, or political ill motives attributed to out groups. These narratives are often portrayed as emergencies that need urgent response, leaving little room for verification and validation.

Diffusion emerges in the fastest possible manner within trusted closed networks, such as private Facebook or WhatsApp groups, and locally popular online pages. Credibility is ensured from social proximity rather than factual verification within these networks. Interviewees repeatedly opined that individuals were more likely to believe and share rumours when these were initiated by acquaintances, local leaders, or politically affiliated actors. In this regard, questioning the rumour may be considered as disloyalty. These dynamic augments rapid diffusion and intensify emotional responses.

Another critical issue concerns the importance of the clarity and timing of institutional responses. Interviewees propose that delayed, fragmented, or ambiguous institutional responses prominently increase escalation risk. Silence from authorities is often interpreted as confirmation of the rumour or institutional bias. It is revealed in several case studies that when clarifications were eventually circulated, they came after vandalism or violence. These findings indicate that institutional latency does not merely fail to prevent violence; it may actively influence escalation by undermining trust.

6.2 Descriptive Statistics and Measurement Properties

The survey results are given below to show how the proposed model was empirically analysed using the collected data. The analysed data indicate moderate to high exposure to rumours and relatively low levels of institutional trust among the respondents. These patterns are in line with prior observations in politically sensitive and socially polarised contexts. As a whole, quantitative results provide empirical support for the qualitative insights by showing how rumour exposure, network reliance, and institutional perceptions are dispersed across the sample and how they structure escalation risk in daily affairs.

Table 1: Summary Statistics

Construct (scale 1–5)	Mean	SD
Rumour Exposure (RE)	3.71	0.82
Closed-Network Reliance (CNR)	3.48	0.88
Perceived Identity Threat (PIT)	3.62	0.85
Institutional Trust (IT)	2.69	0.94
Response Latency Perception (RLP)	3.74	0.81
Counter-Narrative Exposure (CNE)	2.96	0.90
Support for Communal Aggression (SCA)	2.97	0.96

The mean score for Rumour Exposure (RE) suggests that respondents encounter unverified claims repeatedly, particularly during politically sensitive time. Closed Network Reliance (CNR) is also comparatively high, suggesting high reliance on private or semi-private communication systems. Institutional Trust (IT) displays a noticeably lower mean, presenting skepticism toward formal authorities. Meanwhile, Response Latency Perception (RLP) is high, suggesting that many respondents trust authorities respond slowly or doubtfully during crises. These descriptive patterns are consistent with qualitative findings.

6.3 Reliability and Validity Assessment

Internal consistency and convergent validity were tested using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). All constructions exceed commonly used threshold values (α and CR > 0.70; AVE > 0.50), suggesting satisfactory reliability and construct validity. The relatively high alpha and CR values propose that the indicators within each construct measure the same underlying concept uniformly. In addition, AVE values above the recommended minimum suggest that the constructions explain more variance in their indicators than measurement error, supporting the adequacy of the measurement model for subsequent structural analytical study.

Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
RE	0.83	0.88	0.58
CNR	0.81	0.86	0.55
PIT	0.86	0.90	0.61
IT	0.84	0.88	0.59
RLP	0.80	0.85	0.54
CNE	0.82	0.87	0.57
SCA	0.87	0.91	0.63

These results show that the latent constructions are operationalised with adequate internal consistency and capture sufficient deviation in their observed indicators. The high reliability estimates for Perceived Identity Threat (PIT) and Support for Communal Aggression (SCA) are particularly significant, as these constructs occupy core positions in the hypothesised structural model. Strong measurement properties for PIT and SCA decrease attenuation bias and increase confidence that the estimated path coefficients reflect meaningful relationships rather than artefacts of measurement error. This strengthened the interpretability and robustness of the subsequent methodical model estimates.

6.4 Structural Model Results

The structural model assesses the hypothesised relationship among rumour exposure, network dynamics, institutional factors, and support for communal violence. The results provide statistical bases for all proposed hypotheses, with path coefficients in the desired directions and strong levels of significance. The relatively high t-values propose stable estimates, while the magnitude of the coefficients underscores the central role of perceived identity threat in minimising escalation. Together, these findings confirm the internal coherence of the model and substantiate the suggested theoretical logic linking online rumour dynamics to offline attitudinal escalation.

Table 3: Structural Path Estimates

Path	β	t-value	p-value
RE $\rightarrow$ PIT (H1)	0.31	6.48	<.001
CNR $\rightarrow$ PIT (H2)	0.36	7.92	<.001
PIT $\rightarrow$ SCA (H3)	0.44	8.37	<.001
IT $\rightarrow$ SCA (H4)	-0.21	4.12	<.001
RLP $\rightarrow$ SCA (H5)	0.24	4.95	<.001
CNE $\rightarrow$ SCA (H6)	-0.17	3.41	.001
IT $\times$ RLP $\rightarrow$ SCA (H7)	0.12	2.58	.010

The results suggest that Rumour Exposure (RE) and Closed Network Reliance (CNR) both have statistically significant and strong influences on Perceived Identity Threat (PIT). This offers empirical support for the argument that repeated exposure to rumours and reliance on socially trusted networks amplify perceptions of threat by reinforcing emotionally charged interpretations and reducing verification. In turn, PIT has the strongest direct influence on Support for Communal Aggression (SCA), highlighting the core role of identity based fear in escalation. This pattern proposes that psychological threat perception works as a key mechanism through which online information environments shape into offline attitudinal readiness for collective violence in politically and communally sensitive contexts.

Institutional Trust (IT) suggests a strong negative relation with SCA, confirming its protective role. However, Response Latency Perception (RLP) has a positive and significant effect on SCA, suggesting that perceived delays or ambiguity in official responses facilitate aggressive collective action. Prominently, the interaction term (IT $\times$ RLP) is also high, demonstrating that response latency weakens the protective effect of trust. Even individuals who usually trust authorities may support aggressive action if they believe actions of authority are slow or ineffective.

6.5 Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

When linked together, the qualitative and quantitative findings suggest a coherent picture of rumour driven escalation. Rumours get traction through emotional framing and social endorsement within closed networks. As exposure rises, individuals' identity and community are more likely to be threatened. These perceptions generate readiness for action, but whether action becomes violent depends heavily on institutional signals.

From the view of Social Exchange Theory, these findings suggest a clear mechanism of negative reciprocity. Communities depend on institutions to provide protection, clarity, and fairness. When these factors are not met through delay and doubtful communication, social exchange is considered interrupted. Support for vandalism, riots, or collective punishment becomes a path to restore the desired balance. Violence and clashes are therefore framed not as aggression but as valid tool.

Counternarratives appear effective, but only under specific conditions or situations. Both qualitative accounts and the negative coefficient for Counter Narrative Exposure (CNE) propose that corrective messages reduce support for aggression when they appear from locally trusted intermediaries. Official facts alone are often inadequate if

institutional trust is low. This strengthens the importance of community level actors in mitigation strategies or options.

6.6 Political Context, Riots, and Vandalism

The findings also focus on the importance of political context in influencing escalation. During tension periods or large-scale protests, rumours are often interpreted and transmitted through partisan lenses, which increases sensitivity and decreases tolerance for ambiguity. Respondents described how rumours were sometimes portrayed deliberately by politically affiliated agents to defame opponents, consolidate group loyalty, or mobilise supporters at quick notice. In such contexts, vandalism and riots serve both symbolic and strategic contexts. They project power, create fear, display dominance over contested areas, and influence local political dynamics by reshaping perceptions of control.

This suggests that rumour driven communal violence cannot be fully analysed without considering political incentives and opportunity structures. Confused or delayed actions may not only reflect institutional capacity constraints but also political hesitation or strategic evaluation. When communities perceive responses as selective or politically influenced, institutional confidence erodes further. These perceptions increase negative harmony, reinforcing processes of retaliation and mistrust that appear self sustaining and increasingly difficult to disrupt once established.

6.7 Implications for Theory and Practice

Overall, the findings conform to the proposed sequential escalation model and heightened the explanatory value of Social Exchange Theory in understanding rumour driven communal violence. By incorporating rumour patterns, network dynamics, and institutional reaction, the study goes beyond simplified accounts that facilitate violence solely to misinformation or individual irrationality. Instead, it displays how collective behaviour is influenced by perceived breakdowns in reciprocal expectations between communities and institutions.

For policymakers, the findings suggest that the speed, accuracy, clarity, and credibility of responses and actions from appropriate authorities matter as much as factual accuracy. Preventing riots and vandalism therefore merits not only monitoring and correcting rumours but also visibly strengthening institutional presence, responsiveness, and impartiality. When communities perceive authorities as absent or biased, technical interventions alone are unlikely to be effective without strengthening confidence in the underlying exchange relationship.

6.8 Implications for Mitigation and Prevention

The results indicate several mitigation strategies that originate directly from the monitored escalation pathways. First, early detection is critical. Monitoring should prioritise rumours framed across religious offence, identity threat, or political conspiracy, especially during high-risk periods such as elections or mass protests. Early detection allows intervention before emotional narratives solidify within closed networks.

Second, response speed and clarity are decisive. Institutional communication must emerge rapidly and present a unified message across agencies. Delays or contradictory statements underestimate trust and amplify escalation risk. Most importantly, responses should acknowledge uncertainty where it prevails, as overconfident denials that are later contradicted further erode credibility.

Third, institutional visibility and neutrality are equally critical as communication. Visible and impartial policing during rumour driven tensions can interrupt escalation by signaling that protection is upcoming. Conversely, selective enforcement or excessive force reinforces perceptions of bias and increases adverse reciprocity.

Fourth, platform coordination should focus on slowing diffusion rather than solely removing or deleting content. Temporary friction measures, contextual warnings, and reduced algorithmic amplification during crisis periods may limit quick escalation without instigating censorship backlash.

Finally, community-based counter-narratives portray a key preventive mechanism. The findings suggest that trusted local intermediaries are more effective and beneficial than central authorities in reducing assistance for aggression. Training and supporting such actors can enhance informal verification norms and reduce dependence on rumours during crises.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Summary of the Findings

This study maps a suitable and dynamic strategy to guard against the rumour driven communal escalation in Bangladesh by incorporating digital communication dynamics, political context, and institutional response. The findings suggest that rumours are most likely to initiate aggression and violence when they are framed as identity based threats and spread within closed networks. These risks increase further when institutional responses are delayed, fragmented, or unclear. In this note, rumours do not solely misinform. They also generate fear, moral outrage, and preparedness for collective action.

Based on Social Exchange Theory, the study explains why these dynamics are particularly destabilising. Communities operate with implicit assurance of protection, fairness, and timely responses from the appropriate authorities. When these assurances are perceived to be unclear, the exchange relationship breaks down. Negative reciprocity then becomes more obvious, and support for collective punishment, vandalism, or riots is initiated as justified protection rather than aggression. At the same time, the findings suggest that counternarratives can decrease escalation risk, only when they are narrated by locally credible actors who have gained social trust. These insights underscore that rumour driven violence is not accidental but structured, well planned, context dependent, and responsive to institutional signals.

7.2 Recommendations for Policymakers

Building on the mitigation strategies discussed in Section 5.8, this study suggests a set of practical and integrated policy options. First, authorities should establish early detection and priority assessment mechanisms concentrated on high risk rumour themes, particularly which initiate religious offence, communal identity, or political conspiracy. Such mechanisms should be practiced vigorously and logically during high risk periods which include elections, large protests, and major legal or political events.

Second, rapid and transparent communication is must. Institutions should issue clear, simple clarifications in appropriate language and tone within quick notice of rumour emergence, explicitly explaining what is known, what remains uncertain, and what prompt actions are being taken. Speed and clarity matter as much as factual accuracy, as delayed and bias responses often generate information vacuums that rumours quickly fill.

Third, policymakers should concentrate on local intermediary networks. Teachers, religious leaders, community representatives, and local journalists are often more trusted, respected and admired than central authorities. Training, supporting, and monitoring these actors to share verified updates and stabilizing messages can strengthen informal verification norms and decrease adverse effect of rumours.

Fourth, platform coordination mechanisms should be institutionalised and formalised. Rather than depending solely on content removal, platforms and authorities should use contextual warnings, reduced amplification, and urgent labelling for content that usually initiate violence. Finally, local dispute response and mediation teams should be strengthened and augmented so communities clearly and visibly experience fair protection and timely engagement. Without such early warnings, communities may continue to retaliation when rumours emerge.

7.3 Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross sectional survey design limits causal inference, and self reported attitudes may be shaped by social desirability bias, particularly on sensitive matters such as violence and communal relations. Another limitation concerns the reliance on online and community based sampling, which may not represent individuals with limited internet access or those less involved with social media platforms. As a result, the findings may not fully capture perspectives from more marginalised or digitally excluded populations, potentially affecting the generalisability of the results around all the society.

Future research could conduct longitudinal designs to track rumour diffusion and institutional responses over time, allowing stronger and further causal claims. Ethically designed digital trace analysis could offer more precise mapping of diffusion pathways within closed networks. Quasi-experimental studies studying response timing and messaging strategies would further clarify which interventions are most effective. Comparative studies across South Asian contexts may also help distinguish Bangladesh-specific dynamics and context from broader regional patterns.

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Reality Police Shows as a New Arena of Public Oversight: Mediatized Visibility, Mutual Surveillance in Indonesian Policing Context

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Abstract

This article starts from a simple but often overlooked question: what happens when everyday police work becomes a recurring object of public observation through reality television? Focusing on reality police shows in Indonesia, the study examines how mediated visibility reshapes relations between policing, public evaluation, and accountability. Drawing on a mixed methods sequential explanatory design, the analysis combines a large-scale audience survey ($N \approx 2,100$) with in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis. The findings show that reality police television significantly expands the visibility of police actions and invites audiences to assess police conduct in moral and normative terms. Viewers do not merely watch; they evaluate, compare, and judge. Yet this heightened visibility does not automatically translate into procedural transparency. Instead, it is filtered through media logic that prioritizes immediacy, action, and narrative coherence, often leaving legal complexity and organizational deliberation at the margins. Qualitative evidence further suggests that the presence of cameras alters police behavior, encouraging caution and performative self-regulation rather than consistently strengthening substantive accountability. At the same time, the study reveals that public scrutiny generated through reality police shows does not operate in isolation. Informal audience oversight intersects with formal regulatory mechanisms, producing a multilayered and sometimes tension-filled configuration of accountability shaped by differing temporalities, authorities, and normative expectations. Building inductively on these empirical patterns, the article develops the Circuit of Mutual Surveillance as a middle-range conceptual model to capture the reciprocal relations through which police, media, audiences, and regulators simultaneously observe and respond to one another within a mediated visibility environment. By reframing reality police television as a consequential site of public oversight, this article contributes to policing and surveillance scholarship and offers empirically grounded insights into the promises and limits of media visibility for democratic policing.

Keywords: Accountability, Mediated Policing, Police Reality Shows, Public Oversight, Surveillance

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, policing practices have undergone a fundamental transformation marked by an unprecedented expansion of public visibility. Policing no longer operates primarily within relatively closed bureaucratic spaces subject mainly to internal oversight mechanisms. Instead, police work increasingly unfolds within public visual arenas shaped by cameras, screens, and continuous media circulation (Aleem et al., 2021; Haggerty & Ericson, 2019; Morrow, 2019). This shift has given rise to what the literature describes as *policing's new visibility*: a condition in which police actions are exposed, recorded, circulated, and interpreted by the public with a speed and reach far exceeding earlier periods (Brucato, 2015; A. J. Goldsmith, 2010; Haggerty & Ericson, 2019). As a consequence, policing is increasingly understood not only as an institutional practice but also as a public performance, observed, evaluated, and debated across both mainstream media and digital ecosystems (Bullock, 2018; Colbran, 2020).

On one hand, heightened public visibility is frequently positioned as a prerequisite for strengthening police accountability and legitimacy within democratic policing frameworks (Mauri-Rios et al., 2022). Procedural justice scholarship emphasizes that public trust and compliance are closely tied to perceptions of fair procedures, dignified treatment, and the belief that police act in accordance with legal and normative standards (Reny & Newman, 2021; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). From this perspective, openness and access to information about police actions are assumed to enhance public confidence (Cao, 2015; Tankebe, 2010). Yet this relationship is neither automatic nor uniform; it remains contingent upon social context and the quality of citizens' encounters with policing institutions (Skogan, 2006). On the other hand, critical studies caution that visibility should not be conflated with substantive transparency. Public exposure may generate strong symbolic narratives of accountability while remaining procedurally thin, particularly when information is selective, fragmented, and framed through media logic rather than legal deliberation (Bolin & Jerslev, 2018; Brucato, 2015).

Within surveillance studies, these developments are often interpreted as a departure from classical panoptic models toward more dispersed and participatory configurations of oversight. The panopticon, originating from Bentham and reinterpreted by Foucault (Foucault, 1977), conceptualizes modern discipline as a form of asymmetrical visibility that induces internalized self-control (Akduman, 2023). Subsequent scholarship, however, demonstrates that contemporary surveillance is not solely vertical. The concept of the *synopticon* captures situations in which many observe a few actors positioned within public view (Galič et al., 2017; Mathiesen, 1997), while *sousveillance* emphasizes practices through which citizens record and monitor authorities from below (Mann, 2004; Mohler et al., 2022). Further extending this perspective, the notion of the *surveillant assemblage* underscores the fluid and distributed nature of contemporary surveillance (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000), in which technologies, institutions, and social practices are interconnected within dynamic networks rather than hierarchical structures (Galič et al., 2017; Haggerty & Ericson, 2000).

Within these configurations, cameras and visual media do not merely document reality; they actively produce new disciplinary conditions. Koskela's concept of *the camera* highlights how awareness of being potentially recorded encourages behavioral adjustment, prompting subjects to regulate gestures, bodily movements, and interactional rhythms in anticipation of public scrutiny (Koskela, 2003). Organizational studies of policing similarly indicate that video technologies and mediated visibility reshape professional conduct by redefining what counts as "showable" police work (Bruce, 2021). Rather than simply enhancing transparency, visibility can reproduce police culture while simultaneously reorienting officers' self-presentation toward visual appropriateness and performative caution (Keesman, 2023). Visibility, in this sense, functions less as a neutral channel of information than as a mechanism that actively shapes behavior and judgment (A. J. Goldsmith, 2010; Haggerty & Ericson, 2019).

Despite the rapid expansion of previous research on police visibility and surveillance, existing research remains heavily concentrated in two primary arenas; digital media, particularly police use of social media and citizen recording and individual surveillance technologies such as body-worn cameras (Taylor, 2016). Studies of police social media practices show that institutions often deploy digital platforms as tools of presentational strategy and

image management, frequently limiting reciprocal engagement with public critique (Bullock, 2018; Colbran, 2020; Hu et al., 2018). Research on body-worn cameras, meanwhile, reveals a persistent paradox between promises of transparency and practices of symbolic accountability. Technologies promoted as solutions to police misconduct may operate primarily as signs of reform without consistently producing substantive constraints on discretionary power (Brucato, 2015; Koskela, 2003). These debates underscore a recurring caution in the literature; visibility may expand public scrutiny, but it can also reinforce performative legitimacy when not supported by effective formal oversight mechanisms (Triola & Chanin, 2023).

In contrast to these digital arenas, television, particularly reality police shows, has received comparatively limited attention as an active site of public oversight (Phillips & Trone, 2002). Existing studies of police television programs largely operate within traditions of representation, media effects, and symbolic legitimacy (Goldrosen, 2025; Graziano & Gauthier, 2018). Research on television and policing demonstrates that media narratives can shape public understanding of police institutions by simplifying law enforcement processes into accessible and consumable storylines (Corner, 2002; Doyle, 2000). Studies of reality-based policing further emphasize that the genre constructs “reality” through selective scenes (Jones, 2009), dramatic sequencing (Monk-Turner et al., 2014), and spectacle-oriented formats (Calzado & Gómez, 2016), often marginalizing procedural uncertainty, administrative labor, and legal complexity (Cotter & O’connor, 2008; Rowe et al., 2023). Scholarship on spectacle policing and *copaganda* adds that such programs may amplify heroic narratives, normalize coercive authority, and obscure the structural dimensions of accountability and citizens’ rights (Bakkenes, 2023; Fernandez, 2024; Reiner, 2013).

Empirical studies from Indonesia point to similar dynamics. Several studies report a positive association between viewing the program *86* (NET TV) and public perceptions of the Indonesian National Police, although the effect size tends to be modest and more strongly driven by visual appeal and narrative framing than by substantive understanding of policing practices (Andriana Hasby, 2017; Ardoyo, 2018; Astuti & Benedicta, 2023). These findings resonate with Altheide’s concept of *media logic* (Altheide, 2004), which highlights how modern media select, organize, and present institutional realities through entertainment-oriented formats privileging speed, dramatization, and ease of consumption, often at the expense of procedural and policy complexity (Altheide, 2004). While prior research thus establishes the significance of representation and perceptual effects, it remains less attentive to how reality policing television operates as a mediating arena that reshapes relations of power and accountability (Mauri-Rios et al., 2022).

This gap defines the central analytical contribution of the present article. *First*, reality police television has rarely been examined as an active arena of public oversight rather than merely a vehicle of institutional image-making (Ida & Waltrip, 2015; Serino, 2021). *Second*, the interrelations among media visibility, audience response, police behavioral adjustment, and formal oversight institutions have seldom been analyzed within an integrated empirical framework capable of explaining underlying mechanisms (Aleem et al., 2021). Third, much of the literature remains confined to questions of how police are represented, without extending the analysis to how visibility itself triggers social control, public judgment, and multilayered accountability (Mauri-Rios et al., 2022). This limitation is particularly striking given accountability scholarship’s emphasis on relational processes involving forums of judgment, obligations to explain, and the possibility of consequences (Bovens, 2006).

This article advances the argument that reality police television constitutes a hybrid mediatized space in which policing practices, media logic, audience participation, and formal oversight mechanisms intersect within a single relational configuration (Altheide, 2004). Within this space, police officers appear simultaneously as subjects of representation and objects of public evaluation; media institutions act as curators of visibility, determining what aspects of policing are shown and how they are framed; audiences engage in informal oversight through judgment, commentary (Triola & Chanin, 2023), and discursive evaluation; and regulatory bodies and political institutions operate as layers of formal oversight aimed at balancing openness, ethical standards, and rule-of-law principles (Bovens, 2006; Skogan, 2006). For analytical purposes, the article employs the concepts of mediated policing oversight and multilayered visibility and accountability as provisional lenses, before inductively synthesizing the empirical findings into a conceptual model that captures reciprocal oversight relations among police, media,

audiences, and regulators (O'Connor & Zaidi, 2021). This model is elaborated in the discussion section as an analytical framework derived from data rather than asserted as an *a priori* theoretical claim.

Guided by this framework, the article addresses three research questions: (1) How do reality police television programs constitute arenas of mediated public oversight? (2) What mechanisms link media visibility to informal and formal forms of oversight over policing? and (3) How does this multilayered configuration of oversight shape police accountability within democratic contexts? By addressing these questions, the article seeks to contribute theoretically to scholarship on surveillance and mediatized policing, empirically through mixed-methods evidence from the Global South, and normatively through a critical reflection on the opportunities and limits of media visibility as an instrument of police accountability in democratic societies.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a mixed methods sequential explanatory design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches in a structured sequence to develop a comprehensive understanding of mediated public oversight of policing. In this design, quantitative data collection and analysis are conducted in the initial phase to map general patterns of public perception regarding media-based police oversight. This phase is followed by qualitative data collection and analysis aimed at explaining the social, institutional, and symbolic mechanisms underlying those patterns (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

This design was selected because the dynamics of police oversight within the context of reality television cannot be adequately captured through a single type of data. Quantitative survey data allow for the identification of broad perceptual tendencies and distributions among audiences exposed to reality police programs. Qualitative data, in turn, provide the analytical depth necessary to examine how mediated visibility is interpreted, negotiated, and responded to by different actors, including police personnel, media practitioners, audiences, and formal oversight institutions. Integration of the two strands occurs at the interpretive stage, enabling the construction of a coherent explanation of how mediated oversight operates as a multilayered and relational process.

2.2. Participants and Data Sources

Data for this study were drawn from four primary groups relevant to the analysis of media-mediated police oversight. First, audience members of reality police television programs constituted the main source of quantitative data through a structured survey. This group represents the public both as recipients of mediated policing narratives and as actors engaged in informal oversight through evaluative judgment and public discourse.

Second, police personnel, both directly and indirectly involved in reality police television programs, served as qualitative informants. Their perspectives were essential for understanding how media visibility influences professional conduct, decision-making, and reflexive awareness within everyday policing practices. Third, media actors, including production teams and journalists, provided insight into production logics, visual selection processes, and editorial considerations shaping the representation of police work on television. Fourth, formal oversight actors, such as broadcasting regulators and related institutional authorities, contributed normative and organizational perspectives on ethical boundaries, regulatory frameworks, and accountability mechanisms governing police television content. The use of multiple data sources was intended to capture oversight not as a linear process but as a reciprocal and layered relationship among institutions, media, and publics.

2.3. Sampling Procedures

In the quantitative phase, the study employed a non-probability purposive sampling strategy to recruit survey respondents with direct exposure to reality police television programs. Inclusion criteria required respondents to (1) be at least 17 years of age and (2) have watched at least one episode of *86 (NET TV)* or *The Police (Trans7)* during the period relevant to the study. This approach was chosen because the objective of the survey was not

statistical generalization to the national population, but rather the identification of perceptual patterns among audiences who had actually encountered the media content under investigation. The quantitative phase yielded more than two thousand respondents, a sample size methodologically adequate for descriptive analysis and exploratory pattern identification. Demographic distributions were examined to ensure variation across age, gender, educational background, and regional residence, reducing the likelihood that results would be driven by a single dominant social group.

For the qualitative phase, informants were selected through purposive and iterative sampling, based on the relevance of their experience, institutional position, and degree of involvement with the phenomenon under study. The number of informants was not predetermined but followed the principle of theoretical saturation, with data collection concluding when additional interviews no longer produced substantively new analytical insights. Survey data were collected online using a digital questionnaire platform. Participation was voluntary and uncompensated, and respondents were provided with clear information regarding the purpose of the study and assurances of anonymity prior to participation. Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted in multiple settings, including police offices and other institutional meeting spaces, depending on access permissions and participant availability.

2.4. Measures and Instruments

The survey instrument was constructed as a structured questionnaire employing Likert-scale items to measure several key dimensions, including exposure to reality police television programs, perceptions of police representation and mediated visibility, and views on media-based police oversight and accountability. Item development was informed by theoretical frameworks on surveillance, media representation, and procedural justice discussed in the introduction, and adapted to the Indonesian social context. Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire underwent readability checks and minor wording adjustments to ensure clarity and semantic consistency. Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interview guides, allowing for systematic coverage of key topics while retaining flexibility to explore participants' experiences, interpretations, and reflections on media exposure and public oversight.

2.5. Analytical Strategy and Data Integration

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to summarize response distributions and identify general patterns in audience perceptions. These analyses were not intended for causal hypothesis testing, but rather served an exploratory function, informing the direction and focus of subsequent qualitative inquiry. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically through an iterative coding process. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data and progressively refined into more abstract analytical categories through constant comparison. This process ensured that emergent themes remained grounded in empirical material rather than imposed a priori.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings followed a sequential explanatory logic, employing processes of *connecting* and *building*. Quantitative results guided qualitative exploration, while insights from qualitative analysis were used to contextualize and explain observed statistical patterns. Through this integrative strategy, the study synthesized both strands into a coherent conceptual interpretation of mediated public oversight (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

2.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the appropriate research ethics committee prior to data collection. All participants received information regarding the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Participant identities were protected through anonymization, and all data were stored and analyzed in accordance with ethical standards governing social and behavioral research.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Quantitative Results

This section presents descriptive findings from the audience survey designed to capture how reality police television is experienced, interpreted, and evaluated by viewers. Drawing on responses from approximately 2,100 respondents who met the exposure criteria for 86 (NET TV) and/or *The Police* (Trans7), the quantitative analysis maps not only levels of exposure and general perceptions, but also internal tensions within audience judgments regarding visibility, evaluation, and accountability. Rather than treating audience perception as a homogeneous construct, the results reveal differentiated patterns that are analytically consequential for understanding mediated public oversight.

3.1.1. Exposure to Reality Police Shows: Repetition, Recall, and Cross-Platform Circulation

Survey results indicate that exposure to reality police television was moderate to high, with most respondents reporting repeated encounters rather than one-time viewing. This repetition is analytically important: it suggests that audience perceptions are formed through accumulated visual experience rather than isolated impressions. Respondents described watching episodes both regularly and sporadically, indicating that exposure operates through routine consumption as well as incidental encounters.

Crucially, exposure was not confined to linear television broadcasts. Many respondents reported encountering program segments through short clips circulated on digital platforms and social media. This pattern points to a fragmented but persistent visibility, in which policing actions are repeatedly recontextualized outside their original narrative sequence. As documented in the dissertation data, this circulation enables selective recall, where certain actions arrests, confrontations, displays of authority become more salient than procedural continuity. Exposure, therefore, functions not only as access to information but as a condition that shapes which aspects of policing become memorable and evaluable. This level and form of exposure constitute a necessary precondition for public evaluation. Audiences are positioned not merely as passive viewers but as actors with sufficient visual familiarity to form judgments, comparisons, and expectations regarding police conduct.

3.1.2. Visibility, Evaluability, and the Limits of Perceived Transparency

Across survey items, respondents expressed strong agreement that reality police shows increase the visibility of police actions and make those actions open to public evaluation. As shown in Table 3, respondents agreed that these programs make police actions more visible ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.86$) and enable public evaluation of police behavior ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.89$). Respondents also perceived that the presence of cameras encourages greater care and professionalism among officers ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.82$).

However, these affirmative perceptions coexist with a more ambivalent assessment of processual transparency. Agreement declined markedly when respondents were asked whether what is shown represents the full policing process ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.38$). The higher dispersion on this item indicates not mere disagreement but interpretive uncertainty, suggesting that audiences recognize gaps between what is visible and what remains unseen.

This internal differentiation is a key empirical finding. It demonstrates that audiences do not conflate visibility with transparency. While respondents acknowledge that they can see police work and evaluate actions at a surface level, they are less convinced that reality police shows provide sufficient procedural, legal, or contextual information to support comprehensive understanding. The quantitative data thus reveal a layered perception structure: visibility and evaluability are widely accepted, whereas completeness and transparency remain contested.

3.1.3. Normative Evaluation and the Character of Informal Oversight

Survey responses further indicate that exposure to reality police television activates normative evaluation among audiences. A substantial proportion of respondents reported actively assessing whether police actions shown on screen align with law, ethics, and common-sense notions of justice. This evaluative orientation suggests that viewing is accompanied by judgment, positioning audiences as participants in informal oversight rather than detached spectators.

Yet the survey also reveals limits to this oversight. When respondents were asked about their capacity to assess policing procedures in depth, confidence levels declined. This pattern suggests that informal oversight is grounded primarily in moral and normative reasoning, rather than in technical or procedural expertise. In other words, audiences feel able to judge whether something looks right, but less able to judge whether it was procedurally correct within the full legal framework.

This distinction is central to interpreting mediated oversight. The quantitative findings point to a form of public scrutiny that is participatory and evaluative, yet uneven in its procedural foundation, an empirical condition that sets the stage for the qualitative mechanisms examined in the following section.

Table 3: Audience Perceptions on Mediated Visibility and Public Oversight

Survey Item	Mean	SD
Reality police shows make police actions more visible to the public	4.25	0.86
These programs enable the public to evaluate police behavior	4.15	0.89
What is shown represents the full policing process	3.30	1.38
Police officers appear more careful when cameras are present	4.24	0.82
Media exposure increases police accountability	4.24	0.90

Source: Survey data from doctoral dissertation (processed by the author).

Based on survey data collected from approximately 2,100 respondents, the descriptive statistics presented in Table 3 indicate a consistent pattern in audience perceptions of mediated policing. Respondents strongly agreed that reality police television shows increase the public visibility of police actions ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.86$) and enable audiences to evaluate police behavior ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.89$). However, perceptions were notably more divided regarding whether these programs represent the full policing process, reflected in a lower mean score and higher dispersion ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.38$). This divergence suggests that increased visibility does not necessarily translate into perceptions of substantive transparency. Furthermore, respondents perceived that the presence of cameras encourages police officers to behave more carefully and professionally ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.82$), indicating the emergence of mediated self-regulation. Media exposure was also associated with higher perceptions of police accountability ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.90$), supporting the interpretation of reality police shows as an informal arena of public oversight. Taken together, these findings reveal a pattern in which mediated visibility enhances evaluative engagement and symbolic accountability, while leaving unresolved tensions between representation, procedural completeness, and institutional transparency.

3.2. Qualitative Thematic Findings

Qualitative findings from interviews, focus group discussions, and observations provide insight into the mechanisms through which the quantitative patterns are produced and sustained. Rather than simply illustrating survey results, the qualitative analysis reveals how mediated visibility is experienced, managed, and negotiated by different actors within the policing, media oversight nexus.

3.2.1. Camera Awareness as a Mechanism of Behavioral Anticipation

A dominant theme across police interviews and FGDs is camera awareness, a persistent consciousness of being recorded that shapes operational conduct. Informants described how the presence of cameras encourages anticipatory self-monitoring: officers become more attentive to speech, bodily gestures, and interactional tone, particularly in encounters that may later be scrutinized by viewers.

Importantly, camera awareness is not uniformly experienced as coercive. Many informants framed it as a reminder of professional standards and public responsibility. At the same time, the data reveal an ambivalence; in legally ambiguous or high-risk situations, officers may prioritize actions that appear defensible or visually acceptable, even when such actions do not fully capture the complexity of procedural reasoning. This anticipatory adjustment helps explain why audiences perceive increased professionalism, while also sensing that not all aspects of policing are fully represented.

3.2.2. Media Logic and the Structuring of Selective Visibility

A second theme concerns the structuring role of media logic. Media practitioners and police informants alike emphasized that reality television imposes narrative and visual constraints. Decisions about what to film, what to exclude, and how to sequence events are shaped by production imperatives, time limits, and assumptions about audience attention.

As a result, mediated visibility is inherently selective. High-intensity moments—stops, pursuits, arrests—are foregrounded, while slower processes such as legal deliberation, administrative documentation, or post-event accountability procedures receive minimal attention. This selective visibility aligns closely with the quantitative finding that respondents experience increased visibility without corresponding confidence in procedural completeness. The qualitative data thus clarify that visibility is not merely partial by accident, but structurally produced.

3.2.3. Audience Engagement and the Dynamics of Informal Oversight

A third theme highlights the audience as an active participant in informal oversight. Informants described how televised police actions often become topics of discussion, comparison, and judgment in both offline and digital spaces. In some cases, public reactions, especially critical ones are monitored internally by policing institutions as indicators of reputational risk.

However, this oversight remains unstructured and episodic. Judgments are often formed from fragments detached from legal context or outcome, reinforcing the tendency toward moral simplification. The qualitative data thus reinforce the survey finding that informal oversight is evaluative but uneven, capable of generating pressure and visibility without guaranteeing procedural accuracy.

3.2.4. Formal Oversight, Regulation, and Temporal Mismatch

The final theme concerns formal oversight through regulatory and political institutions. Regulatory informants emphasized that reality police programming operates within broadcasting regulations and ethical codes intended to protect rights and prevent trial by media. Formal oversight is conceived as a stabilizing mechanism that sets boundaries for mediated visibility.

Yet qualitative evidence also points to a temporal and operational mismatch. Regulatory responses tend to be procedural and retrospective, while public discourse unfolds rapidly and often reactively. This mismatch limits the capacity of formal oversight to intervene in real time, creating spaces where informal judgment dominates before institutional clarification occurs.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that reality police television constitutes a complex arena of mediated public oversight. Quantitative results show that audiences widely accept increased visibility and evaluability, while remaining uncertain about procedural completeness. Qualitative findings reveal the mechanisms underlying this pattern: camera awareness shapes police conduct, media logic structures selective visibility, audiences engage in informal oversight grounded in normative judgment, and formal oversight operates within regulatory and temporal constraints. These empirically grounded insights provide the foundation for the discussion section, where the article will synthesize the findings into a conceptual model of mediated, multilayered oversight and situate it within broader debates on policing, surveillance, and democratic accountability.

4. Discussion

This section interprets the empirical findings by situating them within broader debates on surveillance, police communication, and democratic policing. The discussion focuses on three interrelated issues: how reality police television operates as a mediatised arena of public oversight; how oversight mechanisms are produced through mediated visibility; and how these mechanisms combine to shape multilayered configurations of police accountability. Through this discussion, the article clarifies the analytical contribution of its findings and consolidates the conceptual model developed inductively from the data.

4.1. Reality Police Shows as Arenas of Mediated Public Oversight

The findings indicate that reality police television can no longer be understood merely as representational media or entertainment content. Instead, such programs function as active arenas of public oversight, in which police actions are rendered visible, evaluated, and indirectly regulated. Survey results show that audiences interpret these programs as opportunities to “see” police work and to assess police conduct, while qualitative findings demonstrate that awareness of public visibility shapes how police officers act in operational settings. Together, these patterns support and extend arguments on policing’s *new visibility*, which emphasize how public exposure transforms power relations between state institutions and citizens (A. Goldsmith, 2005; A. J. Goldsmith, 2010).

At the same time, this study advances the literature by demonstrating that visibility in the context of reality police television is strongly mediated by media logic. What becomes visible is not the policing process as a whole, but a curated selection shaped by production constraints, narrative imperatives, and assumptions about audience attention. This finding resonates with Altheide’s (2004) critique of media logic and with scholarship on spectacle policing, which highlights the privileging of dramatic, action-oriented enforcement over procedural deliberation and administrative complexity (Bakkenes, 2023; Reiner, 2013). Visibility, in this sense, is not neutral exposure but a mediated construction that foregrounds certain dimensions of police work while marginalizing others.

This mediated character of visibility helps explain a key empirical tension observed in the survey data: audiences widely perceive increased openness and evaluability, yet remain uncertain about whether reality police shows provide a comprehensive account of the policing process. The distinction between visibility and transparency becomes analytically central. While visibility enables public observation and judgment, transparency requires informational completeness, procedural clarity, and contextual explanation conditions that are not consistently met within reality television formats. Reality police shows thus produce a form of oversight that is real and consequential, but also partial and selective (McMillan et al., 2023).

4.2. Oversight Mechanisms: From Camera Awareness to Public Judgment

Qualitative findings on camera awareness reveal one of the primary mechanisms through which mediated oversight operates. Police officers’ awareness of being filmed encourages anticipatory self-regulation, shaping speech, bodily comportment, and decision-making in operational contexts. This pattern aligns with Koskela’s (2003) notion of *the cam era*, in which the possibility of recording functions as a disciplinary condition that promotes behavioral modulation. In policing contexts, cameras do not merely document action; they introduce a normative horizon against which officers anticipate public evaluation.

However, the findings also complicate assumptions that camera-based visibility straightforwardly enhances procedural accountability. Consistent with Brucato (2015) and Koskela (2003), the data suggest that mediated visibility often produces symbolic accountability: officers are motivated to act in ways that appear correct and defensible on camera, without necessarily transforming the deeper procedural structures of accountability. In some situations, camera awareness encourages risk-averse strategies or orientations toward showability, where actions are calibrated to visual defensibility rather than procedural completeness. This observation echoes organizational studies showing that video technologies can reshape professional conduct without uniformly strengthening substantive accountability (Keesman, 2023).

Beyond shaping police behavior, mediated visibility also activates informal public oversight. Survey and interview data indicate that audiences engage in normative evaluation of police actions, assessing legality, propriety, and fairness even when they lack technical legal expertise. This pattern reflects a synoptic dynamic in which many observe a limited number of visible actors (Mathiesen, 1997). Yet unlike the classic synopticon, oversight in this context operates through media-curated fragments rather than comprehensive observation. Public judgments are thus formed within a constrained visual field, reinforcing the tendency toward moral evaluation rather than procedural analysis.

4.3. Multilayered Oversight: Interactions Between Informal and Formal Control

A central contribution of this study lies in its analysis of multilayered oversight, particularly the interaction between informal audience scrutiny and formal regulatory control. Interviews with regulatory actors highlight the role of broadcasting regulations and journalistic ethics in setting boundaries for reality police programming, aiming to prevent trial by media, rights violations, and informational distortion. These findings align with Bovens' (2006) relational conception of accountability, which emphasizes the importance of forums, obligations to explain, and the possibility of sanctions.

At the same time, the study reveals persistent tensions between the temporal dynamics of mediated visibility and the operational capacities of formal oversight. Public discourse unfolds rapidly and often reactively, while regulatory mechanisms tend to operate retrospectively and procedurally. This temporal mismatch limits the ability of formal oversight to shape public interpretation in real time, allowing informal judgments to dominate early stages of public evaluation. Such dynamics underscore the relevance of the surveillant assemblage perspective, which conceptualizes contemporary oversight as distributed, fluid, and constituted through interacting actors rather than centralized control (Galič et al., 2017; Haggerty & Ericson, 2019; Sandhu & Haggerty, 2017).

Rather than replacing formal oversight, informal public scrutiny operates alongside it, sometimes reinforcing regulatory concerns and at other times generating pressures that exceed institutional capacities. Accountability in mediated policing contexts thus emerges not as a single mechanism, but as a negotiated outcome of overlapping and occasionally competing forms of surveillance and control.

Through systematic dialogue between empirical findings and existing literature, this study refines and consolidates its conceptual framework. Among the alternative terms introduced earlier, mediated policing oversight most effectively captures the core phenomenon: oversight of policing that operates through media mediation rather than direct institutional control. The concept of multilayered visibility and accountability further emphasizes that visibility and accountability are not singular outcomes, but processes involving interactions between informal and formal layers of oversight.

Building on this refinement, the study inductively develops the Circuit of Mutual Surveillance as its primary analytical model. The model conceptualizes a circular relationship among four actors: police, media, audiences, and regulators. Police are both agents of action and objects of surveillance; media act as curators of visibility; audiences engage in informal oversight through evaluative judgment; and regulators provide formal oversight by establishing ethical and legal boundaries. Crucially, these relationships are reciprocal rather than linear: each actor can simultaneously observe and be observed, regulate and be regulated.

It is important to emphasize that the Circuit of Mutual Surveillance is not proposed as a universal theory. Rather, it constitutes a context-sensitive, middle-range conceptual model, grounded in empirical data and particularly suited to understanding mediated policing in mainstream television contexts. This positioning aligns with inductive principles in mixed methods research and avoids overgeneralization beyond the empirical scope of the study.

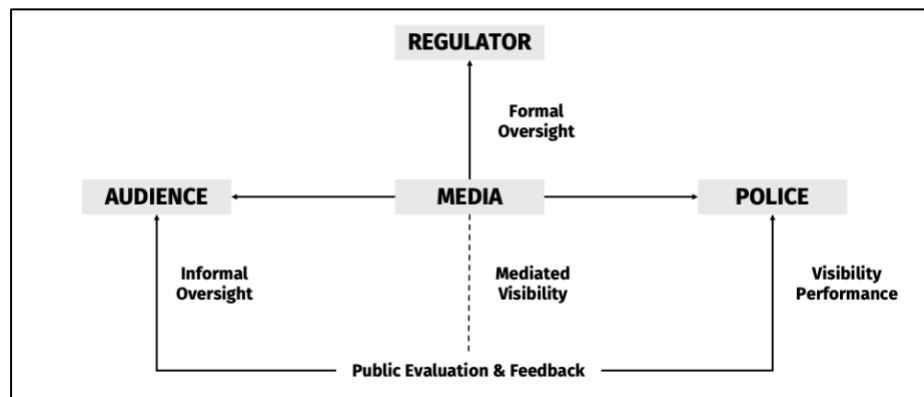


Figure 1: Circuit of Mutual Surveillance in Mediated Policing Oversight

Source: processed by the author

This figure illustrates the mutually constitutive relations among police, media, audiences, and regulators within a mediated visibility environment. Police actions are rendered visible through media selection and framing, shaping public evaluation and informal oversight. Media function as curators of visibility, audiences engage in normative judgment based on mediated representations, and regulators provide formal oversight to maintain ethical and legal boundaries. The model conceptualizes surveillance as a reciprocal and multilayered process rather than a linear or unilateral mechanism.

Theoretically, this study contributes to surveillance and mediatized policing scholarship by repositioning reality police television as a significant arena of public oversight rather than a peripheral media genre. The findings challenge dichotomous interpretations of media visibility as either transparency-enhancing or manipulative, demonstrating instead that visibility operates as a negotiated process shaped by media logic, institutional practices, and audience interpretation.

From a policy perspective, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening multilayered oversight frameworks for police media representation. While mediated visibility can facilitate productive forms of public scrutiny, it also carries the risk of producing symbolic transparency and oversimplified judgments when not accompanied by robust regulatory and ethical safeguards. The results thus support calls for clearer ethical standards governing police media coverage, standards capable of balancing openness, press freedom, and rights protection within democratic policing systems.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This article began with a question that is increasingly difficult to avoid in contemporary policing; how do reality police television programs shape the relationship between public oversight and policing under conditions of intensified media visibility? Drawing on a mixed methods sequential explanatory design, the study concludes that reality police shows should not be treated merely as entertainment or as instruments of institutional image-making. Rather, they operate as a mediatized arena of public oversight, where policing practices, media logic, audience participation, and formal oversight mechanisms become intertwined within a single visibility environment.

First, the study demonstrates that reality police television substantially expands the public visibility of policing. This expanded visibility encourages audiences to engage in normative evaluation of police conduct and, in doing so, to participate in informal oversight. Yet the findings also show that mediated visibility is structurally selective.

Because what becomes visible is filtered through production routines, narrative framing, and televisual conventions, visibility does not necessarily translate into substantive transparency regarding legal procedure or institutional accountability. Public visibility therefore functions as a condition that opens new possibilities for democratic oversight while simultaneously introducing limits, particularly when the informational completeness required for procedural understanding remains outside the frame.

Second, the findings indicate that mediated visibility shapes policing behavior through the mechanism of camera awareness and related forms of performative adjustment. Police officers do not operate only as operational actors; they also act as subjects who anticipate being evaluated by audiences beyond the immediate encounter. Oversight in this context works subtly through reflection, anticipation, and self-regulation, rather than solely through hierarchical command or formal sanction. Importantly, this mechanism may strengthen visible professionalism while not uniformly producing deeper procedural accountability, especially when “acting defensibly on camera” becomes a pragmatic orientation in ambiguous operational settings.

Third, the study highlights that oversight in reality policing contexts is multilayered, emerging through interaction between informal audience scrutiny and formal oversight through regulatory institutions. These layers do not always align. Public discourse circulates quickly and often intensifies in real time, whereas formal oversight typically operates through slower procedural sequences. This mismatch produces recurring tensions between the speed of mediated judgment and the tempo of institutional response. Accountability in mediatized policing contexts therefore cannot be reduced to a single mechanism; it is better understood as a negotiated outcome produced by interacting actors and uneven capacities.

Synthesizing these conclusions, the article consolidates the Circuit of Mutual Surveillance (Figure 1) as an analytical framework for understanding mediated policing oversight. The model situates police, media, audiences, and regulators in a circular relationship of mutual observation and reciprocal constraint within an environment of media-constructed visibility. By foregrounding media as a key mediator, the model emphasizes that contemporary oversight is rarely linear. Instead, it unfolds as a dynamic, relational, and layered process in which each actor may simultaneously observe and be observed, evaluate and be evaluated.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this article contributes to surveillance studies and mediatized policing scholarship by extending analytic attention beyond digital platforms and individual surveillance technologies toward mainstream television as a consequential arena of public oversight. The findings affirm the continued relevance of concepts such as new visibility, synoptic surveillance, and the surveillant assemblage, while also showing the need to incorporate televisual media logic into analyses of how oversight is produced, limited, and normalized. In particular, the study demonstrates that informal oversight in reality policing television is often normative in character, intense in judgment yet uneven in procedural grounding because it is organized around curated visual fragments rather than comprehensive access to institutional process.

The article also offers a middle-range conceptual contribution that bridges surveillance theory, media communication, and police studies. By treating accountability as a multilayered relation involving both formal and informal actors, the study enriches understanding of how legitimacy and social control over policing are produced under increasingly mediatized democratic conditions. Rather than assuming that visibility either strengthens accountability or merely manipulates perception, the model emphasizes the negotiated and contingent character of mediated oversight.

5.2. Policy and Practical Implications

From a policy and practical standpoint, the findings carry implications for the governance of police media exposure and the strengthening of democratic policing. Media visibility through reality programming can function as a productive source of public scrutiny, but only when supported by appropriate ethical and regulatory safeguards.

Without robust oversight, visibility risks producing symbolic transparency, oversimplified public judgment of legal complexity, and intensified performative pressures on police personnel.

These findings support the development of more context-sensitive ethical standards for policing-related media coverage, capable of balancing openness, press freedom, rights protection, and the integrity of legal process. For police institutions, the study also underscores the importance of media literacy and internal reflection on the effects of visibility on professional practice. Visibility should not be treated solely as a reputational resource; it also operates as a mechanism of accountability that can reshape conduct, discretion, and institutional trust when managed responsibly.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

As with any empirical study, the article has limitations. The analysis focuses on reality police programs broadcast on national television, and thus does not provide a comprehensive account of oversight dynamics operating primarily through digital-native platforms and user-generated media. Moreover, the empirical findings are context-specific to Indonesia and are not intended as direct generalizations to countries with different policing systems, media environments, and regulatory architectures.

Future research could expand the analysis through cross-platform comparisons, including digital circulation and user-generated content, to better understand how mediated oversight shifts across media ecologies. Comparative international research would also enrich understanding of how mutual surveillance configurations take shape under varying institutional arrangements, media regimes, and democratic expectations. Such work would be especially valuable for assessing the portability of the proposed model and identifying the contextual conditions under which mediated oversight strengthens, or weakens substantive accountability.

5.4. Concluding Remark

Overall, this article argues that reality police television should be treated as an integral part of the contemporary oversight ecosystem. By conceptualizing these programs as mediatized arenas of public oversight, the study offers a perspective on the relationship between visibility, accountability, and democratic policing that avoids simplistic assumptions about transparency. The Circuit of Mutual Surveillance is not proposed as a universal theory, but as a contextually grounded analytical framework for interpreting mediated policing oversight in an era where visual media increasingly structures how policing is seen, evaluated, and contested.

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Ethics / Informed Consent: This study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the National Research and Innovation Agency of Indonesia (Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional—BRIN), an authorized institution responsible for issuing ethical clearance prior to data collection. All participants involved in the survey, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) were informed about the objectives of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection commenced. All data were analyzed and reported anonymously to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of participants.

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Edutainment in Gaming Culture: Audience Reception of R7 Tatsumaki's Tutor7 Youtube Tutorials for Mobile Legends

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Abstract

Mobile gaming culture in Indonesia has evolved into a digital cultural practice that facilitates community interaction, player identity formation, and informal learning through video-sharing platforms. This article analyzes audience reception of Tutor7 playlist on R7 Tatsumaki YouTube channel as an edutainment practice in Mobile Legends culture. The research uses a qualitative approach with a reception analysis design based on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with 10 informants, with purposively selected samples (Mobile Legends players and Tutor7 viewers), which were then analyzed thematically through the stages of reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that audiences perceive Tutor7 as a source of practical and easily transferable strategies to game situations, primarily due to its concise explanations and the creator's credibility. The entertainment element acts as a bridge that makes the learning process feel easy, but some informants considered the depth of explanations in some episodes limited, positioning Tutor7 as a supplementary resource, not a fully comprehensive learning experience. Strategy implementation is also selective, depending on playing style and match context. Overall, audience reception is concentrated on the position of dominant and negotiation, without any indication of total rejection. This article enriches the study of digital communication by positioning gaming tutorials as cultural texts and platform-based informal learning spaces.

Keywords: Audience Reception, Edutainment, Gaming Culture, Mobile Legends, Youtube Tutorials

1. Introduction

Mobile gaming culture in Indonesia has evolved beyond mere recreational activity. It has become a digital cultural practice that provides a space for interaction, informal learning, and the formation of player identities within online communities. One prominent genre is multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA), which was reported to be the most popular mobile game genre in Indonesia at one time, as reported in Figure 1 (Annur, 2023). In an increasingly connected digital landscape, information and entertainment consumption patterns have also shifted: audiences are increasingly using video-sharing platforms and social media to fulfil their learning needs, including learning game strategies through content creators (Mayfield, 2008; Thompson, 2025).

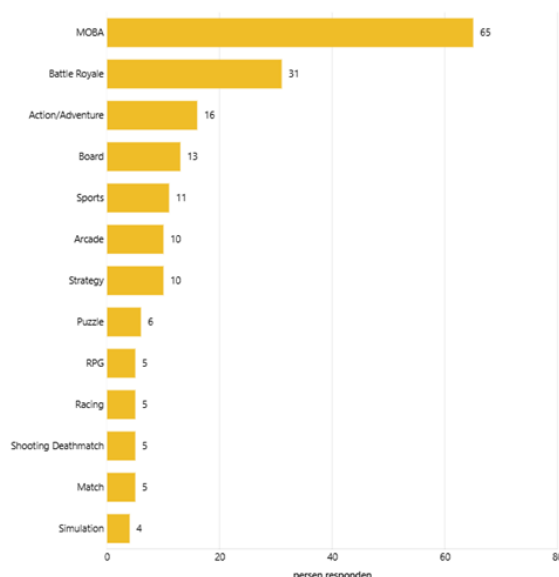


Figure 1: The Most Popular Mobile Game Genres in Indonesia

Source: <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/media/statistik/0dda3362ba4340/moba-jadi-genre-mobile-game-paling-disukai-di-indonesia>

This development aligns with the characteristics of digital communication, which enables participation, rapid feedback, and more fluid interactions than conventional media (Gushevinalti et al., 2020). YouTube occupies a crucial position as a platform for the widespread distribution of educational videos. It is produced by both institutions and independent creators and has become a dominant medium for video-based learning practices on the internet (Kleftodimos et al., 2020). In the context of gaming, video tutorials serve not only as technical guides but also as “learning spaces” packaged with a distinctive style of entertainment, community language, humor, and audio-visual aesthetics. Thus, gaming tutorial content can be understood as an edutainment practice, specifically materials/media/activities that are deliberately designed to be both educational and fun (Pojani & Rocco, 2020).

Conceptually, edutainment is often positioned as a bridge between cognitive needs (learning) and affective needs (entertainment). Pojani and Rocco (2020) emphasize that edutainment exists as a combination of “education” and “entertainment” and can provide learning value when its activities encourage engagement, practice, and intrinsic motivation. In the realm of video-based learning, Kleftodimos et al. (2020) show that educational videos circulating on the web are abundant, but not always rich in interactivity; therefore, approaches that incorporate elements of practice, activity, or game nuances can be a strategy to increase learning engagement. When drawn to gaming culture, YouTube tutorials that “teach while entertaining” have strong potential: they package strategic knowledge as a viewing experience that is light, accessible, and relevant to everyday gaming situations.

Furthermore, the game itself can be understood as a multimodal cultural text: it works through a combination of visuals, audio, symbols, and narratives that produce meaning for players. Krishnapatria (2019) shows how Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) utilizes audio-visual and semiotic modalities to construct representations of characters, roles, and specific meanings, which emphasizes that the gaming experience is not neutral, but rather fraught with constructions of meaning. When this experience is transmitted to the YouTube space through tutorials, the resulting content is no longer simply “playing techniques”, but also communication practices that negotiate meaning what constitutes “correct” play, “effective” strategies, “ideal” playing styles, and how to become part of the MLBB culture.

In this study, the focus is directed at the Tutor7 tutorial series on R7 Tatsumaki YouTube channel, which is widely known among MLBB audiences. The popularity of gaming creators is often supported by credibility, content consistency, and the ability to package material so that it is easy to understand and enjoy (Nagy & Hajdú, 2022; Widiastuti & Fauziya, 2024). However, audience reception of content is never completely uniform. In communication studies, audiences are understood as active subjects who interpret messages based on their

experiences, needs, and social context (Severin & Tankard, 2007 in Suciska & Gunawibawa, 2020; West & Turner, 2008). Therefore, it is important to examine not only “what” is conveyed in Tutor7, but also “how” the audience interprets and uses the content: whether it is perceived as purely educational, purely entertaining, or a combination of both (edutainment), and what factors shape the variation in acceptance.

A relevant framework to explain these dynamics is reception analysis by Stuart Hall through the concept of encoding/decoding (Hall, 1973). Hall views media messages as the result of production (encoding) that carries certain meaning preferences, but the final meaning is formed when the audience interprets (decoding) in everyday life. In the decoding process, Hall proposed dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional reading positions, which help researchers map the variety of audience reception of the same message (Hall, 1973). This perspective is in line with the emphasis that mass communication and digital media need to be read through the relationship between message production, media texts, and the context of audience reception (Baran, 2003; Severin & Tankard, 2007 in Suciska & Gunawibawa, 2020). In fact, meaning making is understood as an open process and has the potential to produce different interpretations, depending on the conditions and experiences of the audience (Saputra et al., 2024).

Furthermore, if Tutor7 is understood as a form of platform-based distance learning, then the interaction dimension also becomes important. The concept of three types of interaction in distance education emphasizes interaction with content, interaction with teachers, and interaction between students, which in the context of YouTube can appear through video material, comments, live chat, as well as discussions between viewers (Tuan, 2025). On the other hand, educational media is understood as a learning aid that can influence the attention, understanding, and engagement of learners (Irsan, 2021). Therefore, it is relevant to assess how Tutor7’s audience experiences the learning process: whether they apply the strategies, use the tutorials as a reference during gameplay, or simply watch for entertainment with incidental learning benefits.

Based on this context, this article aims to analyze audience reception of the Tutor7 series on the R7 Tatsumaki channel as an edutainment practice in gaming culture. Specifically, this study seeks to (1) identify how audiences interpret Tutor7 content, whether dominant, negotiating, or opposing the creator’s encoded meaning; (2) explain the factors of gaming experience, learning needs, and social context that shape differences in meaning; and (3) map how educational elements (strategies, technical explanations) and entertainment elements (delivery style, persona, community dynamics) intertwine in the viewing experience. Thus, this article’s contribution is to enrich the study of digital communication and popular culture by positioning gaming tutorials as media texts that are not only informative, but also full of negotiations of meaning between creators, platforms, and audiences.

1.1 Digital Communication in the New Media Ecosystem

In contemporary communication studies, digital communication is understood as a communication practice mediated by computer and internet technology, thus enabling the exchange of messages to be fast, interactive, and real time (Cangara, 2019; Nasrullah, 2018). The development of digitalization has also shifted the way individuals and organizations disseminate information: from email, forums, blogs, to social networks, expanding the form, reach, and rhythm of message consumption in the digital public space (Suherman, 2023). In this context, the internet has become the primary of new media infrastructure because of its flexible, interactive nature, and facilitates the dual role of the audience as both recipient and sender of messages (McQuail, 2011; Mondry, 2008). The character of interactivity in new media is important because it opens space for audience participation in the production and distribution of content, a prerequisite that explains why user-generated platforms like YouTube can grow as arenas for popular culture, informal learning, and active digital communities (McQuail, 2011; Mondry, 2008).

In the new media ecosystem, which is increasingly hybrid, the shift from mass communication patterns that tend to be one-way towards more selective and participatory digital communication has also given rise to new actors in the public sphere, including influencers who build audience communities primarily through visibility on social networks. Audiences now access information through three interconnected channels: search engines/AI tools, content recommendations on social media, and direct access to media, so that the mediating authority of traditional

media is no longer dominant. In this context, recommendation algorithms and user preferences drive content segmentation and shape “filter bubble”, which ultimately accelerates the fragmentation of audiences into smaller, more homogeneous interest groups (Palau-Sampio & López-García, 2025). This framework is relevant for reading YouTube as both an informal learning space and a popular culture arena: Mobile Legends tutorials from creators like R7 Tatsumaki/Tutor7 function not only as instructional materials, but also as community-based communication products, where audience exposure, meaning, and engagement are influenced by the platform’s recommendation logic and the audience’s proximity to the creator and their network.

1.2 Social Media, Audience Participation, and YouTube as Informal Learning Spaces

Social media is defined as internet-based media that allows users to participate, share, and create content, including blogs, social networks, online forums, and virtual worlds (Mayfield, 2008; Wahyuni et al., 2023). One prominent characteristic is the interactivity seen through activities such as commenting, tagging, and responding to other people’s content, which ultimately forms networks and exchanges of meaning between users (Nasrullah, 2015). For this research, YouTube is relevant not only as a video distribution platform but also as a space for interaction and experiential learning. YouTube is positioned as a popular social media platform that presents educational audio-visual content, including tutorials that support the audience’s learning process through easy-to-follow demonstrations (Bond et al., 2021; Widiastuti & Fauziya, 2024). Thus, YouTube operates as an informal “classroom” connected to digital culture, especially when the content presented stems from the audience’s practical needs, for example, improving gaming skills.

Social media is also increasingly positioned as an infrastructure of informal learning because learning occurs outside the classroom, is relatively unstructured, and is largely driven by user initiative, within this framework, learning often appears as a “residue” of social interactions that generate practical knowledge (Al-Sabaawi et al., 2022). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube enable users to connect, engage, and adapt through networking and interaction features, making them relevant for informal learning and collaboration activities. The study also developed a social media acceptance model for informal learning (based on the integration of TAM3 and constructivism) that highlights the importance of factors such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, information quality, as well as dimensions of interactivity–communication–collaboration in shaping the intention and behaviour of using social media for learning (Al-Sabaawi et al., 2022). This theoretical implication aligns with the research context of your article: the consumption of YouTube tutorials (for example Tutor7) can be understood not simply as a viewing activity, but as an informal learning practice triggered by the perceived usefulness of the content, the quality of the information, and the opportunities for community interaction in the comment space and the surrounding social network (Al-Sabaawi et al., 2022).

1.3 Media as Education Platform and Edutainment Logic

Media and educational studies emphasize that the media’s function extends beyond entertainment; it can also be an effective educational tool when designed to increase audience attention, understanding, and engagement (Irsan, 2021). In the context of digital learning, institutional and individual adaptation to information and communication technology is crucial to maintaining the relevance of learning processes amidst global change (Agustian & Salsabila, 2021).

From the perspective of edutainment, learning can be more effective when educational elements are combined with fun and participatory experiences. The additional literature you attached reinforces this aspect: Kleftodimos et al. (2020) showed that learning videos can be enriched with interactive activities and game elements (game-based learning) to increase engagement and practice, so that videos are not just passive viewing. Kleftodimos et al. (2020). This finding is important for reading game tutorial content (such as Tutor7) as an edutainment format, where the audience learns through demonstrations, repeated practice, and self-evaluation while practicing strategies within the game. Furthermore, Pojani and Rocco (2020) show that game-based activities can help participants understand roles, perspectives, and the complexity of situations through hands-on experience, role-taking, and discussion, although each performer’s interpretation may still differ due to their diverse backgrounds

and experiences. This aligns with the basic assumption of reception research: meaning is not automatically “accepted” but rather negotiated by the audience.

As an edutainment framework reinforcement in the context of learning videos, Othman et al. (2022) showed that the element of “entertainment” in video-based learning can be mapped to specific elements that make the audience feel comfortable while remaining focused on the learning process. In the components of edutainment feature, they emphasized emotional attraction which can be built through the appeal of music (musical interest), speaking techniques such as intonation/speed/formality (speech element), as well as the use of figures/characters (including talking head) as character representation to help the audience follow the explanation in a more personal and easy to understand way. In addition, the activity dimensions are also important because edutainment not just “watching” but encouraging interaction through social interactivity opportunities and interactive questioning as a reflection of learning. When elaborated in the context of a game tutorial channel like Tutor7, these elements are relevant to explaining why audiences perceive the content as “entertaining learning”: not only because of the strategic content, but also because of the delivery style, the presence of the creator, and the invitation/question patterns that encourage participation and self-evaluation when practicing the strategies in the game.

1.4 Gaming Culture and Mobile Legends as a Mediator of Popular Culture

Gaming culture positions games not merely as entertainment products, but as social and cultural practices that shape lifestyles, identities, and communities. In the context of Mobile Legends, learning occurs not only in the game’s mechanics but also in digital literacy: how audiences seek information, follow tutorials, assess creators’ credibility, and integrate new knowledge into their playing practices. Additional literature from Krishnapatria (2019) confirms that mobile games provide vivid and interactive audio-visual experiences and require players to complete gameplay sessions within a certain duration by making play practices intense, structured, and competitive. In such situations, YouTube tutorials serve as “learning capital” that helps players accelerate skill development and adapt to the metagame. Thus, edutainment in gaming culture can be understood as a learning process that arises from performative needs (wanting to become more proficient, rank up, or understand strategies), but is wrapped in an entertainment format that integrates with the audience’s digital experience.

Within the framework of popular culture, mobile games such as Mobile Legends can be positioned as part of pop culture, which is increasingly strengthened by the process of mediation: digital media not only “transmits” experiences, but also promotes, shapes, and normalizes the practice of cultural consumption (Rafique et al., 2022). Furthermore, Rafique et al. (2022) emphasize that media play a crucial role in popularizing popular culture through various mediated sources, including online video gaming and mobile applications, and demonstrate that technological developments enable digital media to facilitate “real-life experiences” in the form of online games. On the other hand, audience/player engagement is driven by the dynamics of achievement and rewards. Players play online games because they gain “rewards” and a sense of productivity after achieving certain goals. Therefore, YouTube tutorials like Tutor7 can be understood as an extension of a popular culture ecosystem that works both ways: gaming culture drives the need for rapid learning (strategy, meta, performance), while the media (YouTube) expands access and strengthens the reproduction of that culture, making edutainment as a learning format inherent in gaming culture consumption practices.

1.4 Theory of Active Audience and Reception Analysis (Encoding-Decoding)

This research initiates from the assumption of an active audience, which positions the audience as active subjects. They select, interpret, and respond to messages according to their needs and background experience (West & Turner, 2008). Therefore, educational messages in tutorials do not automatically produce a uniform understanding; the audience can negotiate, accept some, or even reject certain meanings. Stuart Hall’s reception analysis serves as a central framework explaining how meaning is produced and received through three moments: encoding (message formation by content creators), formation/determination of meaning, and decoding (interpretation by the audience) (Saputra et al., 2024). At the decoding stage, the interpretation results are influenced by the social context, experience, and position of the audience, so that the potential of misunderstanding or differences in reading are always open (Saputra et al., 2024). In Hall’s framework, there are three main reading positions:

dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. Each of which indicates the audience's level of acceptance of the code of meaning offered by the message creator. This framework is relevant to examining Tutor7 content: whether the audience accepts the tutorial as the "best way" to play (dominant), accepts it with certain adjustments according to playing experience (negotiated), or rejects it because it does not match their playing preferences/methods (oppositional).

As a strengthening of the foundation of an active audience in reception analysis, Briandana and Azmawati's study shows that the audience's interpretation of YouTube content is never singular because media texts are polysemic: one event/message can be interpreted in more than one way, and the meaning cannot be "closed" to just one reading. Within the reception analysis framework, which focuses on the encoding/decoding model, Stuart Hall emphasizes that audiences actively construct meaning based on the text-context relationship, allowing readings to shift from dominance, negotiation, to opposition (Briandana & Azmawati, 2020). Their findings also demonstrate that audience interpretations are often dominant, yet allow for differing readings due to the varied experiences, socio-cultural backgrounds, and values of each informant. This logic is relevant with the research on game tutorials: the "educational" messages conveyed encoding by the creator (for example strategy, mechanics, and decision-making in Mobile Legends) can be accepted dominantly by some audiences as the main reference, but can also be negotiated by other audiences according to their playing hours, playing style preferences, and performance needs, which ultimately enriches the mapping of reception positions in the context of gaming culture and edutainment.

1.5 Audience Interaction in Digital Space and Its Communicative Consequences

Beyond meaning, audience interaction is also an important dimension in the YouTube ecosystem. Interaction is viewed as a two-way exchange facilitated by digital technology, allowing audiences to provide direct feedback on content (Cangara, 2019). This reciprocal relationship also aligns with the idea that digital communication encourages audience participation in discussions, communities, and even creator popularity (Puntoadi, 2011). In the context of game tutorials, the comment section can function as a space for negotiating meaning: audiences compare experiences, ask for clarification, test the effectiveness of strategies, and provide testimonials of success/failure. In addition, interactions on social media can influence audience engagement patterns, whether in the form of responses, support, or criticism of content (Nasrullah, 2015). Thus, audience acceptance of Tutor7 is not only reflected in "watching", but also in how audiences dialogue, practice, and reframe the tutorial content within the gaming community.

These findings on audience interaction in digital spaces can be strengthened by research on media interactivity, which shows that user engagement tends to be dominated by "low-effort" forms of interactivity (for example: rating, short comments, or quick feedback), while participatory features that require more effort (such as: co-creating/improving content) are relatively less popular (Zagorulko et al., 2025). In the context of YouTube game tutorials, this pattern is relevant for understanding audience reception: a low number of lengthy comments does not necessarily mean low engagement, as audiences can feel "involved" through quick actions such as liking, subscribing, or short comments that confirm their experiences. At the same time, Zagorulko et al. (2025) also emphasize that audiences often interpret interactivity pragmatically as a means of clarifying understanding and maximizing cognitive benefits, rather than simply entertainment or gamification. Thus, interaction with Tutor7 content can be positioned as part of a "light but functional" learning and negotiation process of meaning, in line with the nature of digital communication that facilitates rapid feedback and experience-based discussions within the gaming community.

2. Method

This research starts from the constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as the result of the construction of meaning formed through the experiences and social interactions of actors (Hidayat, 2003; Patton, 2002). Within this framework, the audience's interpretation of game tutorial content is understood as an interpretive process that is not singular, but rather depends on the experience, knowledge, and social context of each viewer.

This study uses a qualitative approach to understand phenomena in depth through narratives, experiences, and explanations from informants. Qualitative approach is used because the research emphasizes meaning and the interpretation process, rather than quantitative measurement of variables. Specifically, the research applies reception analysis with the main reference to the model of encoding/decoding by Stuart Hall. Reception analysis focuses on how audiences decode media texts in everyday contexts and how they construct a deeper understanding of them. The relevance of this model is also demonstrated by recent studies that continue to use Hall's decoding categories (dominant, negotiated, oppositional) to interpret audience positions after consuming YouTube content (Anshar et al., 2024).

Research subjects are an audience who: (1) are Mobile Legends players, and (2) watch the R7 Tatsumaki YouTube channel, especially the Tutor7 playlist. The selection of informants was carried out by purposive sampling: selecting individuals with characteristics that match the research objectives so that they can provide information relevant to the research focus (Ika, 2021). Informant criteria include age 18-25 years, active YouTube users, watching Tutor7 playlists, following R7 Tatsumaki on social media, and having at least 6 months of experience playing Mobile Legends. This study involved 10 informants, as shown in the research informant profile in Table 1.

Table 1: Informant's Profile

Informant	Age	Start playing Mobile Legends	Playing duration	Youtube habits	Subscribe R7 since	Frequently watched content	Note
1	21	2019 (Season 4)	3–6 hours/ day	3–4 hours/day	2020	Tutorial & livestream ML	Intense play & high content consumption; relevant for educational reception.
2	21	2017	6–7 hours/ week	Watch it every day	2021	ML Content (strategy)	The variance between high experience and rank is now lower; interesting for decoding/negotiating meaning.
3	21	2018	4–5 hours/ week	±9 times/week (high frequency)	2021	Comedy (exe), pro tournaments, ML content	Extensive cross-game experience; enriching the cultural context of gaming.
4	20	2019	±5 hours/ day (±35 hours/ week)	±1 hour/day	2023	ML Gameplay & Strategy	High playtime & peak performance; relevant for evaluating the “effectiveness” of tutorials.
5	21	Since the age of 14 (year not stated)	±1 hour/day (±7 hours/ week)	±3 hours/week	Sep 2024	Game-related entertainment	ML duration is light but has been competitive, providing a “casual–

							competitive” user perspective.
6	24	2017	1–2 hours/d ay	±4 hours/week	2022	Informative & Entertaining (ML)	Focus on one game; tutorial reception is more “in- depth/selective”.
7	21	Since junior high school (year not stated)	±2 hours/d ay	±3 hours/day	Since the RRQ era	Game content (including R7)	High exposure to gaming content; suitable for viewing the role of tutorials as daily informal learning.
8	21	2018 (Season 2)	Uncerta in (situatio nal)	Frequently (especially during mealtimes/l eisure time)	Since R7 joined RRQ	Movie reviews (dominant), also ML content	“Multi-interest” profile (movies + games); useful for viewing non- focused ML reception positions.
9	21	2016	±3 hours/w eek	±8–9 hours/week	Since May 2025	R7 (entertainment & strategy reference)	Focus on ML only; relevant for reading the “entertainment– reference” relationship within a single channel.
10	20	2018	±5 hours/d ay	±4 hours/day	“Since a long time ago”	Horror, turnamen ML, growth mindset, R7	Representation of female players; high digital clock; important for the variety of audience experiences.

Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews. Interviews were used to explore audience perceptions, attitudes, and experiences, allowing researchers to more comprehensively understand their reception/interpretation of the educational content in the Tutor7 playlist. Secondary data was obtained through literature review (such as journals, books and relevant online sources) and documentation (notes, reports, or digital content related to the research object). This strategy is used to complement and strengthen the interpretation of findings from primary data.

Data analysis was performed using an interactive model by Miles & Huberman, which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing/verifying conclusions. In practice, interview transcripts are reduced to select the most relevant parts to the audience’s focus on meaning, then presented narratively/thematically, and conclusions are drawn through repeated verification. Next, the interpretation results are mapped into Hall’s decoding categories (dominant, negotiated, and oppositional) as a framework for classifying audience reception positions (Anshar et al., 2024). As conceptual support, reception research also emphasizes that media texts are

polysemy, so that the audience can produce different readings depending on their social position and cultural experience (Briandana & Azmawati, 2019).

Data validity is maintained through source triangulation, comparing information from several informants and checking for consistency of emerging meanings to increase the credibility of the findings. This technique is emphasized through references to source triangulation and elaboration of triangulation practices in qualitative research (Bachri, 2010; Alfansyur & Andarusni, 2020).

3. Results

This section presents the main findings from audience reception of the Tutor7 playlist on R7 Tatsumaki YouTube channel. Based on interviews with 10 informants, informants generally consider Tutor7 a strategic reference for improving Mobile Legends performance. However, acceptance varies depending on playing experience, playstyle preferences, and viewing goals. The findings confirm five key patterns that consistently emerged in the interview data, as presented in Table 2: First, Tutor7 was perceived as a practical strategy learning tool because informants found the knowledge easily transferable to real-life game situations. Second, the clarity of explanation and credibility of R7 strengthened message acceptance, as audiences perceived concise and reliable guidance. Third, the entertainment element served as a learning “bridge”: the relaxed style kept the material from feeling overwhelming, allowing audiences to still gain educational benefits while enjoying the viewing experience. Fourth, some informants emphasized certain limitations, for example, the depth of explanation that positioned Tutor7 as a supplementary resource, rather than a fully comprehensive learning experience. Fifth, strategy implementation tended to be selective; audiences selected sections that suited their playing style and match context, confirming the negotiation of meaning in interpreting gaming tutorial content.

3.1 Tutor7 is perceived as a strategy learning medium that is “practical” and easily transferred to games

Most informants interpreted Tutor7 as content that provides applied knowledge, especially regarding rotation, laning, hero usage, item builds, and decision-making during team fights. Several informants emphasized that this knowledge felt “immediately applicable” and helped them understand the correct playing patterns, for example: *“After watching Tutor7, I understand rotation and the correct laning method better...”*. In this category, Tutor7 is perceived not just as a game show, but as experiential learning (experience-based learning) presented in a concise, coherent, and applicable format. This is evident from the informant's assessment that the content is systematically structured for hero learning: *“Tutor7 is perfect for learning heroes because it is made in a coherent and easy to understand way, not just for fun...”*. This finding also comes in the form of an acknowledgement that Tutor7 enriches both micro (role-specific mechanics) and macro (team strategy) insights: *“R7 provides knowledge and tips such as how to use heroes and win team fights...”*.

3.2 The clarity of the explanation and credibility of R7 strengthen the acceptance of the educational message

Besides the strategic content, an important factor in acceptance was the way R7 was presented, which was perceived as clear and to the point. Informant-1, for example, emphasized that his viewing orientation was more about learning than entertainment: *“If R7 explains it very clearly and straight to the point, so I watch it not for entertainment, but to learn...”*. In several statements, R7's credibility as an experienced figure (associated with playing competence) made informants more confident in the validity of the strategies presented. Thus, educational messages “encoded” through strategy explanations tended to be more strongly accepted when informants perceived the content creator as a competent source.

3.3 Edutainment: entertainment is seen as a “bridge” for the learning process

Key findings indicate that audiences perceive Tutor7 as content that combines two functions: education and entertainment. Even though the delivery style was considered relaxed, some informants found it helpful in understanding. Informant-10 stated: *“Even though the presentation was relaxed, I still learned something new. So, I think this is a useful form of entertainment...”*. A similar view emerged from Informant-2, who felt that the

relaxed style made the material not feel “heavy”: *“If it’s too serious, it’ll be difficult. R7’s relaxed approach made it easier for me to understand his explanations...”*. However, not all informants considered Tutor7 as “formal” learning. Informant-8 offered a more critical assessment: *“Sometimes the explanations are not very detailed, so I consider it not a full learning experience, more of an additional reference...”*. Meanwhile Informant-9 summarizes the middle position by assessing the flexibility of the content: *“I think it’s half-half. There are serious parts, but it’s also chilly. So, it can still be used for learning...”*. Overall, the study concluded that Tutor7 was perceived as a blend of entertainment and education; some audiences emphasized concrete learning, some enjoyed the entertainment aspect, and some saw both as a combination.

3.4 Informal Learning as a Supplement: Tutor7 as a Complementary Resource

The results showed that some informants interpreted Tutor7 as a form of informal learning: beneficial but not always understood as a fully comprehensive learning experience as formal learning or structured training. This assessment emerged especially when informants highlighted the limited depth of explanation in several episodes, so that Tutor7 is more appropriately positioned as additional references to enrich insight and aid decision-making in the game, not as the sole source of primary learning. Informant-8, for example, explicitly states that detailed explanations are sometimes insufficient to be considered complete learning: *“Sometimes the explanations are not very detailed, so I consider it not a full learning experience, more of an additional reference...”*. A similar view is also seen in Informant-9 who places Tutor7 in the middle position: acknowledging that there are serious parts but still within the framework of entertainment, so that the learning function is not completely formal: *“There are serious parts, but they’re also entertaining. So, it can still be used for learning...”*. These findings indicate that audiences differentiate between “formal learning” and “practical learning” in the digital space: Tutor7 is valued for providing quick and applicable strategic insights, but for some informants, the limited depth or detail makes it more appropriately understood as complementary learning tools that support skill improvement, not a comprehensive and systematic learning experience.

3.5 Negotiation acceptance: strategy is considered important, but is applied selectively

Beyond dominant acceptance, a pattern of negotiated acceptance emerged when informants assessed that not all R7’s suggestions could be followed unconditionally. A frequently cited factor was the difference in personal playing style and the context of public play. Informant-7 emphasized that he uses Tutor7 as a reference but does not always follow all the advice: *“There are times when I feel like my playing style differs from R7’s, so I don’t always follow it. But I still use it as a reference...”*. Informant-10 also emphasized the importance of adapting strategy to the player’s character: *“You don’t have to copy everything, because everyone has their own playing style. Let’s just take what suits you...”*. These findings demonstrate that audiences are not passive; strategic messages are processed through their experiences, needs, and playing situations. In other words, Tutor7 is seen as an important reference, yet it is still “processed” according to individual preferences.

Table 2: Thematic Findings

Result theme	Key indicators (what the audience values)	Informant citation evidence (example)	The meaning of reception
Tutor7 as a practical learning strategy	“Right-to-use” strategy; understanding rotation/laning/team fights	“After watching Tutor7, I understand rotation and the correct laning method better”.	Tutor7 is positioned as a practice-based informal learning (learning-by-doing).
Clarity of delivery & credibility R7	Concise, clear, to the point explanation; trusted for competence	“R7 explains it very clearly and gets straight to the point, so I watch it not for entertainment, but to learn”.	The creator’s credibility strengthens the acceptance of educational messages (dominant reading increases).
Edutainment as a learning bridge	Relaxed/entertaining style helps with material acceptance	“Even though the presentation was relaxed, I still learned something new. So, I think	Entertainment facilitates understanding; education

		this is a worthwhile form of entertainment”.	doesn’t have to be formal to be valuable.
Learning is not always “formal”	Material is considered supplementary reference; details are sometimes limited.	“Sometimes the explanations aren’t very detailed, so I don’t consider them a complete learning experience, more of an additional reference”.	The audience accepts the educational function but limits the effectiveness claims (negotiated).
Selective implementation of strategies	Adapting to the play style and context of public matches	“There are times when I feel like my playing style is different from R7’s... but I still use it as a reference”.	Negotiation of meaning occurs when audiences filter strategies to suit personal needs.

Figure 2 shows that the audience’s reception of Tutor7 was formed through a sequential flow: starting from exposure to content containing playing strategies (rotation, laning, hero/build selection, to team fight decision-making), reinforced by the clarity of delivery and credibility of the creator, and packaged in a relaxed style that brings out the edutainment character. This combination of elements resulted in a dominant perception of benefits: the content was perceived as “immediately usable”, helped clarify strategies, and made the learning process feel easier. From this perception of benefits, the audience then moved to the implementation stage: some fully implemented the strategies and thus tended to be in a dominant reading position, while others continued to receive the educational messages but selectively adapted them to the context of the game and their personal playing style, which placed them in a negotiating position; the findings did not indicate a pattern of overall rejection (opposition) to Tutor7’s main message.

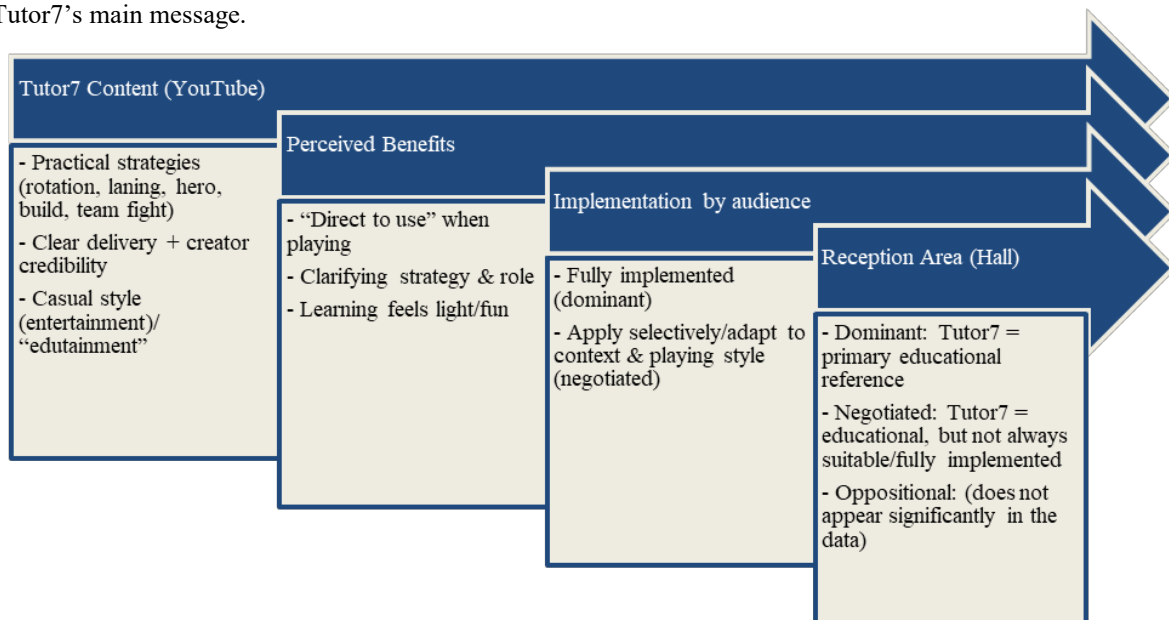


Figure 2. Audience Reception Flow

4. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that the edutainment practice in gaming culture not only works at the level of “informative entertainment”, but also at the level of reception of meaning: how the audience interprets, negotiates, and then applies the messages encoded by the creator. Within the encoding-decoding Stuart Hall’s framework, media messages are not automatically received uniformly; the final meaning is formed when the audience makes decoding based on their gaming experiences, learning needs, and social context. Research data shows that the reception of Tutor7 content on Tatumaki’s R7 channel falls into two main categories: dominant-hegemonic and negotiated, without finding an oppositional position. This pattern is important because it shows that “education in

gaming culture” is more often accepted as resource which is useful rather than being rejected as an irrelevant message, although there remains room for negotiation in the form of selectivity and limitation of content function.

4.1. Tutor7 as a digital communication that is “fast, visual, and applicable”

The dominance of audience reception can be understood through the characteristics of digital communication which allows for message delivery in fast, interactive and real-time. The encoding process is seen from the gameplay format, strategy explanations, and visual-verbal delivery of tips; this is understood as a form of internet-based communication that facilitates instant access to knowledge. Digital communication literature emphasizes that internet media changes the rhythm of information consumption to be more concise, flexible, and closer to the audience’s daily routine (Cangara, 2019; Nasrullah, 2018). In the context of competitive games like MLBB, the need for strategic learning is situational: players need “quick answers” regarding rotations, mechanics, or decision making amidst performance pressures. Therefore, the video tutorial format is a channel that aligns with both players’ cognitive needs and their content consumption habits on the platform.

The suitability of this format is reinforced by the findings of dominant informants who felt an increase in understanding (for example the role of roamers opening maps, rotation, team fight, as well as macro-micro awareness) after watching Tutor7. One dominant narrative describes an increased understanding of roles and mechanics through content that is perceived as relevant and well-structured. Thus, it is not only the content of the message that is perceived as “useful”, but also the way it is presented that leads the audience to evaluate the content is effective as learning aid, in line with the view that educational media can increase attention and understanding when it suits the learning style and needs of the recipient (Irsan, 2021; Agustian & Salsabila, 2021).

4.2. Why the dominant reception is strong: credibility, performance needs, and an active audience

Most of the dominant receptions can be explained through the concept of an active audience. The dominant findings are reinforced by the assumption that audiences consciously choose media to fulfil both cognitive and affective needs (Severin & Tankard, 2007 in Suciska & Gunawibawa, 2020). When audiences watch Tutor7 with the goal of improving their playing skills, the decoding process tends to be in line with the intent encoding, making the tutorial a credible and relevant strategic reference. At this stage, edutainment not just a mix of learning and entertainment, but a communication strategy that fulfils both performance needs (ranking up, understanding the meta, improving mechanics) and affective needs (watching relaxed, fun, non-rigid content).

In addition, the creator’s credibility plays a role as meaning anchor. The dominant informant assessed that R7 conveyed the strategy from a professional (competitive) perspective so that the message was understood as a trustworthy “code”. In uses and gratifications logic, this is a natural condition: when the source is perceived as competent and the audience’s experience supports the message’s relevance, dominant acceptance is more likely. This means that gaming tutorials operate like “informal classes” whose primary legitimacy lies not in the institution but in performative reputation: whoever plays better is more likely to be trusted to teach.

4.3. Negotiating meaning: edutainment as “learning, but not always full”

Despite the strong dominance, the negotiation findings indicate that audiences still engage in critical and adaptive reading. Negotiation occurs when audiences accept the main idea that Tutor7 is educational but limit or modify its application according to playing conditions, preferences, and personal needs. For example, one informant stated that the explanation was “not too detailed”, so the content was not considered a complete lesson, but rather “an additional reference”. This is consistent with Hall’s definition of the negotiation position: audiences “accept within limits” but adapt the meaning to suit their own interests.

This pattern is relevant to the edutainment literature, which positions edutainment as a bridge between cognitive and affective needs, that is, learning occurs through engaging experiences but does not necessarily replace formal learning. The concept of edutainment emphasizes the design of materials or activities that are both educational and enjoyable to encourage engagement and intrinsic motivation (Pojani & Rocco, 2020). In Tutor7, the negotiation

informant emphasized the “two functions” that run side by side: there are serious parts and there are light-hearted parts, so that the content can still be used for learning without losing the entertainment aspect. At this point, edutainment functions as low-friction learning: learning is presented in a format that is not burdensome, but the consequence is that the depth of the material may be perceived as limited by some audiences.

4.4. Selectivity and adaptation of strategy: tutorial “code” does not always match the game situation

Negotiation also occurs at the practical level: audiences do not copy strategies blindly but rather select and adapt. In the data, some informants stated that implementing strategies requires adjustments to game conditions. This suggests that decoding does not stop at understanding but continues to be social practice, that audiences test messages in the dynamic reality of gaming. This is important because competitive gaming is contingent: team composition, hero draft, matches time, and team communication mean that one strategy may not always work in all situations. Therefore, Tutor7 is understood as a “guide” rather than a “rule”.

These findings align with studies of video-based learning that emphasize the importance of interactivity and practice. Klefodimos et al. (2020) showed that educational videos on the web are abundant, but not always rich in interactivity; therefore, the practice/activity element or nuance can increase learning engagement. In the case of Tutor7, the practice occurs not through formal features quizzes or modules, but through playing game repetition: the audience watches, then tries it out in the next game. This is where gaming’s edutainment comes in: the practice of learning is embedded in the activity of playing itself.

4.5. Why there is no opposition: needs match, but there is still “soft” criticism

The absence of opposition can be interpreted as an indication that Tutor7’s primary message (useful strategies) does not contradict the experiences of most informants. However, the absence of opposition does not imply a passive or uncritical audience. For example, the negotiations that emerged limited the content to supplementary resources or assessing its suitability only for players of a certain level, which represents a form of “soft” criticism that still accepts the educational value but rejects the implicit claim that tutorials are universally applicable. In other words, the audience did not reject meaning preference in total but rejected generalization and demanded contextualization.

Reception literature also reminds us that media is polysemic: a single text can generate multiple readings due to the audience’s differing experiences and socio-cultural positions. Briandana & Azmawati (2019) emphasize that reception focuses on the process of in-depth meaning-making, where individuals are cultural agents who actively produce meaning from media texts, and differences in meaning often arise from differences in experience or social position. In this study, differences in playing levels and performance need to be the differentiating factors between dominance and negotiation.

4.6. Tutor7 as an edutainment ecosystem: interaction, community, and algorithms

Discussions of edutainment in gaming culture also need to consider Tutor7 as a platform ecosystem, not just a one-way creator-audience relationship. Social media allows for participation and interaction, and communication flows not only from creators but also from audience to audience through comments, discussions, and social proof. In the context of distance learning, interactions with content, “teachers” (creators), and fellow “learners” (other viewers or audiences) can occur through the comments column, live chat, or the practice of sharing clips. While this study focuses on informants’ reception of the tutorial content, the interaction dimension remains relevant in explaining why the content feels “live” and accessible: audiences are not learning alone, but rather within a digital public space.

Furthermore, content distribution on YouTube is influenced by recommendation logic. Palau-Sampio & López-García (2025) show how algorithms can fragment audiences and encourage consumption within increasingly homogeneous groups. In practice, MLBB players who frequently watch tutorials will be increasingly “pulled” towards similar content, reinforcing a culture of rapid learning through video and increasing the chances of

dominant reception because the retained audience is one that already shares similar interests and needs. This means that edutainment does not only come from creators but is also reproduced by platform design.

4.7. Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretically, these findings strengthen the relevance of the Hall's encoding-decoding model to read gaming tutorials as cultural texts, not just technical content. Tutor7 contains preferred meaning about "the correct/effective way to play" but audiences still negotiate based on the playing situation and their identities as players. Practically, the dominant findings indicate opportunities for informal, community-based education: when content is presented visually, applicably, and credibly, it can be an effective learning tool for players, even without a formal class structure. However, the negotiation findings highlight its limitations: for certain audiences such as beginners, tutorials can feel insufficiently detailed or require repetition; therefore, content needs to be designed with scaffolding (for example, difficulty level markers, step summaries, or examples of situational adaptations) to make the benefits more evenly distributed.

For creators, this discussion suggests that the success of edutainment is not solely determined by the "right technique" but by the ability to package education in a friendly and flexible style. The informant's statement that Tutor7 is "half-half" means serious yet relaxed, suggesting that persona and communication style are part of the message, encouraging dominant acceptance without eliminating room for negotiation. For communication researchers, this study adds to the evidence that digital popular culture, such as gaming, is a complex arena to produce meaning: learning, entertainment, identity, and platform logic are intertwined in the viewing experience. Finally, it is worth noting that the dominant-negotiation mapping in this study depends on the informants' narratives and their consumption context. Further research could expand the variety of informants (for example, pure beginners, active competitive players, or casual community), as well as combining analysis of YouTube comments or observation of playing practices to see how decoding truly becomes a practice. In addition, future studies can link edutainment with the dynamics of algorithmic visibility and community, for instance, how recommendations and comment interactions reinforce or shift dominant receptions.

Overall, this discussion confirms that Tutor7, as an edutainment practice within gaming culture, operates primarily through credibility, applicable digital communication formats, and audience performance needs, resulting in a strong dominant reception. However, audiences remain active: they negotiate the depth, purpose, and implementation of strategies within the game context. Within the framework of digital communication, this is a form of contemporary popular learning: learning occurs in the entertainment space, but meaning is never completely "closed" to the creator.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that Tutor7 on R7 Tatsumaki's YouTube channel serves as an edutainment practice in gaming culture, that tutorial content is perceived as "useful" because its format is fast, visual, and easy to apply to Mobile Legends performance needs. In terms of reception, most informants are at dominant position (receiving the main message as a reference for effective strategies), while others are at negotiating position, which still recognizes its educational value, but selectively adjusts the application of strategies to match conditions and personal playing style; opposition patterns do not appear significantly in the findings.

From a theoretical perspective, these results strengthen the relevance model encoding-decoding by Stuart Hall to read game tutorials as cultural texts, rather than simply technical content, because the meaning of "correct/effective gameplay" is not automatically accepted, but rather negotiated through the player's experiences, learning needs, and social context. From a practical perspective, the dominant findings confirm the opportunity of community-based informal learning. When content is presented credibly and applicable, it can be an effective learning tool without a formal classroom structure. However, negotiation findings also highlight its limitations for some audiences such as beginners, the explanations may not feel in-depth enough, making the content more appropriately positioned as a supplementary resource, rather than a fully comprehensive learning experience.

Finally, this study emphasizes that Tutor7's edutainment practices are shaped not only by creators but also by the platform's ecosystem, which can reinforce video-based fast-learning habits and encourage the homogenization of audience interests. Since the mapping of dominant-negotiation positions relies on informants' narratives and their consumption contexts, further research could expand the variety of informants (pure beginners, active competitive players, casual community players), while combining interviews with YouTube comment analysis or observation of play practices to see how decoding becomes a recurring practice in everyday gaming.

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Deconstructing the Gender Binary: A Butlerian Analysis of Gender Performativity in *The Left Hand of Darkness*

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Abstract

Ursula K. Le Guin explores the fatal flaws of assigned gender roles and challenges heteronormative structures in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. She uses the science fiction genre to create a fictional world called Gethen in which the inhabitants are ambisexual and gender fluid life forms. Within this context, the human protagonist and the main narrator of the novel, Genly Ai, points out the complexities of Gethenian society. In this regard, Le Guin uses ambisexuality to underscore the implications of binary gender norms on society constructing a world excluding gender-based tension between men and women. According to that, *The Left Hand of Darkness* can be associated with almost all theories and assumptions in gender studies. Judith Butler's idea of gender performance perfectly goes parallel with the criticisms of Le Guin. This article revolves around the diverse discrimination and inequalities between gender roles.

Keywords: Ambivalence, Femininity, Gender Performativity, Gender Roles, Heteronormativity, Masculinity

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of civilization, gender roles defined by patriarchal organization which also caused inequality between genders, have been an undeniable factor in society. This complicated and deeply rooted social incident affected almost every culture and society by evolving over centuries. Defining gender roles is influenced by a variety of factors, especially religious, political, historical, or economic conditions. Origins of this complex phenomenon go back to ancient times when gender roles defined in terms of physical strength and reproductive roles. It can be said that some perceptions occurred based on gender roles which are related to biological conditions of men and women in terms of physical strength of men and on the other hand reproductive roles of women which have pushed them to claim domestic roles. With the rise of urbanization and the effects of the capitalist order, some changes in the economic structure have brought up gender issues within. The accumulation of wealth gave rise to a patriarchal structure in which men controlled both the domestic sphere and economic power. These economic changes made gender roles to evolve into another dimension and transformed into the social and political dominance of men. Furthermore, grand narratives such as religion may have been considered as one of the most influential determinants in the reinforcement of gender hierarchies. Interpretations and practices of religious texts and beliefs have led to unequal treatment of not only men and women but also otherized sexual orientations since

these narratives have also been shaped according to patriarchal structures of the society. Political systems have also put the women into a secondary position and taken their opportunities from women's suffrage to family laws and so on. Even feminist reforms could not entirely prevent those kinds of inequalities to continue today since politics still limit women's rights in most countries. These factors can be regarded as one of the most critical and focal points in the defining of gender roles throughout history.

Feminism as a movement has a very influential place in the literary field to criticize the relevant issues. This field explores social, cultural, psychological, or political boundaries between men and women, in this way, it delves beyond the biological facts and unfolds the ways in which society constructs the idea of gender and imposes expectations on men and women. In this approach, male and female as biological sexes are irrelevant to the ideas about masculinity and femininity. However, these ideas have been traditionally associated with sex that male must be related to masculinity and female must be related to femininity, otherwise you would not be accepted by the society. Butler challenges the binary sex by arguing that what we consider 'natural' is actually a cultural discourse. She deconstructs the traditional hierarchy between sex and gender by stating: "As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced and established as "prediscursive," prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts." (Butler, 1990, p.11). Judith Butler's concept of performativity criticizes these expectations and deconstructs the conventional structures of gender roles by indicating that gender identity and expression are performative acts and gender is not a biological factor, but it is something that one performs. In this context, gender studies focus on almost every discriminative aspect of gender norms and provide a universal approach to gender figures. According to that, gender studies and feminist theories became a considerable approach in the literary field. Some influential writers, such as Virginia Woolf, Margaret Atwood, Alice Walker, or Mary Anne under the pen name of George Eliot have left impressive remarks on literature in terms of feminist and gender studies. Ursula K. Le Guin is one of these remarkable authors, with her outstanding science fiction novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* deconstructs the ideals of the heteronormative society by fictionalizing a planet in which the inhabitants of this environment have no biological binary genders. Heteronormativity as a term, refers to a sociocultural assumption in which a society claims heterosexuality as a defined sexual orientation and often alienates other sexual identities. In her article on Le Guin's work, Fayad explores the influence of heteronormative structure in the following passage:

Whether viewing gender as irreducible difference located in the body, or as a discursive construct, the argument has centered on a heterosexual norm that assumes a division between masculine and feminine identities, one that is specifically implicated in relations of power and domination. (Fayad, 1997, p59)

According to that, heteronormativity is an inevitable factor in patriarchal society that shapes the power dynamics between male and female and has an undeniable relation with assigning femininity and masculinity towards genders causing strict struggles to 'secondary' sexual orientations. At this point, the protagonist of the novel Genly Ai struggles to adapt himself into the ambisexual sociocultural structure of Gethen and criticizes it through the novel according to his own heteronormative point of view by trying to relate Gethenian people to femininity or masculinity. As a remarkable piece of art in literature, *The Left Hand of Darkness* can be analyzed in gender studies. There is a great variety of research on this science fiction novel including "*The Left Hand of Darkness*": *Feminism for Men* by Barrow and Barrow, *Aliens, Androgynes, and Anthropology: Le Guin's Critique of Representation in "The Left Hand of Darkness."* by Fayad. These articles help to form discussions on the relevant topic. Butler's evolutionary theory on gender studies suggesting that gender is a repetitive act of performance is used to compare and contrast the social structure of Gethen and gender expectations on Earth.

1.1. Understanding the Setting of the Novel

The setting of the novel takes place on a cold and icy fictional planet called Gethen. The very distinguishing characteristic of Gethenian people is their ambisexual life form and androgynous features. The term ambisexual is used to describe Gethenian people's sexual biological form in which they can perform both 'feminine' and 'masculine' sexual roles during their period of fertility called kemmer but they do not possess binary genders. On the other hand, the term androgyny refers to mixed gender expressions associated with both masculinity and

femininity. The function of androgyny in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is also stated in Fayad's research on this novel:

Androgyny, presumably inherent in one way or the other in all of us, functions as a third term that neutralizes the gendered way in which the subject is constructed. In this sense, androgyny can be seen as a space of resistance that redefines the ways in which gender identity is constructed. (Fayad, 1997, p.59)

Since their life form does not contain binary genders, there is no discrimination of femininity and masculinity in Gethenian's cultural structure as these ideas are results of defined gender roles in heteronormative society in which heterosexuality is the defined sexual orientation of a society. The fact that Gethenian people don't obtain different sexual orientations and don't claim gender roles defined by society due to their ambivalent biology, thus it becomes the supreme element of deconstructing the gender roles in our society by presenting a naturally gender fluid community in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Through this method, Ursula K. Le Guin deconstructs the societal expectations of our world in general and brings an illuminating perspective to unequal and discriminative perceptions towards binary gender roles, especially those who are living under the disillusionment of the heteronormative phenomenon. The reader observes the planet Gethen from the perspective of Genly Ai who is a human seeking for interstellar alliance of planets by making diplomatic contacts. As he is an outsider in Gethen and possesses an entirely different biological form compared to Gethenian people, he struggles to comprehend the genderfluid interrelationships of this society in terms of his patriarchal and heteronormative point of view. Fayad argues this point in her article as in the following lines.

It is mainly through the characterization of Genly Ai as a scientific observer that we see the cultural construction of gender in progress; far from being a "neutral" investigator, he translates the "neutral" sexual identity of the androgynes he encounters into assigned "masculine" and "feminine" roles. In this sense, Ai does more than classify the androgynes using categories that are not applicable; he unconsciously participates in the production of "masculine" and "feminine" identities. (Fayad, 1997, p.59)

In this regard, Genly Ai conflicts with his own constructed ideas of femininity and masculinity and tries to make a relation between his own heteronormative scope and Gethenian society in order to adapt to their culture. Within this context, Le Guin ignores and criticizes constructed gender roles by giving voice to a male character who tries to adapt to a gender fluid society. Moreover, Thibodeau considers *The Left Hand of Darkness* as not only a sci-fi narration that reverses gender roles, but also a radical thought experiment that makes it clear that gender is not an ontological feature but a socially constructed category. Centering around an androgynous alien species, the novel detaches the idea of gender from biological determinism and renders it as a temporary condition based on context, time and relationality. "The novel's use of an androgynous alien species not only explores gender as an essential element of social construction, but also imagines a world free of the male/female binary that so thoroughly dictates identity and informs discourse." (Thibodeau, 2012, p. 263). Thibodeau particularly underlines the male/female dichotomy which is pivotal to shape heteronormative discourse in such societies. Within this context, binary roles depend on cultural observations based on hierarchal constructions of gender. In this article, deconstruction of gender roles and heteronormative society from the perspective of Genly Ai in *The Left Hand of Darkness* will be analyzed.

2. Literature Review

Examining *The Left Hand of Darkness* within the framework of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* offers a critical review that helps readers explore the novel's essential themes such as gender performance, heteronormativity, androgyny and broken patriarchy. Reading this novel within the scope of Butler's gender theory makes the reader gain an extended understanding of the gender structure of modern world. There have been a lot of studies written about Le Guin's fictional world Gethen in terms of politics, postcolonialism, gender issues or racial ideologies in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. However, the idea that Le Guin, by depicting an androgynous society, aims not just to criticize gender roles but to expose the discursive inconsistency behind the marginalization of femininity by heteronormative society is not particularly vivid in most of the current studies of this novel. Hence, this article attempts to bring light to this very point in terms of Genly Ai's struggle to cope with Gethenian culture. While examining this study, Butler's *Gender Trouble* will serve as the primary source of the analysis.

3. Deconstruction of Binary Gender and Heteronormative Structure

Ursula K. Le Guin uses science fiction to construct a society in which there is no binary gender, either biologically or socially. As it is stated before, Le Guin narrates the experiences of Genly Ai who is an agent landed on the plated Gethen to provide diplomatic relations. The unusual characteristics of Gethenian people challenge Genly Ai's heteronormative values and make the readers question what gender norms actually mean.

From the very beginning of the story, the readers can encounter Genly Ai's confusion about how to define and mention Gethenian people. "Wiping sweat from his dark forehead the man-man I must say, having said he and his." (Le Guin, 1969, p.7). Since Gethenian people don't possess binary genders, the pronoun 'they/them' will be used to refer to them. He directly assigns gender identities to these people and subconsciously he chooses to call him 'man' to identify 'their' presence. In Genly Ai's point of view it can be suggested that the reason why he prefers to classify 'them' as a male can be associated with power dynamics of gender in which masculinity is often considered dominant over femininity. Genly Ai reveals his irritation towards 'their' effeminate tone of actions. "Annoyed by this sense of effeminate intrigue I got off the platform." (Le Guin, 1969, p.8) Herein, it can be observed that Genly Ai criticizes the attitudes of Gethenians according to his own perception of gender and assigns gender roles to these people once again. The reason why he gets irritated by the femininity of that individual can be associated with fixed gender norms of heteronormative cultural structure of Genly Ai. He mostly considers Gethenian people as male and associates them with masculinity. In this regard the feminine attitudes of the Gethenian do not fit with the expectations of Genly Ai who mostly represents the conventional heteronormative society in this novel. This point is also discussed in an article by Craig and Diana Barrow.

"The role of Genly Ai, however, is not to reinforce stereotypical male attitudes but to expose them; he is the means whereby men can confront their own ambiguous responses to women through the cultural shock of seeing feminine qualities in Gethenians that Genly Ai unconsciously perceives as male." (Barrow & Barrow, 1987, p.85)

Associated with that, Genly Ai's perspective goes parallel with what Butler tries to explain. According to Butler, there is a particular difference between gender and sex. She claims that sex is a biological fact that defines people's productive roles and anatomical differences between male and female sex. On the other hand, gender refers to the societal expectations from male and female regarding man and woman. However, those expectations could be cruel that society expects male to be man and female to be woman, in other words, a male must perform masculinity, and a female must perform femininity. By contrast with the expectations of society, Butler claims that one should be free to perform whoever he or she wants to be, hence there is no ultimate association between male one and masculinity or female one and femininity since gender is a fluid phenomenon (Butler, 1999, p. 10). These expectations of gender performance bring confusion to Genly Ai as can be seen in the following lines. Within this context, Rudy's observation (1997) directly aligns with Butler's argument about gender fluidity. By describing gender as a 'social grid' rather than a 'biological certainty' Rudy highlights that being a 'man' or a 'woman' is a behavior which is learned from the dictation of social structures (p. 33). Genly Ai's struggle to understand Gethen's biological order incomparably illustrates the 'social grid' that Rudy draws attention. He cannot succeed in ignoring the binary conditioning of his own reality.

Though I had been nearly two years on Winter I was still far from being able to see the people of the planet through their own eyes. I tried to, but my efforts took the form of self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own. (Le Guin, 1969, p 10)

Genly Ai reveals his confusion about Gethenian life form, and he fails to understand and empathize with their natural genderless identity. Indicating that he spent two years and still cannot fit into the cultural formation of Gethen emphasizes the inevitable construction of unequal binary gender-based society. However, gender categories which are "essential" to Genly Ai are completely irrelevant in establishing social interactions.

I thought that at table Estraven's performance had been womanly, all charm and tact and lack of substance, specious and adroit. Was it in fact perhaps this soft supple femininity that I disliked and distrusted in him? For it was impossible to think of him as a woman, that dark, ironic, powerful presence near me in

the firelit darkness, and yet whenever I thought of him as a man I felt a sense of falseness, of imposture: in him. (Le Guin, 1969, p10)

In this excerpt, Genly Ai's discomfort with femininity draws attention. It is noteworthy to state that his way of associating femininity with mischievous attitudes is highly related to misconception towards conventional otherization of womanhood and femininity. Genly Ai's internal conflict forces him to categorize Estraven in terms of binary genders due to defined gender roles in his culture. He relies on stereotypical gender norms of femininity and tries to apply those norms to Gethenian cultural structure.

In chapter three, there is a moment when the king and other Gethenians are talking about the other life forms which have biologically binary genders, the king states that "So all of them, out on these other planets, are in permanent kemmer? A society of perverts? (Le Guin, 1969, p21). As was stated before, kemmer is a periodic cycle of Gethenians when they obtain productive roles. They only obtain these roles during their coupling. This part can be interpreted as an ironic representation of homophobia. Thereby, Le Guin mocks the established ideas on gender and societal norms. In heteronormative societies, sexual orientations can be regarded as 'perversion' just as the king labels people who are in permanent kemmer (obtaining one gender role permanently) as a society of perverts. Herein, Le Guin subverts the overall misperception of sexual expectations and orientations.

Ursula K. Le Guin points out gender discriminative attitudes of human culture by adapting homophobia into the sociocultural expectations of Gethenian people. In human culture obtaining reverse gender roles compared to assigned roles to biological sexes is an inappropriate action to take. In this regard, Le Guin criticizes this point through social expectations of Gethenian people.

Excessive prolongation of the kemmer period, with permanent hormonal imbalance toward the male or the female, causes what they call perversion; it is not rare; three or four percent of adults may be physiological perverts or abnormal-normals, by our standard. They are not excluded from society, but they are tolerated with some disdain, as homosexuals are in many bisexual societies. The Karhidish slang for them is halfdeads. They are sterile. (Le Guin, 1969, p.34)

In Gethen, people must only obtain fixed roles during their productive cycle, and it is an abnormal situation to obtain permanent roles out of kemmer. This potential flaw in Gethenian culture is similar to the concept of homophobia in human culture and can be associated with "heterophobia" when it comes to applying homophobia in Gethen culture. In other words, homophobia is a reflection against having an affair with the same sex, and in order to make a relation with human culture, it can be regarded as heterophobia in Gethenian culture since it is not appropriate to obtain permanent productive role in Gethen.

In chapter five, there is a part where Genly Ai describes his host. "My landlady, a voluble man, arranged my journey into the East." (Le Guin, 1969, p 26) He chooses to use the word "landlady" indicating his host is a female and on the other hand he refers to 'them' as a man. This part is a very strong representation of Genly Ai's confusion about their fluid gender. Then he continues to reveal why he chooses to use these words by saying "I thought of him as my landlady, for he had fat buttocks that wagged as he walked, and a soft fat face, and a prying, spying, ignoble, kindly nature." (Le Guin, 1969, p27). It is observable that Genly Ai associates such terms as kindness, ignobility, and prying with femininity, which puts 'them' in a secondary position compared to masculinity by insulting the qualities of femininity in a sexist manner. In the same manner, he associates certain physical features with gender as well. On the other hand, when it is observed from a perspective of binary gender, parental roles of Gethenian people can be confusing considering their ambivalent nature in regard to motherhood and fatherhood since they can both give birth and fertilize their partner. At this point, Genly Ai states that he asked his 'landlady' how many children 'they' gave birth to:

He was so feminine in looks and manner that I once asked him how many children he had. He looked glum. He had never borne any. He had, however, sired four. It was one of the little jolts I was always getting. Cultural shock was nothing much compared to the biological shock I suffered as a human male among human beings who were, five-sixths of the time, hermaphroditic neuters. (Le Guin, 1969, p27)

When the readers focus on the response of Genly Ai to his so called “landlady”, it turns out that ‘they’ have not given birth before but sired four children. If the readers examine this very point in terms of binary gender roles, it can be seen that the “landlady” is a ‘father’ of four children even though ‘they’ are considered and described as feminine with ‘their’ physical and characteristic features. When parental figures in binary gender societies are taken into account, there could be a relationship of superiority and inferiority between fatherhood and motherhood figures in terms of the binary oppositions of power dynamics in gender structures. In this regard, Genly Ai gets shocked, and his gender expectations get shaken when he hears that the “landlady” he overlooked by feminizing ‘them’ has obtained the role of “fatherhood” according to Genly’s cultural background. At this point Le Guin highlights the fluidity of gender once again. Another concept of masculinity is associated with “war”. Genly Ai points out that there had been no massacre or genocide in Gethen before:

But on Gethen nothing led to war. Quarrels, murders, feuds, forays, vendettas, assassinations, tortures and abominations, all these were in their repertory of human accomplishments; but they did not go to war. They lacked, it seemed, the capacity to mobilize. They behaved like animals, in that respect, or like women. They did not behave like men, or ants. (Le Guin, 1969, p.27)

He puts boundaries between the terms war and femininity. In this context, he places the term of war in the same category with masculinity and associates the fact that Gethenian people have never had a global war with their gender fluidity and makes a connection with their “femininity” in terms of his heteronormative culture structure. In this part the readers can observe that Genly Ai prioritizes masculinity and puts Gethenian people in a secondary position by feminizing them.

Ultimately, Le Guin’s fictional planet Gethen is not very different from the world we know and live today in terms of rejecting the sexual orientations which do not appeal to the conformist society; however, it is also an incredible tool to criticize the established binary gender roles by presenting a society where ‘sex’ is not a fixed biological phenomenon. By doing so, Le Guin deconstructs the heterosexual matrix which claims people are only perceivable as individuals if they fit into the binary relation of male masculinity and female femininity.

4. Flaws of the Binary Gender Roles

As it is also stated in the title of chapter seven, *The Question of Sex*, unravels the sexual characteristics of Gethenian people. The narration shifts from the perspective of Genly Ai to first researcher crew that landed on Gethen. The readers get to know about their gender structures and how they affected their culture. Firstly, the biological functioning of Gethenians, as detailed in this passage and as it is mentioned in the previous chapter of this article, the representation of Gethenian’s sexual relations are stated in the following lines by the research crew landed on the planet as “The genitals engorge or shrink accordingly, foreplay intensifies, and the partner, triggered by the change, takes on the other sexual role (? without exception? If there are exceptions, resulting in kemmer-partners of the same sex, they are so rare as to be ignored).” (Le Guin, 1969, p.47). They have difficulties in understanding the sexual orientation of Gethenians since the crew’s understanding of sexuality is centered around binary genders. The observer’s use of question marks and the dismissal of varieties of other sexual pairings such as same-sex intercourses that can be categorized as homosexual pairings in gender binary culture of the observer and Genly Ai as well reveals a heteronormative gaze. Within this context, even the most intellectual minds of the Ekumen struggle to describe Gethenian sexuality without reflecting their own binary understanding of Gethen’s fluid system. On the other hand, they can choose which productive role they would obtain via hormone medicines. “(Otie Nim wrote that in the Orgoreyn region the use of hormone derivatives to establish a preferred sexuality is quite common; I haven’t seen this done in rural Karhide.)” (p.48). Their chance to choose productive roles can be associated with gender fluidity of Gethenians. Moreover, parental structure is given in the following line. “Descent of course is reckoned, all over Gethen, from the mother, the “parent in the flesh” (Karh.amha)” (p.48). When this part is considered, Gethenian people apply ‘matriarchal’ descent as an indirect criticism of patriarchal descent. However, it can be observed that “motherhood” is only biologically concerned and has nothing to do with societal expectations and established gender performance since Gethenians can obtain both productive roles. The mention of hormone in Orgoreyn suggests that gender is not only a biological occurrence on Gethen but also it can be a subjective preference. This demonstrates that there is still a potential for gender performance or biological choice even if their androgynous nature; however, this performance is disassociated with motherhood from the domestic

sphere. In Gethen any leader, physician, or laborer can become a ‘mother’ apart from its traditional submissiveness and becomes a symbol of biological capability. Furthermore, the most striking critical part of the novel might be the following lines since they are direct comparisons of Gethenian and human cultures:

Consider: Anyone can turn his hand to anything. This sounds very simple, but its psychological effects are incalculable. The fact that everyone between seventeen and thirty-five or so is liable to be (as Nim put it) "tied down to childbearing," implies that no one is quite so thoroughly "tied down" here as women, elsewhere, are likely to be—psychologically or physically. Burden and privilege are shared out pretty equally; everybody has the same risk to run or choice to make. Therefore, nobody here is quite so free as a free male anywhere else. [...] Consider: There is no unconsenting sex, no rape. As with most mammals other than man, coitus can be performed only by mutual invitation and consent; otherwise, it is not possible. Seduction certainly is possible, but it must have to be awfully well timed. [...] Consider: There is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive. In fact the whole tendency to dualism that pervades human thinking may be found to be lessened, or changed, on Winter. (Le Guin, 1969, p.49)

This passage serves as a fundamental criticism of patriarchal order and completely argues and uncovers the flaws of gender discrimination. Le Guin argues the inherent flaws of gender divided society by demonstrating a world where the ‘burden’ of bearing a child or ‘privilege’ of ability to fertilize are shared out equally. This equality deconstructs the conventional ideology of dominant/submissive or active/passive dichotomies that set human patriarchy. Moreover, this section encapsulates the focal point of this paper which is the social struggles imposed on women and queer society within patriarchal hierarchy. Through the perspective of Gethenian gender fluidity, Le Guin uncovers how the social destruction caused by gender discrimination in human culture is based on these binaries advocating for a social structure that values mutual consent and equally shared human experience over hierarchical dominance.

5. Conclusion

In short, Le Guin criticizes binary oppositions of gender roles, patriarchy, suppression of women and queer society, inequality between genders and every other discriminative and discriminated aspect of binary gender through science fiction and applies these figures through a gender fluid ambivalent life form, Gethenians. The conventional link between biological sex and social roles has been challenged in the novel. Le Guin suggests that many of the traits that have been considered ‘natural’ are fixed cultural constructions. These points are unfolded by Genly Ai’s scope in order to highlight the limitations of binary worldview. All those points mock the heteronormative perception of male dominated society in the perspective of Genly Ai. Butler’s idea of gender as a performative construction can be observed in every detail of *The Left Hand of Darkness*. In this remarkable work, one can question the destructive social construction of male dominated society.

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Digitalization, Social Media, and Strategic Innovation in MSMEs: Scopus-Based Bibliometric Trends (2015-2025)

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Abstract

The development of digitalization and social media has become a key factor in driving strategic innovation and competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in various countries. This article aims to map research trends on digitalization, social media, and strategic innovation in MSMEs using a bibliometric approach based on Scopus publication data for the period 2015-2025. Analysis was conducted on 171 articles using VOSviewer software, allowing the identification of publication patterns, leading countries, and the most frequently used keywords. The analysis results show a significant increase in the number of publications, with Indonesia as the most productive country in this topic. Network mapping reveals four main research clusters: digital marketing and e-commerce, social media-based digital transformation, sustainable business development through technology adoption, and entrepreneurship and strategic planning. Further discussion emphasizes the importance of digital literacy, business model innovation, and policy support in strengthening the role of MSMEs in the digital economy era. This article contributes by presenting a comprehensive overview of research developments, while also offering future research directions related to cross-country comparisons and the context of MSME digitalization implementation.

Keywords: Digitalization, Social Media, Strategic Innovation, MSMEs, Bibliometrics

1. Introduction

In the last decade, the development of digital technology has driven major changes in the global business landscape, including in the micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) sector. Digitalization is not only considered an operational tool but also a strategic element that can drive innovation, efficiency, and competitive advantage (Aljabari et al., 2024; Vrontis et al., 2022). The increasing adoption of digital channels such as social media, e-commerce, and artificial intelligence (AI) enables MSMEs to move deeper into the market, build closer customer relationships, and create data-driven products and services more quickly (Aghazadeh et al., 2024; Aljabari et al., 2024; Giantari et al., 2022).

However, the digitalization process in MSMEs is not always smooth. Low digital literacy, inadequate technological infrastructure, and absence of policy support are huge issues, especially in developing countries (Bennacer et al., 2025; Qalati et al., 2022). Furthermore, the success of digitalization depends heavily on an organization's readiness to build digital capabilities and its willingness to continuously innovate (Korcsmáros & Csinger, 2022; Mladenova et al., 2025).

Although digitalization has become mainstream in global business strategies, its implementation in the context of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) still faces complex challenges that require further study. Various studies have found digital transformation to hold promising potential for MSMEs to expand market access and operational efficiency through social media and digital technology (Eze et al., 2023; Ullah et al., 2023). However, limited resources, lack of digital literacy, and barriers to adoption of technology are major barriers, especially in developing countries (Enshassi et al., 2025; Rodriguez-Vasquez et al., 2025).

In a study by Enshassi et al. (2025), AI adoption in digital marketing among MSMEs is influenced by perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease-of-use (PEOU) but is also significantly constrained by inhibiting factors such as budget constraints, managerial capabilities, and resistance to change. Similarly, Fodouop Kouam (2025) noted that although digitalization can improve the efficiency of business communications and interactions, a significant digital divide still exists between MSMEs and large corporations.

Various previous studies have examined the interaction between digitalization and strategic innovation in the MSME sector. However, most of these studies remain fragmented and contextual, limited to qualitative approaches or surveys in specific regions (Ponomarenko et al., 2024; Ragazou et al., 2022). With the tremendous spread of linked literature in recent years, few studies have set up systematically a trend of scientific knowledge in this regard with a bibliometric approach. In this context, mapping scientific trends through bibliometric analysis is highly relevant for evaluating research focus, identifying literature gaps, and formulating appropriate digital strategies for MSMEs. Bibliometrics has the advantage of constructing scientific maps that help identify publication trends, emerging research themes, and suggest future directions of research. This study purposes to fill this gap by analyzing scientific publishing trends on digitalization, social media, and strategic innovation in MSMEs between the years 2015 and 2025.

This study provides mapping of the development of scientific knowledge using a bibliometric approach, as it has the potential to provide a total presentation of the structure, dynamics, and direction of development of a large research field in a systematic and data-driven manner. In this context, the analysis co-occurrence used to identify conceptual relationships between keywords, thereby revealing the thematic structure, dominant research focus, and evolution trends of the topics of digitalization, social media, and strategic innovation in MSMEs (Ponomarenko et al., 2024; Ragazou et al., 2022). This approach allows for the creation of a visual map of the scattered literature and provides a foundation for more focused academic and practical explorations going forward. Through thematic mapping in this field, this study is expected to provide significant conceptual contributions to the development of further research agendas, as well as serve as a guide for MSMEs and policymakers in designing adaptive and innovative digital strategies. This study aims to have a comprehensive understanding of scientific trends in digitalization, social media, and strategic innovation in MSMEs between the years 2015-2025. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

1. Mapping scientific publication trends on digitalization, social media, and strategic innovation in the context of MSMEs using the Scopus database.
2. Analyzing thematic co-occurrences of the keywords used in literature.
3. Exploring the development of main research clusters and dominant thematic trends surfacing in MSME research in the digital era.
4. Providing strategic insights into understanding the scientific map and future research opportunities.

2. Method

This study uses a bibliometric analysis approach to systematically map and evaluate the intellectual structure of scientific publications discussing digitalization, social media, and strategic innovation in MSMEs during the period 2015 to 2025. Bibliometric analysis is increasingly used in business and communication research due to its ability to analyze large-scale data sets, identify thematic patterns, and track trends and influential contributors in a particular field (Donthu et al., 2021).

As part of bibliometric techniques, this study employed co-occurrence analysis to explore the frequency of keyword co-occurrence and uncover dominant research themes and their conceptual interrelationships (Kumar et al., 2020). This approach enables a comprehensive mapping of scientific knowledge while providing a reliable thematic overview for further research development. The analysis was conducted using VOSviewer software, a widely recognized tool for visualizing bibliometric networks. This tool allows researchers to generate co-occurrence networks, keyword clusters, and thematic evolution maps that collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the research landscape.

The period 2015-2025 was chosen for its empirical and contextual significance. 2015 marked the initial phase of the growth of literature on MSME digitalization, particularly after the widespread adoption of digital technologies in developing countries. Meanwhile, the post-2020 period has seen a surge in academic interest in this topic, particularly because of the Covid-19 pandemic, which accelerated the adoption of digital technologies and social media by MSMEs across various sectors (Ponomarenko et al., 2024; Vrontis et al., 2022). By extending the scope to 2025, this study captures recent developments in the digital landscape and provides a forward-looking perspective on the direction of scholarly attention on digital transformation issues in the MSME sector.

The bibliometric dataset was collected from the Scopus database, recognized as one of the largest and most credible peer-reviewed scientific journal databases globally. To reflect the core themes of this study, a search was conducted on August 06, 2025, using a Boolean search string, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Data retrieval constraints for the Scopus database

Database	Scopus
Search field	Title, Abstract, Keywords
Search string	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("digitaliz*" OR "digitalis*" OR "digital communication*" OR "digital media" OR "digital marketing" OR "digiti*" OR "digital transformation*" OR "digital innovation*" OR "digital technolog*" OR "digital transition") AND ("marketing communication*" OR "marketing strateg*" OR "integrated marketing communication*" OR "digital marketing" OR "social media marketing" OR "social media" OR "facebook" OR "instagram" OR "facebook" OR "tiktok" OR "online shop*" OR "social media promotion" OR "social media advertising" OR "digital advertis*" OR "online marketing" OR "digital marketing communication" OR "digital business*" OR "digital enterpr*" OR "electronic marketing" OR "search engine marketing" OR "internet marketing" OR "innovative marketing") AND ("SME*" OR "small and medium enterprise*" OR "small business*" OR "small enterprise*" OR "medium sized business*" OR "mid sized business*" OR "SMB" OR "small to medium business*"))
Open access	All
Years	2015-2025
Author name	All
Subject area	Social science
Publication stage	All
Document type	Article
Source article	All
Affiliation	All
Funding sponsor	All
Country	All
Source type	Journal

Language	English
Data extracted	6 August 2025
Number of publications	149

Description: This bibliometric search strategy was conducted in Scopus with a focus on titles, abstracts, and keywords for the related topics of digitalization, social media, and MSMEs, resulting in 149 selected articles from the period 2015-2025. Data was extracted on August 6, 2025

3. Results

The Scopus dataset was analyzed descriptively to highlight publication trends and distribution across four main categories: publication year, country of publication, and field of study. These four categories provide a comprehensive overview of research output growth, the geographic distribution of scholarly contributions, and the scope of disciplines examining digitalization, social media, and strategic innovation in MSMEs during the 2015-2025 period. This descriptive pattern provides a foundation for understanding academic engagement and will inform the next phase of scientific mapping, specifically keyword co-occurrence analysis and clustering to explore the thematic structure and direction of research development in this field.

3.1 Descriptive Analysis of the Data Set

3.1.1 Documents by Year

Based on Figure 1, the annual publication trend for the 2016-2025 period shows a significant increase in academic attention to the topics of digitalization, social media, and strategic innovation in MSMEs. In 2016, the number of publications was still very low (1 document), but began to increase in 2017 (5 documents). Since 2019, this trend has consistently increased again, with a significant spike after 2020, which resulted in 8 publications.

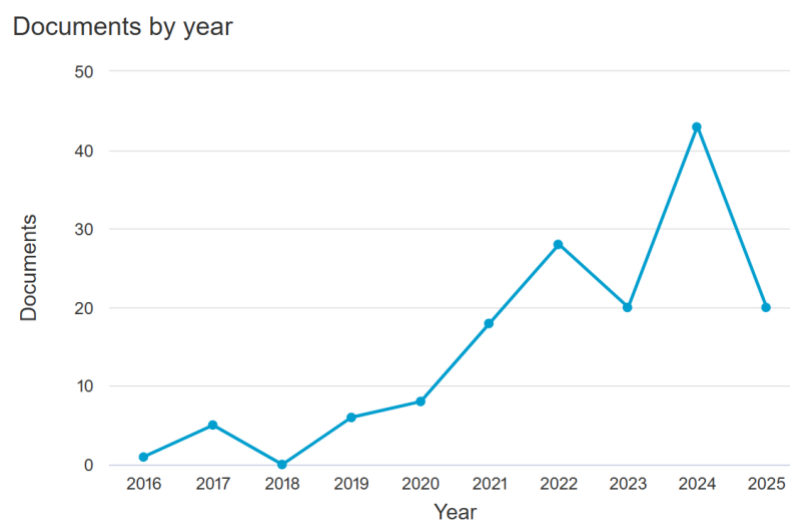


Figure 1: Documents by Year

The most striking growth occurred in 2021-2022, when the number of publications jumped from 18 to 28 documents. The highest peak occurred in 2024 with 43 documents, reflecting a surge in research interest post-pandemic. This increase aligns with the increasing adoption of digital technology by MSMEs, the rapid development of social media platforms, and the need to adapt marketing strategies in the era of digital transformation.

Despite a decline in 2025 (20 documents), the overall pattern suggests that the past decade has been a crucial period in building a foundation for scholarly research on the relationship between digitalization, social media, and strategic innovation. The post-2020 surge is likely influenced by the global push for digital transformation

resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced MSMEs to optimize technology and social media to maintain their competitiveness in an increasingly digital marketplace.

3.1.2 Documents by Country

As shown in Figure 2, the distribution of publications by country shows a very clear dominance of Indonesia, which recorded over 40 documents during the research period. This position puts Indonesia far ahead of other countries, significantly ahead of Malaysia, which is in second place with over 15 publications, and India, which recorded around 14 publications.

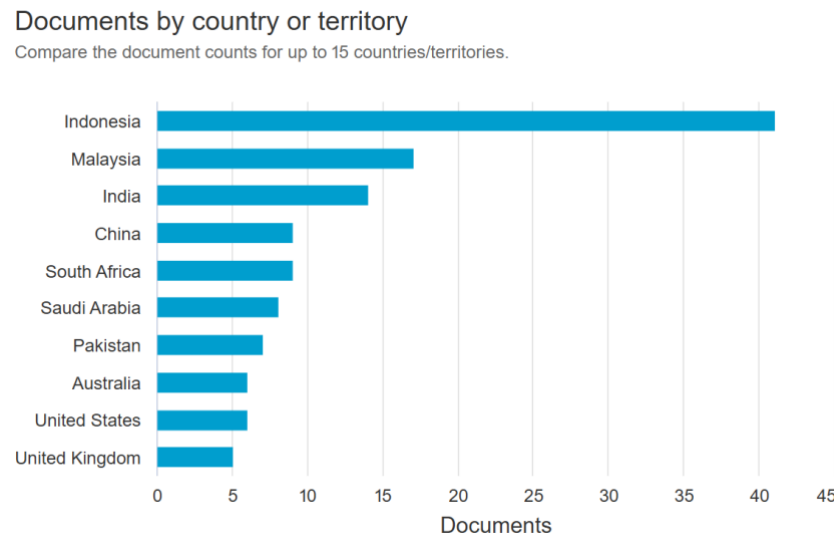


Figure 2: Documents by Country

Indonesia's dominance reflects the high level of attention academics and researchers in the country have paid to digital marketing, social media, and digital communication strategies, particularly in the context of MSMEs. This can be attributed to the rapid development of Indonesia's digital ecosystem, the significant growth of social media users, and the increasing use of digital platforms by small and medium-sized businesses for marketing.

Other countries such as China, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia fall in the middle group, with between 8 and 9 publications, while countries like Pakistan, Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom contribute relatively less, ranging from 5 to 7 publications. Overall, this pattern suggests that research contributions on this topic are global, but strongly concentrated in Asia, with Indonesia as the primary center of literature production in this area.

3.1.3 Documents by Subject Area

Figure 3 shows the distribution of publications by scientific field. Social sciences significantly dominate, contributing 38.6% of the total publications. This dominance indicates that the research topics analyzed are primarily discussed from a social science perspective, encompassing behavioral studies, societal interactions, and the social implications of technological developments and digital marketing. Overall, this distribution indicates that the analyzed phenomena have cross-disciplinary relevance, but with a focus on social and managerial studies, further enhanced by technical, economic, and environmental analyses.

Documents by subject area

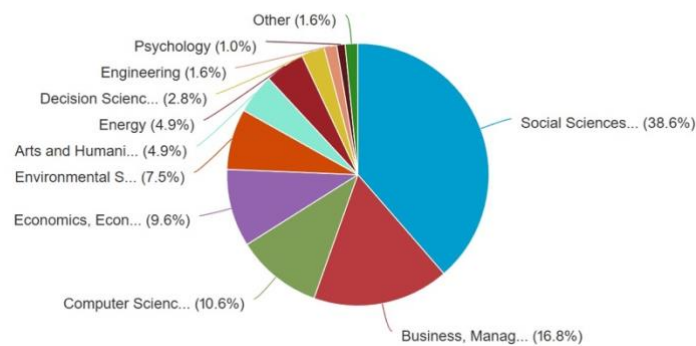


Figure 3: Documents by Subject Area

Business, Management, and Accounting came in second with 16.8%, demonstrating a significant focus on business strategy, organizational management, and the economic implications of digital marketing practices and technology use. Meanwhile, Computer Science (10.6%) and Economics, Econometrics, and Finance (9.6%) were important supporting fields, reflecting a multidisciplinary approach that combines technical, analytical, and financial aspects. Other contributing fields include Environmental Science (7.5%), which is likely related to sustainability studies and green marketing; Arts and Humanities (4.9%) and Energy (4.9%), which demonstrate cross-sectoral research involvement; and Decision Sciences (2.8%), Engineering (1.6%), and Psychology (1.0%), which, while small in size, still provide unique perspectives on the phenomena studied. The presence of the other category (1.6%) also indicates a small diversity of topics not included in the main classifications.

3.2 Results of Co-Occurrence Analysis

3.2.1 Density Visualization

Figure 4 shows a density visualization of keywords appearing in related publications. Yellow indicates high density, meaning the keyword appears frequently and is strongly connected to other keywords. Overall, this density map underscores that the research landscape is dominated by discussions of digital marketing in the small and medium enterprise sector, with close links to issues of digital transformation, social media, and innovation, supported by the development of e-commerce and the sustainability agenda.

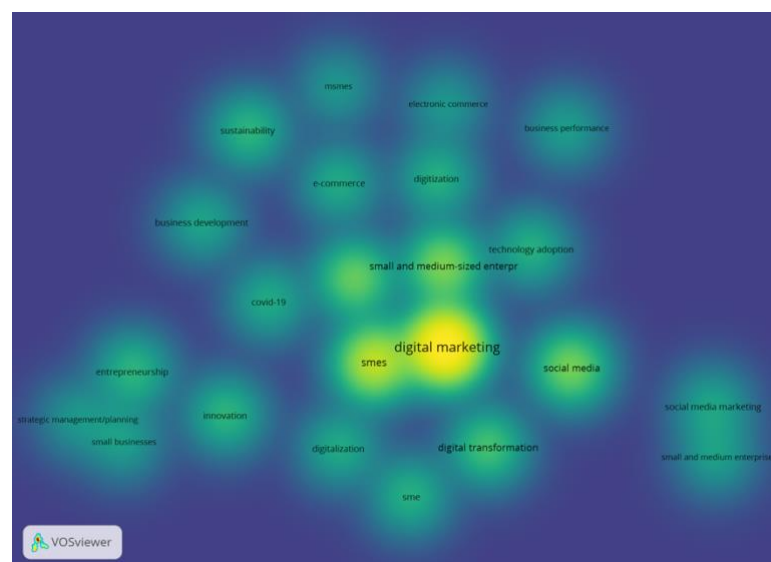


Figure 4: Density visualization

In this map, keywords “digital marketing” occupies the central position with the highest color intensity, indicating that this topic is the focus and is most frequently discussed in the collection of publications analyzed.

In addition, keywords such as “SMEs”, “social media”, “digital transformation”, and “small and medium-sized enterprises” also have a high-density level, representing themes that are often associated with digital marketing. Other keywords that have quite close relevance and connection include “innovation”, “technology adoption”, “e-commerce”, and “sustainability”, which show a multidisciplinary approach in research.

Some thematic keywords such as “covid-19”, “entrepreneurship”, and “business performance” emerged with moderate intensity, indicating that while not a primary focus, these topics provide important context, particularly in relation to changing business behavior and post-pandemic technology adoption.

3.2.2 Overlay Visualization

Figure 5 presents an overlay visualization which shows the temporal development of keywords used in publications related to the topic digital marketing in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The blue color represents the dominant keywords at the beginning of the research period (around 2020-2021), while the yellow color indicates the keywords that have emerged more recently and gained attention in recent years (2024-2025). Overall, this visualization not only maps the interrelationships between topics, but also reveals the evolution of research directions, from a rapid response to the challenges of the pandemic to the use of digital technology as a key pillar of SME development and competitiveness in the post-pandemic era.

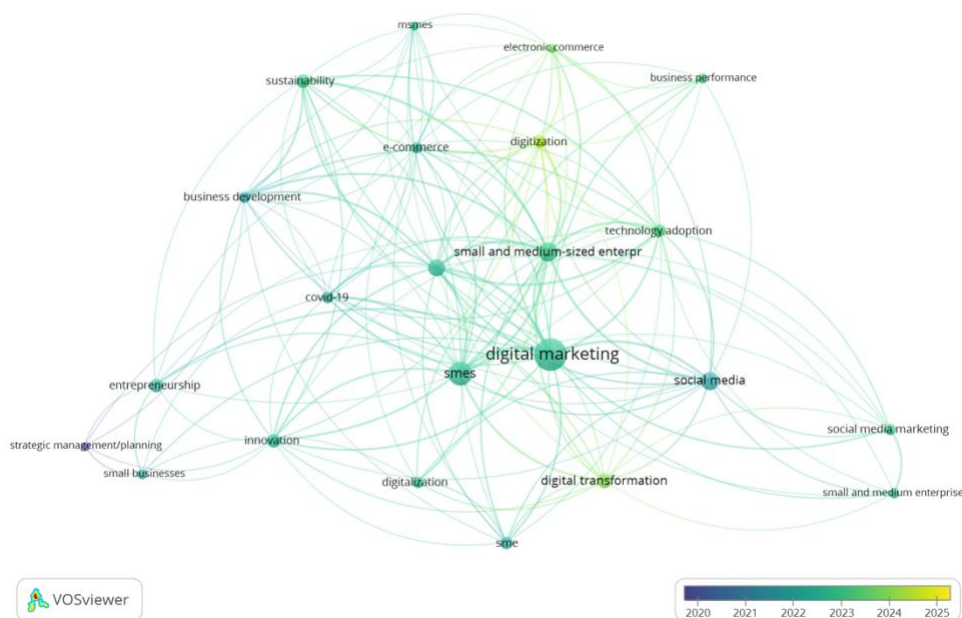


Figure 5: Overlay visualization

Core keywords such as “digital marketing”, “SMEs”, and “social media” have the largest node size, indicating high frequency of occurrence and extensive connectivity with other keywords. Temporal trends show that topics such as “innovation”, “entrepreneurship”, and “covid-19” widely used in the initial period, in line with the dynamics of business changes during the pandemic.

Entering a newer period, there is an increase in attention to keywords “digital transformation”, “technology adoption”, “sustainability”, and “business performance”. This shift indicates a shift in research focus from initial

adaptation to digitalization to long-term strategies that integrate technology, sustainability, and business performance.

3.2.3 Network Visualization

Figure 6 shows network visualization which maps the relationships between keywords into four main cluster themes. Each cluster represents research focuses that are interrelated but have different study emphases.

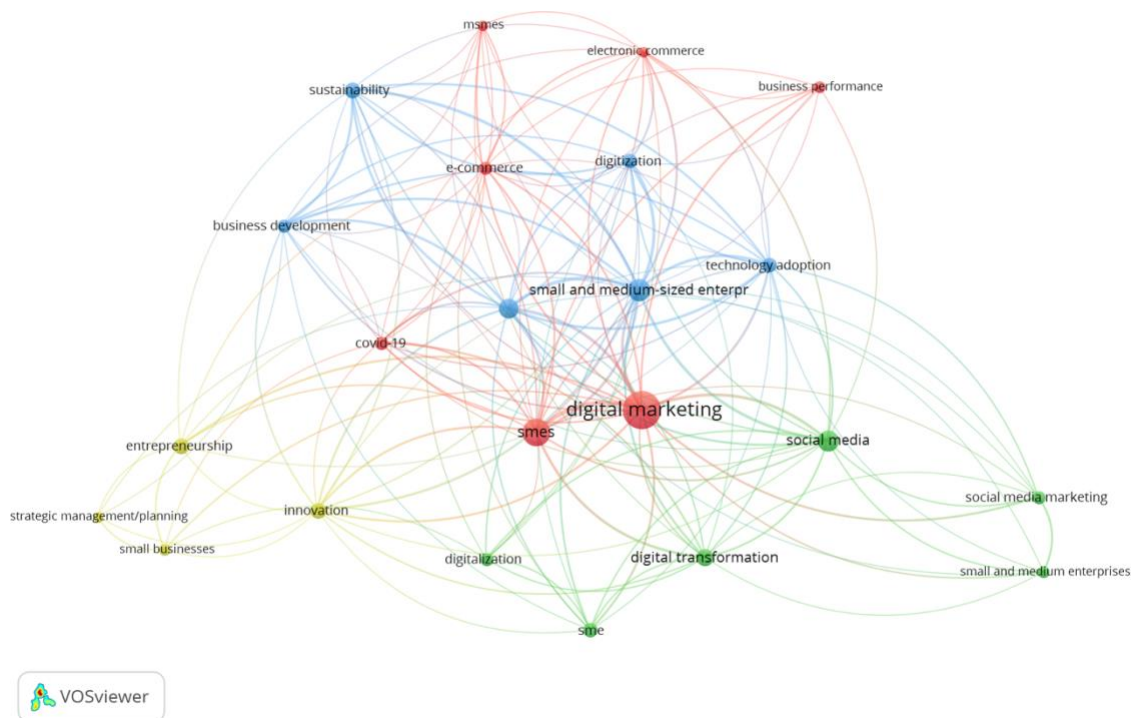


Figure 6: Network visualization

Cluster 1 consists of keywords such as digital marketing, SMEs, MSMEs, e-commerce, electronic commerce, business performance, and covid-19. This cluster describes the research focus on the role of digital marketing and e-commerce in supporting SME business performance, particularly in the context of the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The close correlation between keywords indicates that studies in this cluster tend to highlight digital adaptation strategies to maintain and improve business performance.

Cluster 2 covers digital transformation, digitalization, social media, social media marketing, small and medium enterprises, and the primary focus of this cluster is digital transformation and the use of social media as a marketing channel, which are essential components of modern business strategy. The strong correlation between keywords indicates that research in this area has extensively explored the integration of digital technology into SME operations and marketing strategies.

Cluster 3 consists of business development, digitization, marketing, small and medium-sized enterprise, sustainability, and technology adoption. This cluster focuses on sustainable business development through the adoption of innovative technology and marketing strategies. Keyword dominance sustainability shows a shift in academic attention towards the integration of sustainability principles in the development of technology-based SMEs.

Cluster 4 is related to entrepreneurship, innovation, small businesses, and strategic management/planning. The primary focus of this cluster is on entrepreneurship, innovation, and strategic planning as drivers of small business

competitiveness. The observed relationships indicate that innovation and strategic management are seen as essential foundations for supporting business sustainability and growth in the digital age.

Overall, this network map provides a comprehensive overview of the research landscape related to digital marketing in SMEs, showing how core topics interact and form four complementary areas of study. This analysis also helps identify potential research gaps, particularly at the intersections between clusters which connect sustainability issues, digital transformation, and business performance. The categorization in Table 2 could show how the research is grouped by theme.

Table 2: Categorization of the cluster based on the colour coding

Cluster	Cluster title	Extracted keywords
Cluster 1 (Red)	Digital marketing in supporting SME business performance	Business performance, covid-19, digital marketing, e-commerce, electronic commerce, MSMEs, SMEs
Cluster 2 (Green)	Digital transformation and social media	Digital transformation, digitalization small and medium enterprises, SME, social media, social media marketing
Cluster 3 (Blue)	Sustainable business development and technology adoption	Business development, digitization marketing, small and medium-sized enterprise, sustainability, technology adoption
Cluster 4 (Yellow)	Entrepreneurship, innovation, and strategic planning	Entrepreneurship, innovation, small businesses, strategic management/planning

Description: This table presents the cluster categorization of the co-occurrence analysis results based on color coding in the network visualization. Each cluster is given a title reflecting the thematic focus of the research and is accompanied by a list of keywords extracted from the data.

4. Discussion

4.1 Main Research Cluster and Dominant Thematic Trends

Cluster 1 with the theme of digital marketing and e-commerce for msme performance. This cluster shows a close relationship between the use of digital marketing, e-commerce and improving business performance, especially amidst the challenges of the pandemic. Literature such as Aghazadeh et al. (2024) and Giantari et al. (2022) emphasizes that the ability to integrate digital marketing strategies with data analytics strengthens customer loyalty and expands markets. Bennacer et al. (2025) also show that investing in digital skills and adopting online platforms can improve operational efficiency and market reach, although barriers such as limited capital and digital literacy remain. This finding is consistent with bibliometric results that place the keywords “digital marketing” and “e-commerce” at the center of the network.

Cluster 2 with the theme of digital transformation and social media. This cluster highlights the role of social media as a key channel in the digital transformation strategy of MSMEs. Enshassi et al. (2025) study shows that the success of social media adoption is influenced by perceived usefulness and perceived ease-of-use, despite obstacles such as management resistance and resource constraints. Eze et al. (2023) added that the integration of digital technology into business operations not only increases visibility but also forms interactive relationships that strengthen brand image. This trend is clearly seen in the shift in research focus from a rapid response to the pandemic to a long-term, data-based strategy, and digital transformation.

Cluster 3 with the theme of sustainable business development and technology adoption. The focus of this cluster is how technology adoption supports sustainable business development. Studies such as Mladenova et al. (2025) and Haryanto & Sultoni (2024) emphasize that sustainability is now an integral part of MSME innovation strategies, particularly through the adoption of environmentally friendly technologies, energy efficiency, and digital supply chain optimization. However, as noted by Korcsmáros & Csinger (2022), the success of this strategy

is highly dependent on organizational readiness and public policy support. Bibliometric analysis shows that the keyword “sustainability” has a strong connection with “technology adoption” and “business development”.

Cluster 4 with the theme of entrepreneurship, innovation, and strategic planning. The final cluster focuses on the role of innovation and strategic management in maintaining the competitiveness of MSMEs in the digital era. Fodouop Kouam (2025) study emphasized the importance of continuous innovation and adaptive strategic planning to bridge the digital divide between MSMEs and large corporations. Ponomarenko et al. (2024) research also showed that a strong entrepreneurial orientation encourages more effective use of digital technology, thereby enhancing adaptability to market changes.

4.2 Strategic Insights

4.2.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings strengthen the literature on integration of digital marketing and digital transformation, as well as emphasis on the importance of an organization's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal competencies and external resources to respond to rapid environmental changes. In the context of MSMEs, Troise et al. (2022) showed that three key capabilities, namely digital technology capabilities, relational capabilities, and innovation capabilities, directly contribute to building organizational agility. This agility positively impacts financial performance as well as product and process innovation, proving that the use of digital technology not only increases competitiveness but also serves as a strategic foundation for the sustainability of MSME businesses amidst a turbulent business landscape. This capability is also reflected in the flexibility to adapt digital marketing strategies to market dynamics, utilize real-time customer feedback, and adopt new technologies to maintain relevance and competitiveness. This process is not only reactive but also proactive, where MSMEs need to anticipate market trends and changes in consumer behavior to create sustainable innovation.

In addition, the results of this study also indicate that technology adoption theory like Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is relevant to understanding the adoption behavior of social media and new technologies by MSMEs, especially in the context of developing countries. The two main constructs of TAM are: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease-of-use (PEOU), has been shown to be a determining factor driving digital technology adoption decisions by MSMEs (Enshassi et al., 2025; Eze et al., 2023). In developing countries, PU value is often influenced by technology's ability to expand markets and increase revenues, while PEOU is closely related to the availability of training, supporting infrastructure, and user interface simplicity. The integration of the dynamic capabilities perspective and TAM provides a more comprehensive conceptual framework: dynamic capabilities explain how organizations adapt, while TAM explains why individuals and organizations decide to adopt or reject technology.

Thus, the relationship between these two frameworks is crucial to explain the bibliometric results: clusters focused on digital transformation, technology adoption, and strategic innovation reflect the synergy between the need for continuous adaptation (dynamic capabilities) and the psychological-perceptual factors influencing technology acceptance (TAM). This integrated approach can serve as a strong theoretical foundation for designing policy interventions and managerial strategies that promote the success of MSMEs' digital transformation.

4.2.2 Practical Implications

For MSME practitioners, this research confirms that the success of digital transformation depends heavily on consistent investment in digital skills development and improvements to information technology infrastructure. Studies by Bennacer et al. (2025) and Aljabari et al. (2024) show that improving employee digital competency and technological infrastructure readiness directly impact operational efficiency, customer service quality, and market share expansion. These investments include not only hardware and software procurement but also ongoing training that can build confidence and adaptability in utilizing new technologies. Giantari et al. (2022) emphasize that without a strong foundation of digital skills, even the implementation of advanced technology will not deliver optimal results for business strategies.

Furthermore, the use of social media needs to be integrated with data analytics for more effective marketing strategies. Findings by Aghazadeh et al. (2024) and Eze et al. (2023) demonstrate that the right combination of social media and data analytics can provide real-time insights into consumer behavior, market trends, and campaign effectiveness. This approach enables MSMEs to craft more personalized marketing messages, optimize promotional budget allocations, and measure the impact of strategies. Utilizations ocial listening tools also allows businesses to detect changes in consumer preferences more quickly than conventional survey methods.

In the Indonesian context, Mulyana et al. (2020) emphasized that MSMEs have utilized social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp not only as low-cost marketing channels but also as strategic tools to strengthen brand image, build relationships with consumers, and encourage innovative practices. This finding aligns with bibliometric evidence demonstrating Indonesia's leading position in scientific publications on this topic, reflecting how empirical reality on the ground contributes to research output. The study also suggests that social media adoption enhances organizational agility and innovation capabilities in MSMEs, thus providing adaptive strength in facing a highly competitive business environment.

Moreover, sustainability principles need to be a core part of innovation planning, not just an add-on. Mladenova et al. (2025) and Korcsmáros & Csinger (2022) emphasize that integrating sustainability aspects such as energy efficiency, waste reduction, and implementing green supply chains not only meets regulatory and ethical demands but also serves as a source of competitive advantage increasingly appreciated by consumers. Haryanto & Sultoni (2024) adds that today's digital consumers increasingly prioritize brands that consistently demonstrate a commitment to sustainability in every aspect of their products, services, and operations.

Meanwhile, for policymakers, these results highlight the urgency of developing digital literacy training programs specifically tailored to the needs of MSMEs, encompassing basic to advanced skills in digital marketing, data analytics, and cybersecurity. Enshassi et al. (2025) emphasize that such training programs can overcome resistance to technology adoption while improving perceived ease of use. In addition, technology adoption incentives are needed, such as equipment subsidies, tax breaks, or access to soft financing schemes to support digital investment, as proposed by Berbatovci & Buja (2024) to accelerate technology penetration in the MSME sector. Policies that support sustainable innovation are also crucial, including pro-environmental regulations, support for applied research, and strengthening public-private partnerships to develop environmentally friendly digital solutions. This is in line with the findings of Ponomarenko et al. (2024) who emphasize the important role of the government in building an innovative ecosystem that is inclusive, sustainable, and adaptive to technological developments.

4.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides a comprehensive overview of publication trends related to digitalization, social media, and strategic innovation in MSMEs, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the data scope is limited to English-language publications indexed in the Scopus database. This situation has the potential to lead to language bias and database bias. Thus, the research may not fully reflect the contributions of relevant local or non-English language literature. As noted by Donthu et al. (2021), the limitation of a single database source can affect the representation of findings and overlook important contextual perspectives, particularly from developing countries. This is relevant because several studies in the reference folder, such as Giantari et al. (2022) and Hadiyati et al. (2024), indicate that local publications often contain more applicable insights regarding MSME practices at the regional level.

Second, the analytical approach used in this study is descriptive, meaning the results focus more on mapping the research landscape than testing causal relationships between variables. This approach is indeed appropriate for the purpose of scientific mapping but does not allow for conclusions to be drawn regarding the direct influence between factors as suggested by Bennacer et al. (2025) and Eze et al. (2023) in their quantitative studies. This limitation opens opportunities for further research to combine bibliometrics with inferential analysis methods or structural equation modeling to verify the relationship between variables such as technology adoption, business performance, and sustainability.

Third, the selection of keywords in search string. Even though it is designed comprehensively, it still has risks keyword omission bias. Some themes that may be relevant, such as the integration of artificial intelligence in MSME marketing or the role of platform economy in digital transformation, may not yet be fully addressed. Studies such as Aghazadeh et al. (2024) and Berbatovci & Buja (2024) emphasize the importance of these themes, so further analysis should consider them in research design.

For further research, it is recommended to expand the databases used, for example by combining Scopus with Web of Science or Dimensions, as recommended by Kumar et al. (2020) to increase the coverage and validity of the results. In addition, the integration of approaches systematic literature review can provide analytical depth by identifying and critically evaluating key literature in each cluster. Future research could also explore the intersections between clusters identified in the bibliometric results, for example, the relationship between sustainability (Cluster 3) and digital business performance (Cluster 1), or between strategic innovation (Cluster 4) and social media utilization (Cluster 2). Studies such as Mladenova et al. (2025) and Ponomarenko et al. (2024) showed that the intersections between these themes are often the most dynamic areas of MSME innovation. An empirical approach with cross-country case studies could also enrich understanding of how different social, economic, and cultural contexts influence digitalization adoption in MSMEs.

Additionally, descriptive results by country indicate that Indonesia dominates the number of publications on the topics of digitalization, social media, and strategic innovation in MSMEs, far surpassing other countries such as Malaysia and India. This fact indicates that the Indonesian academic ecosystem is very active in highlighting the dynamics of MSME digital transformation, in line with the rapid growth of social media users and increasing government policies encouraging economic digitalization. However, the dominance of publications from one country also raises questions about global representation in this field. Therefore, future research directions could further examine the factors driving research productivity in Indonesia and compare them with other countries. This cross-country comparative approach is important to understand whether MSME digitalization trends are contextual or universal, as confirmed by literature such as Eze et al. (2023) and Berbatovci & Buja (2024), which show significant variations in technology readiness and digital adoption strategies across regions. Thus, future research will not only enrich the global academic perspective but also provide practical insights into how national contexts influence the direction and success of MSME digital transformation.

5. Conclusion

This article shows that research on digitalization, social media, and strategic innovation in MSMEs has experienced a significant increase, especially after the pandemic period, with a strong focus on digital marketing, social media-based digital transformation, technology adoption for sustainability, and entrepreneurship and strategic planning. Co-occurrence visualization confirms four complementary thematic clusters: from the role of digital marketing and e-commerce on business performance, to the integration of digital transformation, technology adoption, and innovation orientation as the foundation of MSME competitiveness in the digital economy era.

Conceptually and practically, these findings confirm that strengthening digital literacy, business model innovation, and policy support are prerequisites for MSMEs to not simply “use” technology, but to be able to orchestrate technology and social media as strategic capabilities for performance and sustainability. On the other hand, the limited scope (Scopus database and English-language publications) and the predominantly descriptive nature of the analysis open up opportunities for further research, such as expanding the database, deepening systematic reviews in each cluster, examining relationships between themes (for example sustainability and digital performance), and cross-country comparative studies to more fully capture the varied contexts of MSME digital adoption.

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Kurniawan Prasetyo; Data Curation, Andi Pajolloi Bate; Writing - Original Draft Preparation, Kurniawan Prasetyo; Writing - Review & Editing, Kurniawan Prasetyo and Andi Pajolloi Bate; Visualization, Kurniawan Prasetyo; Supervision, Kurniawan Prasetyo; Project Administration, Andi Pajolloi Bate & Haekal Fajri Amrullah; Funding Acquisition, Not applicable.

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Emotional Political Branding and Hybrid Campaigning in a Young Democracy: Evidence from Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election

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Abstract

This study examines the personal branding strategies of Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka in Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election, focusing on the integration of digital campaigning and conventional political practices. The pairing is particularly significant due to Gibran's position as a millennial vice-presidential candidate, which situates the campaign within broader debates on political communication and youth electoral engagement. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research was conducted in Semarang City, Central Java. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation of digital campaign activities, and analysis of campaign-related documents and social media content, and were analyzed thematically using data and methodological triangulation. The findings demonstrate that Prabowo–Gibran's personal branding was constructed through a hybrid campaign strategy that combined digital media outreach with face-to-face political mobilization. The emotional “gemoy” narrative functioned as a key symbolic device to reposition Prabowo's political image as more approachable and inclusive for Millennial and Generation Z voters. At the same time, Gibran's candidacy embodied symbolic millennial representation in national politics, generating both enthusiasm and ambivalence regarding political competence and legitimacy. Social media—particularly the X (Twitter) platform—emerged as a central arena for shaping public perceptions and facilitating digital political engagement. This study argues that effective personal branding in contemporary electoral politics depends not merely on digital campaign intensity, but on the strategic integration of digital and conventional approaches and the management of generational representation within democratic processes.

Keywords: Personal Branding, Hybrid Campaign, Digital Political Communication, Millennial Voters, 2024 Presidential Election

1. Introduction

Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election marks a significant shift in national political dynamics, particularly in campaign practices and modes of political communication. One of the most publicly debated developments was

the nomination of Gibran Rakabuming Raka as the youngest vice-presidential candidate in Indonesia's electoral history. His candidacy was enabled by Constitutional Court of Indonesia Decision No. 90/PUU-XXI/2023, a ruling that generated diverse public responses, ranging from optimism regarding youth representation in national politics to critical concerns over political process and legitimacy.

At the same time, the 2024 election unfolded within a demographic context distinct from previous electoral cycles. Data from the General Elections Commission (KPU) indicate that Millennials and Generation Z constitute the majority of eligible voters nationwide. Given these generations' strong attachment to digital technologies and social media platforms, online spaces have increasingly become central arenas for political opinion formation, campaign information dissemination, and political engagement (Domínguez-García et al., 2025; Venus et al., 2025).

These developments have compelled political candidates and campaign teams to adapt their communication strategies. Political campaigns no longer rely solely on conventional, face-to-face mobilization but increasingly integrate social media, visual content, and popular narratives to resonate with younger voters (Syukur et al., 2025). Within this context, personal branding has emerged as a crucial strategy for constructing distinctive political images aligned with voters' preferences. While digital technologies offer opportunities to enhance political participation and electoral legitimacy, they also pose risks to electoral integrity when not governed by transparent and accountable practices (Borz & De Francesco, 2024).

Although scholarly attention to digital campaigning and political branding has grown, much of the existing literature continues to emphasize general patterns of social media use. Previous studies suggest that social media is particularly effective as a campaign tool for younger candidates (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016) and plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and expanding political participation (Vera Hermawan, 2025). Research on the evolution of political branding in Indonesia has largely focused on shifts toward digital communication, often without in-depth engagement with emotional dimensions of personal branding (Adila & Eddyono, 2025). Empirical studies that specifically examine emotional personal branding within a hybrid campaign framework and youth representation at the local level remain relatively limited.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to analyze hybrid campaign strategies, emotional personal branding, and millennial representation in the Prabowo–Gibran campaign during Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election in Semarang City. By doing so, this research contributes to political communication scholarship by elucidating how political personal branding operates within hybrid campaigns and interacts with the dynamics of young voters in contemporary Indonesian electoral politics.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Campaign Strategy and Hybrid Campaigns in Political Communication

Studies on political campaign strategies have evolved alongside changes in the political communication landscape. Campaign strategies are no longer understood merely as technical efforts to win electoral contests, but as broader political communication processes involving the interaction of political actors, messages, media, and audiences in an integrated manner (Kioussis, n.d.). Political communication encompasses complex relationships between political communicators, the messages they convey, the channels through which communication occurs, and the resulting effects on public opinion formation and candidates' political images (Ray, 2022). Within this framework, campaign strategy functions as an organizing mechanism for managing political messages in ways that align with voters' characteristics and preferences.

With the increasing penetration of digital technologies, campaign strategies have shifted toward more flexible and adaptive forms. A growing body of research suggests that contemporary political campaigns increasingly adopt hybrid approaches, combining digital campaigning through social media with conventional practices such as face-to-face meetings and grassroots outreach (Dewantari et al., 2025). Hybrid campaigns are considered effective because they allow candidates to reach diverse voter segments, including digitally active voters as well as groups

that still rely on direct interpersonal interaction. Nevertheless, much of the existing scholarship continues to emphasize the effectiveness of social media as a campaign tool, while the dynamics of integrating digital and conventional strategies—particularly within local political contexts—remain underexplored.

2.2. Political Personal Branding in Digital Campaigns

Within political communication literature, personal branding has become a key concept for understanding how political actors construct identity and differentiation in competitive electoral environments. Political branding functions as a mechanism for establishing emotional connections between candidates and voters through the strategic use of images, narratives, and symbols (Scammell, 2007). Through personal branding, candidates are not only recognized for their policy programs and ideas, but also for personal characteristics deliberately constructed and communicated in the public sphere.

The rise of digital media has further intensified the role of personal branding in political campaigns. Social media platforms provide candidates with opportunities to present themselves in more personal, visual, and interactive ways, thereby expanding the scope of political communication. Previous studies indicate that effective personal branding is often supported by emotional narratives, informal communication styles, and popular symbols that resonate easily with audiences (Fuaddah et al., 2025). However, much of the existing research still prioritizes candidates' visibility and popularity on social media, while the emotional dimension of personal branding—particularly within a hybrid campaign framework—has received relatively limited scholarly attention, especially in local electoral contexts.

2.3. Millennial and Generation Z Voters and Social Media

Changes in campaign strategies cannot be separated from shifts in voter demographics. Millennials and Generation Z are commonly understood as voter groups that have grown up in digital environments and maintain strong attachments to social media as primary sources of political information. Numerous studies suggest that young voters are more responsive to political messages delivered through digital platforms using visual, narrative, and interactive formats. Indeed, younger generations often develop their political orientations through digital media and social networks rather than through conventional political institutions (Loader et al., 2014).

The dominance of young voters in the national electorate has encouraged candidates and campaign teams to adjust their political communication strategies accordingly. Social media functions not only as a channel for information dissemination, but also as a space for political identity formation, public discussion, and political participation (Bossetta, 2018). Nevertheless, the literature also notes that increased political engagement among young voters does not necessarily correspond with deeper understanding of policy issues (Theocharis, 2015). This condition highlights an inherent tension between the symbolic representation of youth in politics and normative demands for candidates' competence and political legitimacy.

2.4. Research Gap and Study Positioning

Based on the review of existing scholarship, it can be concluded that studies on digital campaigning, political personal branding, and young voters have developed substantially. However, there remains a notable gap in research that specifically examines emotional personal branding within a hybrid campaign framework, particularly at the local level and in relation to millennial representation. Moreover, many studies tend to analyze digital and conventional campaigns as separate phenomena, without sufficiently addressing how these strategies interact in contemporary political practice (Bracciale & Cepernich, 2018).

This study positions itself to address these gaps by analyzing hybrid campaign strategies, emotional personal branding, and millennial representation in the Prabowo–Gibran campaign during Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election in Semarang City. By doing so, the research contributes to political communication scholarship by offering contextual insights into how political personal branding operates within hybrid campaigns and how such strategies are perceived by young voters at the local level.

2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design to provide an in-depth analysis of the personal branding strategies employed by Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka in Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of political communication dynamics, campaign strategies, and voter perceptions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement (Karpf et al., 2015). The case study design enables a contextualized and detailed examination of the phenomenon within a specific political setting.

The research was conducted in Semarang, Central Java Province. The selection of this site was based on three considerations. First, Semarang is an urban area with a substantial proportion of Millennial and Generation Z voters in the 2024 election. Second, as a provincial capital, the city exhibits relatively complex and strategic political dynamics. Third, Semarang has been identified as an area with relatively high electoral vulnerability, making it a relevant context for examining variations in campaign strategies and political engagement. In the 2024 Presidential Election, Semarang had 4,646 polling stations across 16 districts, with a total of 1,239,669 registered voters. Official vote recapitulation indicates that the Prabowo–Gibran ticket received the highest number of votes in the city compared to other candidates, reflecting a competitive electoral environment and reinforcing Semarang's relevance as a case study.

This research focuses on three main analytical dimensions. First, it examines the hybrid campaign strategies of the Prabowo–Gibran ticket, particularly the integration of digital campaigning via social media with conventional campaign practices in reaching diverse voter segments in Semarang. Second, it analyzes emotional personal branding, specifically the “gemoy” narrative disseminated through digital campaigns and its role in reconstructing candidates' political images to appeal to Millennial and Generation Z voters. Third, it explores millennial representation and patterns of young voter political engagement, focusing on how the presence of a millennial vice-presidential candidate is interpreted by young voters and how digital media shapes their political participation and preferences in the 2024 election.

Data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from open-ended responses collected from 20 young voters aged 18–23, all of whom were university students. Based on voting experience, the majority were first-time voters (16 respondents), followed by second-time voters (3 respondents) and voters with three or more voting experiences (1 respondent). Secondary data were drawn from official election documents, online media coverage, campaign materials, and social media content related to campaign activities. These sources were used to contextualize the analysis and enrich the interpretation of young voters' perceptions of campaign strategies.

Data collection was conducted through non-participant observation and documentation. Non-participant observation focused on digital campaign activities across multiple social media platforms, including X (Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram, as well as relevant online news coverage. Documentation involved the systematic collection of written, visual, and digital materials directly related to the research focus.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis within an interactive qualitative framework. The analytical process involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Observational and documentary data were systematically coded to identify recurring patterns and key themes related to hybrid campaign strategies, emotional personal branding, and political engagement among Millennial and Generation Z voters. These themes were subsequently interpreted to explain how political personal branding was constructed, disseminated, and understood by young voters in the context of the 2024 Presidential Election.

To ensure data credibility and validity, this study employed data triangulation and methodological triangulation (Patton, 1999). Primary data from young voters' open-ended responses were cross-checked with findings from non-participant observation and documentary analysis, allowing for verification across sources and methods. Data triangulation involved collecting information from multiple sources, including voter responses, official election documents, online media reports, campaign materials, and social media content across platforms. Methodological

triangulation was achieved by combining open-ended responses, non-participant observation, and documentation to examine the same analytical focus. This triangulated approach minimized researcher bias and strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Hybrid Campaign Strategies: Integrating Digital Media and Conventional Political Outreach

Based on field data, this study finds that campaign strategies in Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election exhibited a significant shift compared to previous electoral cycles, particularly through the intensified use of digital technologies and social media to engage Millennial and Generation Z voters. This transformation reflects a broader reconfiguration of political campaigning, in which traditional campaign practices are no longer abandoned but are strategically integrated with digital approaches. The 2024 campaign landscape was characterized by increased reliance on social media, more personalized and targeted political communication, and an emphasis on future-oriented issues relevant to younger voters, such as digitalization, post-pandemic economic recovery, and sustainability. These developments were reinforced by the demographic dominance of Millennial and Gen Z voters, as well as the presence of a millennial candidate within the presidential ticket.

Despite the growing prominence of digital campaigning, the findings indicate that conventional strategies—particularly *blusukan* (direct grassroots visits)—remained an integral component of the campaign. This approach was primarily maintained to reach segments of the population with limited access to digital media. The coexistence of these strategies demonstrates that campaigning in the 2024 election operated within a hybrid model, combining the extensive reach of digital platforms with the interpersonal proximity offered by face-to-face engagement. Digital campaigns, especially on platforms such as X (Twitter), were found to enhance political awareness and engagement among young voters, who not only consumed political information but also actively participated in online political discourse and voluntary campaign activities. In this sense, the 2024 election campaign functioned not merely as a mechanism for vote mobilization, but also as a space for expanding digital political participation.

At the same time, the continued reliance on *blusukan* underscores that contemporary political campaigns in Indonesia have not fully displaced traditional modes of political communication. Instead, digital tools are deployed alongside conventional strategies to accommodate heterogeneous voter segments. The effectiveness of the **Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka** campaign thus lay in its capacity to manage cross-generational communication through adaptive and inclusive campaign strategies.

This perception was consistently reflected in informant responses. Most participants emphasized that campaigns in the 2024 Presidential Election no longer relied exclusively on conventional methods but combined digital and face-to-face approaches. Social media was viewed as particularly effective for engaging young voters, while direct outreach remained relevant for other segments of society. As one informant noted:

“Campaigns nowadays mostly take place through social media, but there are still grassroots visits so that people who are not active on social media can also get to know the presidential candidates.” (Informant A)

This statement illustrates how hybrid campaigning was understood by voters as a pragmatic combination of digital outreach and direct interaction. Social media functioned as the primary channel for digitally active voters, while *blusukan* ensured inclusivity by reaching communities with limited digital access. These findings align with existing scholarship on hybrid campaigning, which highlights the strategic integration of online and offline practices as a defining feature of contemporary electoral politics. In the Indonesian context, this integration appears particularly salient in managing generational diversity and uneven digital access, reinforcing the adaptive nature of political communication in the 2024 Presidential Election.

3.2. Emotional Personal Branding and the Reconstruction of Political Image through the “Gemoy” Narrative

The findings indicate that the personal branding of the Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka ticket in the 2024 Presidential Election was strongly constructed through an emotional narrative popularly referred to as “gemoy.” Field data suggest that this branding strategy effectively differentiated the ticket from competing candidates, particularly in attracting the attention of Millennial and Generation Z voters. The “gemoy” narrative was widely perceived as symbolizing approachability, simplicity, and a more relaxed orientation toward politics. This emotional framing was disseminated through a variety of visual and digital formats, including memes, cartoon-style illustrations, short videos, and easily recognizable campaign symbols that were highly shareable across social media platforms.

Informants consistently reported that such content was more accessible and engaging for young voters than formal or policy-oriented campaign messages. Social media platforms—especially TikTok and X (Twitter)—emerged as the primary channels for circulating and reinforcing this emotional image. These findings align with broader arguments in political communication scholarship that emphasize the growing importance of affective appeals and visual storytelling in contemporary electoral campaigns.

Importantly, the “gemoy” branding contributed to a notable reconstruction of Prabowo Subianto’s political image. Previously perceived as stern, militaristic, and socially distant, Prabowo was re-presented through this emotional narrative as a more approachable and relatable political figure. Informants interpreted this shift as a deliberate strategy to soften his public persona and align it more closely with the sensibilities of younger voters. As one participant explained:

“The ‘gemoy’ campaign feels more relaxed and closer to young people, not as rigid as political campaigns usually are.” (Informant B)

This perception suggests that emotional personal branding succeeded in creating symbolic proximity between the candidates and young voters through informal communication styles and consistent visual and performative expressions across both online and offline campaign activities. Moreover, the effectiveness of the “gemoy” narrative was amplified by the involvement of public figures, social media influencers, and digital volunteers who voluntarily reproduced and circulated campaign content. This indicates that personal branding during the 2024 election was not solely orchestrated by official campaign teams but also evolved organically through participatory dynamics within digital supporter communities.

3.3. Youth Representation, Digital Political Engagement, and Ambivalent Voter Perceptions

The study further reveals that the presence of **Gibran Rakabuming Raka** as a millennial vice-presidential candidate was widely perceived by young voters as a form of generational representation in national political contestation. Field data show that Gibran’s age distinction relative to other candidates attracted the attention of Millennial and Generation Z voters and generated expectations of renewed political communication styles and policy agendas more attuned to youth concerns. This sentiment is reflected in one informant’s statement:

“As a young person, I feel represented, but I still expect leaders to genuinely have the capacity—not just be young.” (Informant C)

This response illustrates that generational representation was largely understood in symbolic terms, while simultaneously accompanied by rational expectations regarding competence, experience, and leadership quality. Age alone was not regarded as a sufficient basis for political support.

At the same time, the findings highlight ambivalent perceptions among young voters. While Gibran’s candidacy was viewed as an opportunity for greater youth representation, it also elicited skepticism concerning political competence and the legitimacy of the nomination process. Some informants explicitly linked these concerns to public controversies surrounding Constitutional Court of Indonesia Decision No. 90/PUU-XXI/2023, which enabled his candidacy. This ambivalence suggests that generational representation does not automatically translate into political legitimacy in the absence of perceived independence, merit, and institutional credibility.

The findings also demonstrate that young voters' political engagement during the 2024 election was predominantly mediated through digital spaces. Informants reported that Millennials and Gen Z primarily accessed political information via social media and short-form digital content, such as brief videos, memes, and viral campaign narratives. This mode of engagement fostered high levels of online political participation, including discussion, critique, support, and content redistribution. However, such engagement was not always accompanied by in-depth understanding of policy platforms.

Taken together, these findings indicate that political participation among Millennial and Generation Z voters in the 2024 election was highly active in digital terms but remained strongly influenced by imagery, symbols, and generational representation rather than systematic policy evaluation. Digital media thus functioned not merely as channels of political information, but as central arenas for the formation of political identity and preference among young voters. This dynamic underscores the growing significance of affective and representational politics in shaping youth engagement within contemporary electoral democracies.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election represents a significant transformation in political communication, particularly through the adoption of hybrid campaign strategies that integrate digital media with conventional political practices. These results reinforce the argument that digitalization does not fully replace traditional forms of political engagement but instead complements them in reaching heterogeneous voter segments. Digital campaigns proved effective in engaging Millennial and Generation Z voters, who are commonly characterized as digital natives. At the same time, the persistence of *blusukan* (grassroots, face-to-face outreach) underscores the continued relevance of interpersonal political communication, especially for communities with limited access to digital technologies. This finding aligns with prior studies emphasizing that campaign effectiveness in developing democracies is shaped by candidates' capacity to combine modern communication tools with locally embedded political practices (Bracciale & Cepernich, 2018).

The discussion of the "gemoy" personal branding strategy further demonstrates that contemporary political campaigns increasingly rely on emotional and symbolic dimensions in constructing candidate images. Rather than functioning solely as a differentiation strategy, emotional branding serves as a mechanism for reconstructing political identity to align with the cultural preferences of younger voters. The use of memes, cartoon-style visuals, and lighthearted narratives reflects a shift from programmatic, policy-centered communication toward affective political communication. These findings support arguments that political personal branding becomes more effective when embedded in popular culture and digital communication practices, particularly among younger voters who tend to respond more strongly to visual cues and simplified narratives (Izzeldin Malik, 2011). Informants' perceptions of the "gemoy" campaign as relaxed and approachable suggest that emotional branding operates not only as a campaign tactic, but also as an adaptive response to the affective orientations of Millennial and Generation Z voters in digital environments.

The presence of Gibran Rakabuming Raka as a millennial political figure reflects an effort to symbolically represent younger generations within national politics. However, the findings reveal that symbolic representation alone does not automatically generate strong political legitimacy. While young voters expressed a sense of generational representation, they simultaneously articulated critical assessments of candidates' competence and the nomination process. Moreover, political participation among Millennial and Gen Z voters during the 2024 election was largely digitally mediated and highly active online, yet not consistently oriented toward substantive policy evaluation. This pattern highlights a paradox of digital political participation: high levels of online engagement do not necessarily correspond with deeper political understanding. Social media thus functions not only as an information channel, but also as a key arena for shaping political identity and preference through imagery, symbols, and affective cues. These findings suggest that youth representation in contemporary campaigns is inherently ambivalent—capable of fostering emotional proximity while remaining contingent on perceptions of competence, leadership capacity, and political autonomy.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the personal branding strategy of the Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka ticket in Indonesia’s 2024 Presidential Election was constructed through a hybrid campaign model that integrated digital media with conventional campaign practices. This integration enabled the candidates to engage diverse voter segments, particularly Millennial and Generation Z voters active in digital spaces, while maintaining interpersonal proximity with communities facing limited access to digital technologies. The findings confirm that emotional personal branding, articulated through the “gemoy” narrative, played a central role in reconstructing Prabowo Subianto’s political image as more inclusive, approachable, and relevant to younger voters. This narrative functioned not only as a strategy of candidate differentiation, but also as a medium for fostering affective closeness, amplified by the participation of digital communities, volunteers, and social media influencers.

Furthermore, the presence of Gibran Rakabuming Raka as a millennial vice-presidential candidate created symbolic representation of youth within national political contestation. However, the study also reveals ambivalent perceptions among young voters, indicating that generational representation does not automatically translate into political legitimacy without accompanying perceptions of competence, independence, and leadership capacity. Political participation among Millennial and Generation Z voters in the 2024 election was predominantly digitally active, yet remained more strongly influenced by imagery, symbols, and visual narratives than by systematic policy evaluation.

Conceptually, this study contributes to political communication scholarship by underscoring that the effectiveness of personal branding in contemporary elections is not determined solely by the intensity of digital campaigning. Rather, it depends on candidates’ ability to manage the interaction between digital strategies, conventional political practices, and the dynamics of generational representation. These findings open avenues for future research to further examine the long-term implications of emotionally driven, digitally mediated campaigns for democratic quality and voter behavior in Indonesia and other emerging democracies.

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The Relationship Between Indonesia and Malaysia: An Overview of Historical, Artistic and Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

The close relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia in historical, artistic, and cultural contexts demonstrates that Indonesia can be considered the mainstream of Malaysian culture. Historically, for example, the territory of present-day Malaysia was once part of the Srivijaya Kingdom in South Sumatra (7th century) and the Majapahit Kingdom in Java (14th century). The impact of these historical events has resulted in numerous social and cultural similarities between Indonesians and Malaysians, especially in regions geographically close to Malaysia, such as Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Java. In these regions, not only do intense socio-cultural ties exist but also blood ties. Many Malaysian kings, officials, and religious scholars are descended from Sumatra, Java, and Sulawesi. Historically, the long-standing relationship between the Indonesian and Malaysian peoples has led to several cultural similarities between Indonesia and Malaysia. It would be more accurate to say that some Malaysian culture is Indonesian, or some Indonesian culture is Malaysian. The many similarities between Malaysian and Indonesian culture have given rise to the term "sisterhood" often used by Malaysians to refer to Indonesia as "sisters of the same race."

Keywords: Indonesia – Malaysia Relations, Heritage, History, Art, Culture

1. Introduction

The geographical position of Indonesia and Tanah Melayu has an important meaning in the early relationship between the two countries. Both countries are located along the trade route between China and India since ancient times. This position has caused the regions of both countries to be influenced by India and China. The influence of the two civilizations can be seen in the culture, society and religion of the local people. Indian influence is found in the art, architecture, literature and customs of the people before the arrival of Islam in the 13th century. Hinduism and Buddhism are the religions practiced by the majority of people in the Indonesian Archipelago and the Malay Peninsula. This is evidenced by the existence of temples in Sumatra, Java and the Malay Peninsula. Chinese influence is more on the political aspect. Kingdoms in the Malay world such as Sriwijaya, Majapahit and Malacca once had diplomatic relations with China.

The geographical position of the Tanah Melayu Peninsula which is located adjacent to the Indonesian archipelago, especially Sumatra and Java, has caused the population on the Peninsula to be more influenced by the culture of

the Indonesian archipelago, compared to the culture of mainland Southeast Asia (Thailand and Indochina). The Strait of Malacca is a strait located between the east coast of Sumatra and the west coast of the Tanah Melayu Peninsula, which is an important sea route for East-West trade relations or India-China trade. Trade activities in this strait have advanced the kingdoms along the strait such as Palembang, Kedah, Melayu (Jambi) and Malacca (Sar Desai, 1980).

Trade interests have led to the emergence of large maritime-style kingdoms such as Sriwijaya and Malacca. With this, the geographical position of Indonesia and Malay Land has played an important role in relations between the two regions, especially in terms of trade development and cultural development. There are several important similarities that stand out in the early relations between the two countries. These similarities can be seen from the aspects of nationality, language, religion and culture. In terms of ethnicity, the indigenous people of Indonesia and Malaysia are known as Indonesians or Malays (Tate, 1977). The indigenous people of Malaysia and Indonesia generally come from the same ethnic group, namely the Mongoloid group which originates from the Yunnan region in southern China. They came to Southeast Asia around 2500 BC. The Malays came to Southeast Asia in two waves. The first wave was a group known as the Proto Malays and the second group was known as the Deutero Malays. The difference in the arrival time of the Proto Malay and Deutero Malay has a time difference of 2000 years (Vlekke, 1967:9-10).

Population migration in Southeast Asia is a phenomenon that has been going on since humans arrived in this region. Migration has always occurred between the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra, Sumatra and Java, Java and the Malay Peninsula and so on. Because they come from the same ethnic group, their migration from one country to another in this region is not considered as migration abroad but as migration from one village to another.

The Malay people in the Malay Archipelago are maritime societies. As a maritime society, they sail to all corners of the region. As a result, their language, namely Malay, has become the lingua franca in this archipelago. In fact, this language is only spoken by residents in several parts of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. Malay received extraordinary encouragement to develop as a lingua franca due to the development of trade and ports in the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. These trading centers have become meeting places for people from all over Southeast Asia. The use of Malay has united almost all ethnic groups in Indonesia (Vlekke, 1967:12).

In terms of religion, there are similarities between Indonesia and Malaysia. Compared to other countries in Southeast Asia, Islam is an influential and dominant religion in the lives of people in both regions. In terms of belief, Islam is an element that distinguishes the people of Tanah Melayu and Indonesia from the people of other Southeast Asians. This is because the majority of the population of mainland Southeast Asia are Buddhists and Catholics in the Philippine Islands.

In terms of culture, Tanah Melayu and Indonesia received many elements from Indian culture, but elements of Indian culture are more visible in Indonesian culture, especially in architecture and carving. In examining the early relationship, there are similarities in the cultural aspects between the two countries. Because of its geographical location on international trade routes, including trade routes between India and China, these two regions, Tanah Melayu and Indonesia, were greatly influenced by Indian and Arab cultures. In the end, many cultural products of the two nations, Indonesia and Malaysia, are a blend of local values and foreign elements such as Indian, Chinese and Arab influences. Examples are wayang (the Mahabharata story) and Zapin dance which are Arab influences (Sunarti, 2013a).

The development of Islam has had an important impact on the early relations between the two countries. Islam has become one of the unifying factors of the two nations. Compared to the Majapahit and Srivijaya eras, the relations between the two nations were increasingly close during the Malacca Sultanate in the 14th century, which was an Islamic Sultanate that played an important role in trade and the spread of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago. In addition, the occurrence of marriages between members of the royal family resulted in closer relations between one kingdom and another. Before the entry of British and Dutch colonialism in the Malay and Indonesian lands, the people of the two nations were politically connected by kingdoms that took turns influencing each other. Several large kingdoms in the past took turns controlling the same area, such as the power of the Aceh kingdom

which covered part of the Malay Peninsula, as well as the Riau Lingga kingdom whose territory reached the Johor region (Sunarti, 2013b).

The different concepts of national identity between Indonesia and Malaysia are apparent, yet they are interconnected. Indonesia, with its motto of *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), has successfully created a strong national identity. Conversely, Malaysia, with its National Cultural Principles (DKK), faces challenges due to its ethnic diversity and Article 153 of the Malaysian Constitution, which protects the privileges of Malays. The formation of national identity in Indonesia began in the early 20th century during the Dutch East Indies colonial period, with the organization of the independence movement and the use of the Indonesian language. Meanwhile, in Malaysia, the concept of National Cultural Principles remains difficult to implement due to its focus on Malay culture, in contrast to the *Rukun Negara* (State Principles), which consider all citizens equal (Fortuna Anwar, 2012).

Both countries have experienced colonisation and its associated legacies, such as cultural dislocation, cultural appropriation, and hybridity. European domination took root in Southeast Asia in the 19th century and imperialism reached its height at the beginning of the 20th century. During these centuries Indonesia was colonised by the Dutch, with brief interregnums by the British and the Japanese, and Malaya was colonised by the British, with a brief period of Japanese rule. Many have argued that postcoloniality and its associated colonial paradigms did not necessarily end at the moment independence was declared or obtained (Clark and Juliet Pietsch, 2014:11).

Since the 1950s, Malaysian films have been popular in Indonesia, and vice versa, Indonesian films have also been popular in Malaysia. During the Soeharto era, Indonesia and Malaysia collaborated on television broadcasts through the program "Titian Muhibah." Cultural relations between the two countries flourished in music and film, with figures such as P. Ramlee, Siti Nurhaliza, Sheila Majid, and Indonesian literary works becoming known in Malaysia. The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred innovation in cultural diplomacy with virtual events, seminars, and cultural festivals expanding audience reach. Creative industries, such as film and music, have become important sectors in cultural relations. ASEAN film festivals and musical collaborations promote the cultures of both countries (Fauzi, 2009).

2. Historical connection

Indonesian and Malaysian society are connected by kingdoms that alternately influence each other. Several large kingdoms in the past alternately controlled the same area, for example, the power of the Aceh kingdom covered part of the Malaysian Peninsula. Likewise with the Riau Lingga Kingdom, the territory of the Malacca Sultanate during its heyday also covered part of the island of Sumatra. Furthermore, several kingdoms in the Malaysian Peninsula region were founded by Indonesians, such as the Negeri Sembilan kingdom by the Minang people who had come to the Peninsula region since the early 16th century AD, then the Johor Sultanate by the Bugis people, as well as the Selangor Sultanate.

In the book *Sejarah Melayu* and a Malay epic, *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, the word "Melayu" is explicitly associated with Sumatra and in Tome Pires' book, *Suma Oriental* in the 16th century AD, the term "Tanah Melayu" refers to the area around present-day Palembang. Early Chinese sources mention a Malay country in the present-day Jambi region; but *Sejarah Melayu* mentions that "Melayu" is a river that flows near a sacred hill in Palembang, namely Bukit Siguntang (Andaya & Andaya, 1982). One day on the hill, three brothers who were descendants of Alexander Zulkarnaen miraculously appeared. One of them became King of Palembang who later became the ancestor of the kings of Malacca.

In this connection, "Melayu" means a person who has a close relationship with this single ancestor and whose descendants became kings who ruled the Malacca kingdom. "Melayu" (Malaysia), thus, also refers to the region of Sumatra. More specifically, the region is the Srivijaya Kingdom. Referring to a great power and culture, such as the Srivijaya Kingdom, the term "Malay" was used by a society in Malaysia who intended to distinguish it from the indigenous people of the Malaysian region at that time. Until now, in Malaysia there is still a distinction between indigenous people and Malays. In the context of Malaysia, the term "indigenous people" can be equated

with the term "isolated tribe" in Indonesia. Although many of them live in urban areas and are indeed indigenous Malaysians. With the Malay identity, these people often feel more civilized compared to the indigenous people who are considered primitive (Sunarti, 2016).

Many kingdoms or sultanates in Malaysia are closely related to sultanates in Indonesia. Therefore, the people of Tanah Melayu do not see the Bugis and Minangkabau people as foreigners. This was proven when the people of Selangor accepted Raja Lumu, son of the Bugis ruler Daeng Chelak, as their sultan in 1742. and the people of Negeri Sembilan accepted Raja Melewar, who was of Minangkabau descent, as king of Negeri Sembilan (Yang Dipertuan Besar Negeri Sembilan) in 1773 (Tate, 1997).

The Sultanates of Selangor and Johor have close ties with South Sulawesi because the sultans of Selangor and Johor are of Bugis descent. Likewise, the Malacca Sultanate was founded by Parameswara, a prince from Sriwijaya (Palembang) who fled from the Majapahit attack to Tumasik or Singapore. Parameswara succeeded in establishing the Malacca Sultanate around 1400 in Tanah Melayu which later developed into the largest trading city of his era, replacing the Sriwijaya kingdom (Sunarti, 2016).

The Perak Sultanate was closely related to Aceh. This happened because when Aceh attacked Perak in 1575, the eldest son of the Sultan of Perak was taken as a husband by the Queen of Aceh. Four years later the son of the Sultan of Perak became king or sultan in Aceh (Andaya, 1982). Then this sultan sent his younger brother to Perak who later reigned as Sultan of Perak. This action strengthened the family relationship between Aceh and Perak.

This very close political and cultural relationship then changed after the arrival of Western nations, especially the Dutch and British, who then controlled the Malay Lands and Indonesia. The London Agreement of 1824 between England and the Netherlands can be said to be the starting point for the political separation of the Malay Lands and Indonesia. This agreement divided the Malay world into two regions that were different in terms of politics. Based on Articles 9 and 10 of this agreement, the British agreed to hand over all their trading centers in Sumatra to the Dutch and would not make other agreements with local leaders on the island (Sar Desai, 1981:58).

On the other hand, the Dutch also handed over the city of Malacca and its territory in the Malay Peninsula to the British and also stated that they would not make any other agreements with local leaders in the Peninsula. This agreement is considered to be the basis for the modern Indonesian and Malaysian states. The British colonization of the Malay Peninsula and the Dutch colonization of the Indonesian archipelago subsequently created a different historical experience for the two nations (Sunarti, 2013a).

Before the formation of the two countries called "Indonesia" (1945) and Malaysia (1957) today, the relationship between the people of the two countries was relatively very close. Both nations have the same historical heritage, language, religion, and culture. The people of both countries come from the same ethnic group and most of them have close family ties, especially between the people of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula (Muniandi, 1996). During the glory of the great kingdoms, such as Srivijaya, Majapahit, and Malacca, the territories of Indonesia and Malaysia were once under the auspices of the powers of these kingdoms. There are several important similarities that stand out in the early relations between the two nations. These similarities can be seen, among other things, from the aspects of nationality, language, religion, culture and work.

In terms of ethnic groups, the indigenous people of the Malay Lands and Indonesia generally come from the same ethnic group, namely the Mongoloid group originating from the southern part of China (Yunan). They came to Southeast Asia around 2500 BC. According to the theory of the Dutch anthropologist, P. Sarasin, the Malays came to Southeast Asia in two waves. The first wave was a group known as the Proto Malays and the second group was known as the Deutro Malays. The difference in the arrival time of the Proto Malay and Deutro Malay groups is 2000 years.

The Proto Malays came to Southeast Asia around 2500 BC and brought Neolithic culture. Meanwhile, the Deutro Malays came around 300 BC and brought iron and bronze culture to the Southeast Asian region (Vlekke, 1967). According to this theory, the descendants of the Proto Malays were forced to move to the interior after the arrival

of the Deutro Malay group. This new group settled throughout the Malay archipelago and was gradually able to control the coastal areas of the Southeast Asian archipelago.

The success of the Deutro Malay group in guarding the coastal area was due to their wandering spirit and expertise as sailors. Population migration in Southeast Asia is a phenomenon that has occurred since humans arrived in this region. Migration always occurs between the Malay Lands and Sumatra, Sumatra and Java, Java and the Malay Lands and others (Ghulam, 1976; Taib Osman, 1989). Because they come from the same group, their migration from one country to another in this region is not considered as migration abroad but as migration from one village to another.

The Malay community in the Malay archipelago is a maritime society. As a seafaring society, they sail to all corners of this region. As a result, their language, namely Malay, has become a lingua franca in this archipelago (Tate, 1977:27). In fact, this language was initially only used by residents in several parts of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. The Malay language received extraordinary encouragement to develop as a lingua franca due to the development of trade in ports on the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. These trading centers have become meeting places for people from all over Southeast Asia. The use of Malay is considered to have united almost all ethnic groups in Indonesia (Vlekke, 1967:12).

In terms of religion, there are similarities between Indonesia and Malaysia. Compared to other countries in Southeast Asia, Islam is an influential and dominant religion in the lives of people in both regions. In terms of belief, Islam is an element that distinguishes the people of Tanah Melayu and Indonesia from the people of other Southeast Asians. This is because the majority of the population of mainland Southeast Asia is Buddhist, or Catholic in the Philippine Islands. In terms of culture, Tanah Melayu and Indonesia received many elements from Indian culture, but elements of Indian culture are more visible in Indonesian culture, especially in the fields of architecture and sculpture (Holt, 1967).

In examining the early relationship, there are similarities in the cultural aspects between the two countries. Because of its geographical location on international trade routes, including trade routes between India and China, the Tanah Melayu and Indonesia regions were greatly influenced by Indian and Arab cultures. In the end, many cultural products of the two nations, Indonesia and Malaysia, are a blend of local values and foreign elements, such as Indian, Chinese, and Arab influences. Examples are wayang (the Mahabharata story) from India and Zapin dance (influenced by Arab).

3. The relationship between art and culture

The process of the arrival of Indonesians to Malaysia is certainly not only loaded with economic and political aspects but also cultural aspects. Like the arrival of foreign nations to Indonesia which basically have economic and political motives, it also brings cultural content. Indonesian culture has also been greatly influenced by various nations who have stopped and settled in the Nusantara region (Lombard, 1996). In fact, often these cultural contributions form a new culture which until now is recognized as the original culture of the Indonesian nation. Likewise with Malaysian culture which is not free from various foreign cultural influences. One of the contributors is Indonesian culture.

The influence of Indonesian culture can be said to be very large and because it has been going on for hundreds of years, cultures originating from Indonesia are often no longer perceived as a culture originating from outside or foreign. They consider it as part of Malaysian culture (Abdul Kadir, 1988). For example, in terms of food, Padang cuisine is a very common food for Malaysian people because it was brought by the Minang ethnic group who are concentrated in Negeri Sembilan. Likewise, Javanese food and its arts have become part of Malaysian culture because the Javanese ethnic group is concentrated in Johor and Selangor (Mohd Thamrin, 1987). Including the Barongan dance art which was once a problem in the relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia.

Below we will describe several examples of cultural products found in Malaysia, which have similarities with cultural products found in Indonesia. The first is Shadow Puppetry. This is an ancient traditional theater in

Malaysia. In Malaysia there are four types of wayang which are referred to by specific names, namely Javanese *wayang kulit* (*wayang kulit purwa*), *wayang gedhek*, *wayang Melayu* (Javanese *wayang*), and *wayang kulit Siam* (*wayang kulit Kelantan*). Javanese *wayang kulit* (*wayang kulit Purwa*) originates from Indonesia and was developed by people of Javanese descent living in Johor. In Malaysia, this type of wayang kulit still shows the characteristics of original wayang kulit purwa, including stories and characters from the Mahabharata epic. Musical accompaniment is also played with Javanese gamelan (Sweeney, 1976; Hardjowirojo, 1968).

Wayang is a performing art in the form of a typical drama. These performing arts include sound arts, literary arts, musical arts, spoken arts, fine arts, and others. Some people believe that wayang performances are not just art, but contain sacred symbols. Since the 19th century until now, wayang has been a topic of discussion and has been described by experts. Wayang is an original Indonesian (Javanese) word meaning shadow, comes from the root which with the prefix *wa* becomes the word *wayang*.

Words in Javanese that have roots with various vowel variations include: *laying*, *dhoyong*, *puyeng*, *reyong*, which mean always moving, not fixed, vague, and faint. The words *wayang* and *hamayang* used to mean showing shadows, then developed into shadow performances and became shadow performance art or wayang. *Wayang* as a depiction of the dualistic mind of the Javanese people. There are two things, parties or groups that are in conflict, good and bad, physical and spiritual, and refined and coarse. Both are united in humans to achieve balance. *Wayang* is also a means of social control, for example with social criticism conveyed through humor. Another function is as a means of strengthening social status, because those who can perceive *wayang* are respected people, and are able to provide large costs. *Wayang* also instills social solidarity, is a means of entertainment, and education. In general, the definition of wayang is a form of traditional performance presented by a puppeteer, using puppets or the like as a performance tool (Kusuma, 2021).

Wayang kulit is a puppet made of leather, carved, and sungging, so that it depicts forms that are not the same as real humans. It is used as a tool to depict human life. Wayang can create shadows on the screen (screen), and can be moved to the right, left, up, down, and certain angles. The word *purwa* comes from Sanskrit which means first, the previous, or the old. *Purwa* era means ancient times, and *wayang purwa* means puppets in ancient times. The word *purwa* comes from the chain of words *parwa*, meaning chapters in the Mahabharata. Thus, *wayang kulit purwa* is also called *wayang kulit* which takes the theme of the story from the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana. The development of the form of wayang during this period is a new form of change in the initial concept. The clothing in *wayang* is also inseparable from the changes during this Islamic period, there was a stylization, so that it became harmonious and to distinguish the social level and position of each character. Some *wayang* costumes have symbolic and historical meanings, in addition to achieving harmony, and also to change the mission being conveyed (Maksum, 2017).

Unlike Malaysia, *wayang kulit* itself is an ancient traditional theater in Malaysia. In Malaysia there are four types of *wayang* referred to by certain names, namely Javanese *wayang kulit* (*wayang kulit purwa*), *wayang gedek*, Malay *wayang* (Javanese *wayang*), and Siamese *wayang kulit* (Kelantan *wayang kulit*). Javanese *wayang kulit* (*wayang kulit Purwa*) originates from Indonesia and was developed by people of Javanese descent who live in Johor. In Malaysia, this type of *wayang kulit* still shows the characteristics of the original *wayang kulit purwa*, including the stories and characters from the Mahabharata epic.

The second is Javanese *Gamelan*. The word *gamelan* refers to a set of musical instruments (usually made of bronze) that are beaten with a certain beater. Javanese *gamelan* was brought to the Malay Lands along with the arrival of Javanese people to the Malay Lands during the British colonial era. Many Javanese people inhabit the southern regions of the Peninsula, such as Selangor, Johor, and also Singapore.

The third is the *Zapin* dance. This dance art is one form of folk dance introduced to the Indonesian archipelago by Arab traders. The *Zapin* dance originates from the cultural adaptation and assimilation of *Zapin* (Arabic) which was presented to the general public by Malay people of Arab descent. *Zapin* initially developed in the Johor Sultanate, then spread among the Malay people of the Indonesian archipelago (Md Noor, 1993). In Indonesia, since the early 16th century AD, the *Zapin* dance has been entertainment for the nobility during the Riau-Lingga

Sultanate and has developed with the support of the palace. *Zapin* is also known among the Malay people in Kalimantan.

Fourth is *Randai*. This is a traditional dance and theater form of Minangkabau that combines dance movements, singing, music, storytelling, and acting. Today *Randai* has developed through several continuous influences at various levels. The word "randai" imagines a circle or movement formation in a circle around a certain location. This comes from the behavior of a group of people who surround a certain area and look for lost objects as they move towards the center of the circle.

Meanwhile, *Randai* also uses oral storytelling and martial arts as sources of its performances. *Randai* is famous among the Minangkabau people throughout Indonesia and Malaysia. This art was brought to Malaysia by migrants from Minangkabau who had come to the Malay Lands since the early 16th century AD. Immigrants from Minangkabau even later established a kingdom that is now known as the Negeri Sembilan Sultanate (Md Noor, 1986).

Fifth is traditional *Caklempong* music. This type of music was brought to Malaysia by the Minangkabau people who settled in Negeri Sembilan around the beginning of the 14th century AD. Since then the *Caklempong* tradition that developed in Malaysia has continued to be influenced by the Minangkabau tradition in Sumatra. In ancient times *Caklempong* was not only played as entertainment for the general public, but also at the Sultan's inauguration. Currently *Caklempong* music is played for various official state ceremonies and cultural celebrations, such as wedding ceremonies. *Caklempong* music also accompanies *pencak silat* performances, candle dance, plate dance and henna dance. This music is also found in the *Randai* dance drama.

Sixth is *Kompang*. This *kompang* is a type of traditional Malay instrument which has the same shape as the tambourine in Indonesia and the *dufuf* in the Middle East. The art of playing *Kompang* comes from Arabic art which developed in the Indonesian archipelago and ultimately influenced Malay art since the beginning of the 13th century AD. Initially, the singing of Arabic songs was accompanied by the game of *Kompang* which was similar to Arabic *Kompang* because the way of holding and hitting it was the same. Local people then imitated the *Kompang* game of Arab traders who used it to attract buyers. Because *Kompang* was promoted in Islamic culture, Arab preachers also used it to accompany Islamic poetry. At first, *Kompang* appeared only in villages, celebrating wedding ceremonies and religious ceremonies such as the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The examples of cultural products above are only a small part, so more in-depth research is needed regarding the similarities between cultural products in Indonesia and Malaysia (Sunarti, 2013b).

4. Conclusion

From the discussion above, it can be seen that the geographical and geopolitical position of Southeast Asia has a very large impact on cultural, social and political changes in the Southeast Asian region as a whole. Indonesia and Malaysia as two countries that have the most strategic geographical locations and directly border each other by sea and land, have received many influences from outside which then form many similarities in terms of history and culture. Indonesia and Malaysia are two countries not only because of their geographical locations as neighbors but also because they have almost the same cultural diversity, because they have almost the same racial background, namely the Melanesian race.

From a historical perspective, it can be seen that the relationship between the Indonesian and Malaysian peoples has been going on for a long time and has caused several cultural similarities between Indonesia and Malaysia. It is more appropriate to say that part of Malaysian culture is Indonesian culture, or part of Indonesian culture is part of Malaysian culture. The many similarities between Malaysian and Indonesian cultures have given rise to a term that Malaysia often expresses towards Indonesia as "saudara serumpun".

Indonesian society itself rarely expresses the term. The existence of cultural similarities is seen as a blessing that brings one closer to another. However, in recent years, cultural similarities have become a "pebble in the shoe" in Indonesia's relationship with Malaysia. This problem arises due to the problem of cultural claims. In this case, the

majority of Indonesian people often feel that their cultural products have been hijacked by Malaysia. In addition to the lack of historical understanding of the Indonesia-Malaysia relationship, the problem of claims to a cultural product arises due to the continued view that links cultural boundaries with national boundaries. In fact, this way of thinking has long been known to be inappropriate. In domestic cases, it can be seen that various cultures cross several administrative regions that are not strictly limited by administrative regions. Likewise, if we look at the cultural boundaries between Indonesia and Malaysia.

The administrative boundaries of countries cannot distinguish between several cultural similarities. How can we claim that the Dayak Iban culture is only Indonesian culture? Because the Dayak Iban people also live in Malaysia. It is the same as recognizing "rendang food" as an Indonesian cultural product alone, even though the Minang people have brought it to Malaysia for a long time. Are Javanese who have long settled and become Malaysian citizens prohibited from developing their ancestral culture in Malaysia? What if one day Barongan or Gamelan is recognized as Surinamese culture?

In the issue of cultural claims, Indonesian society must realize that the Indonesian nation and its culture have spread widely to various regions for a long time. So that our culture also exists and is recognized as a culture by a community group in another country. On the other hand, Malaysia must be honest about history that some of its cultures have Indonesian roots. Although it has felt that some cultures that are the same as Indonesia are the original cultures of Malaysia. To show good faith and respect for its kindred spirits, on various occasions, the roots of the culture should be expressed by Malaysia, including for the promotion of its tourism.

In addition to understanding the spread of Indonesian culture, the two countries must also understand the new cultural map. The new cultural map emerged after the two kindreds were strictly limited by political boundaries, namely the state. Art and cultural products become an important part of the identity of the nation and state. Each party not only preserves the old culture but also forms a new culture. Cultural cooperation between the two countries is crucial for addressing cultural heritage claims, which often lead to misunderstandings. Examples include UNESCO's recognition of Indonesian cultures such as batik and wayang, and the recognition of pantun as a shared cultural heritage in 2020.

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Public Compliance Response to the COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign in Indonesia: A Study in Serang City, Banten, and Padang City, West Sumatra

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Abstract

This study focuses on analyzing public compliance with the COVID-19 vaccination campaign in Serang and Padang Cities, located in Banten and West Sumatra Provinces, respectively. Therefore, the government has set a national vaccination target to achieve herd immunity. The implemented policy encountered challenges such as resistance from some communities due to doubts about the safety and efficacy of the vaccine, alongside concerns about its halal status. This prompted the adoption of qualitative and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) methods to evaluate factors influencing compliance using the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Compliance Gaining theory. The respondents belonged to varying age groups and were mostly workers. The results showed dissimilarity in compliance motivations in the two regions. For example, in Serang City, respondents had a high level of self-efficacy-based acceptance, and vaccination decisions were reliant on self-belief in personal health and trust in government authority. In Padang City, vaccination acceptance was influenced by external factors and subjective norms, including administrative obligations (school, travel, and work). In conclusion, the acceptance of the vaccine was strengthened by positive information and attenuated by misinformation concerning the side effects. Furthermore, the success of future health campaigns required credible and empathetic messaging. This was reliant on belief and ensured public compliance was perceived as administrative.

Keywords: COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign, Public Compliance, Theory of Reasoned Action, Compliance Gaining, Health Communication

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Data collected in November 2022 reported 10,185,374 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 503,862 deaths worldwide, with a fatality rate of 4.9 percent. In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO) (2022) reported that people would have to live with this virus for a long period.

WHO (2021) stated that vaccination was an essential method adopted to reduce the spread of the virus. The main aim of this worldwide strategy was to reduce mortality, disease severity, and the overall burden. Additionally, this also included protecting health systems, supporting socioeconomic activities, and reducing the severity of new COVID-19 variants.

In the health context, a typical way to control the COVID-19 pandemic was to implement proportional public health measures and widespread vaccination. Moreover, full-dose vaccination can reliably protect healthcare workers from hospitalization and death caused by the virus. The vaccine's effectiveness in preventing infection from January to March was 84 percent. This implied that only two in ten fully vaccinated healthcare workers were at risk of contracting COVID-19 (Kementerian Kesehatan, 2021).

The Indonesian government is committed to fighting the pandemic, including through a vaccination policy. The aim was to reduce the long-term effects of the pandemic on the health sector and economy. Based on this perspective, the government has put several policies in place. First, the President of Indonesia issued Presidential Decree No. 18/2020 on September 3, 2020, establishing a COVID-19 vaccine development team under the supervision of the coordinating minister for Economic Affairs.

Second, the President signed and issued a Presidential Regulation (Perpres) on October 6, 2020, regarding vaccine procurement and the implementation of the vaccination program to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The regulation also stated that PT Bio Farma would supply vaccines through international cooperation. Third, the government, through the Ministry of Health, and in collaboration with international organizations, such as UNICEF, ensured the provision of vaccines. An estimate of 30 million vaccine doses was expected to be received by the end of 2020 through bilateral agreements, with an additional 50 million doses in early 2021 (*Survey Penerimaan Vaksin COVID-19*, n.d.).

The implementation of the vaccination initiative was appropriate because Global agreements outlined the importance. In line with these agreements, the government imported various types of vaccines produced in different countries. As of August 2021, Indonesia had imported 201.9 million vaccine doses. The following vaccines, Sinovac, AstraZeneca, Sinopharm, Moderna, and Pfizer, were imported. Data from the Ministry of Health showed that Sinovac was the most frequently imported vaccine, with a total of 166.5 million doses.

The Indonesian government started administering the COVID-19 vaccination program on Wednesday, January 13, 2021. President Joko Widodo was the first to receive the Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine. Moreover, this has received Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the Food and Drug Monitoring Agency (BPOM), including the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). At a January 10, 2021, meeting, recommendations were obtained from members of the National Drug Evaluation Committee, a team of immunology experts, the Indonesian Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (ITAGI), and epidemiologists.

The government's objective was to vaccinate 182 million people, or 70 percent of the population, to achieve herd immunity by 2021. In 2020, the Ministry of Finance allocated a budget of IDR 35.1 trillion to purchase three million doses of the Sinovac vaccine to support the vaccination effort.

The COVID-19 vaccination policy did not instantly gain full public support. An online survey conducted by the Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs (JHCCP) from May to September 2021 found that 34 percent of Indonesians did not want to be vaccinated. Douglas Storey of the JHCCP reported that the survey was conducted on 14 million respondents through Facebook. Another result was that individuals aged 55 and above were the most likely to refuse the COVID-19 vaccine. 40% of respondents in this age group reported refusing the vaccine. Douglas identified three reasons most frequently cited by the respondents. The main reason was persistent doubts about the vaccine's safety. The other reasons included a desire to wait, concerns about cost, religious reasons, and

the belief that the vaccine was unnecessary. According to the Ministry of Health, vaccine refusal rates in July 2021 were approximately 33 percent. A follow-up survey conducted by Indikator Politik Indonesia found that, in January 2022, 54.8 percent of respondents declined the booster vaccine (Haryanti Puspa Sari, 2021).

As a public health policy, COVID-19 vaccination should elicit a positive response from recipients. Leung et al. (2020) reported that willingness to accept the vaccine was crucial to achieving high vaccination coverage and combating evolving infectious diseases. Previous studies have shown that several factors affect personal acceptance of a vaccine, particularly when it concerns influenza. These consisted of resistance to the word "vaccination," perceived risk of use, including safety and efficacy, convenience, price, and sociodemographic factors (Wang et al., 2021).

Many people were against the vaccination due to personal, religious, social, and political reasons, as well as rumors regarding the negative effects of the COVID-19 vaccine. For a country with 237.53 million Muslims, equivalent to 86.9 percent of the total population, resistance was faced even before efforts to vaccinate the people were implemented. Moreover, in Muslim-majority countries, there were doubts about vaccines because of religious and social beliefs (McNeil & Purdon, 2022). Another serious problem was misinformation, such as claims that the Sinovac coronavirus vaccine was haram (forbidden). This had not been certified halal by MUI (Indonesian Islamic Religious Council). Therefore, public acceptance and willingness to be vaccinated against COVID-19 posed a challenge for the government (Leung et al., 2020).

Based on this perspective, three factors, namely knowledge, social, and religious dynamics, affected the attitude of the public towards the vaccination. Therefore, the government needs to understand why vaccination is refused and how to gain public compliance. The essence is to support implemented programs as well as reduce the severe impact of the pandemic. Rejection among some citizens suggested a significant challenge that should be addressed to ensure the success of the vaccination policy. Additionally, public awareness campaigns should be carefully designed to ensure that the benefits of vaccination are recognized by the public.

This result was consistent with the United Nations (UN) directives, which stated that managing a pandemic or crisis mainly depended on coordination and communication. Furthermore, there should be clarity in accountability and decision-making to foster shared knowledge and understanding (Jo Nurse, 2023).

During the UN General Assembly on September 23, 2020, President Joko Widodo stated that the COVID-19 vaccine would be a game-changer in fighting the pandemic (Detik.com, 2020). Additionally, Montty Girianna (Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Perekonomian Republik Indonesia, 2021) reported that vaccination was among the steps the government took to restore normalcy. It also enabled people to resume normal activities as well as drove the country's economic recovery.

An online survey conducted by the Johns Hopkins Centre for Communication Programs (JHCCP) among 14 million respondents on Facebook from May to September 2021 found that 34 percent of Indonesians did not want to be vaccinated. According to Douglas Storey of JHCCP, this reluctance stemmed from lingering doubts about vaccine safety, concerns about cost, religious beliefs, and the conviction that vaccination was unnecessary. A 2020 survey conducted by the Ministry of Health, ITAGI, WHO, and UNICEF showed that 65 percent of respondents were willing to receive the vaccine if provided by the government, while 8 percent refused. The remaining 27 percent expressed doubts about the government's plan to distribute the vaccine. Public confidence in the vaccine varied due to limited information about its type, availability, and safety profile.

The Ministry of Health, ITAGI, WHO, and UNICEF recommended developing a communication plan that addresses the diverse information needs of the public regarding vaccine safety, effectiveness, and fair distribution before, during, and after vaccination. The push to speed up vaccination for the citizens was based on predictions that the country would need approximately ten years to reach herd immunity. The study at Johns Hopkins University, as reported by Detik.com on February 8, 2021, stated that herd immunity was reached when 70-85 percent of the population had been vaccinated. Data compiled by Bloomberg on February 5, 2021, also reported

that Indonesia recorded a daily vaccination rate of 60,433 doses. It is estimated to take more than ten years to reach the vaccination objective of 70-85 percent of the population, supposing the rate does not increase.

Based on this data, vaccination is the solution for a quick recovery from the pandemic. Public policy should be practical, beneficial, and gain support and compliance to successfully emerge from the pandemic. Appropriate, concrete public communication messages should also be conveyed, as regulatory support alone is not sufficient.

In psychology, compliance-gaining is a foot-in-the-door method that involves gradually persuading individuals. Previous studies reported that compliance-gaining focused on persuasively achieving set objectives, but within predetermined, specific, or restrictive options. This conflicts with persuasion, which centers on changing beliefs, attitudes, desires, motivations, and behavior (Gass & Seiter, 2018).

Gass & Seiter (2018) reported that compliance-gaining strategies could be examined from three main methods. This included analyzing the type of compliance-gaining strategy used (Gerald Marwell and David Schmitt, 1976), context dimensions (Cody, Woelfel, and Jordan, 1983), and the perspectives of power, legitimacy, and politeness (French and Raven, 1960).

The COVID-19 vaccination campaign messages discussed were initiated by the government and widely spread through various communication channels. The messages examined were from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics. Based on a review of mass media coverage and COVID-19 campaign materials, the government has stated that the vaccination appeal was communicated systematically and consistently, supported by related technical policies to promote public compliance. Indonesians who followed the vaccination recommendations encountered appeals that were widely disseminated through mass media, both above- and below-the-line. These persuasive messages that caused the public to become aware of, understand, and acknowledge the importance of the vaccination would be examined and evaluated for their suitability within Compliance Gaining Theory.

This study aimed to identify the reasons behind public acceptance and rejection of vaccination in Serang City, Banten, and Padang City, West Sumatra, using Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Moreover, the study is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature on public compliance with government health messages about vaccination. The importance evolved from the limited testing of compliance-gaining theory applied to mass health messages.

Considering that the pandemic has ended, this study remains significant from a health communication perspective. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Elaborative Likelihood Model, Self-Protection and Compliance Achievement Theories allowed factors to be identified and analyzed, leading to public compliance with vaccination against COVID-19. Furthermore, compliance was motivated by the persuasive messages preceding the vaccination.

1.2. Health Communication

WHO reported that the pandemic caused the global health and socioeconomic crises. The managerial process mandated the government to implement risk communication strategies and people engagement initiatives. The vaccination recommendation was categorized under risk communication due to potential effects on recipients' bodies. However, to address the pandemic, vaccination had to be carried out without public resistance. There is a need for persuasive messages to raise awareness about the importance of following the vaccination guidelines. This could be realized by using the PHF (Persuasive Health Message) Framework and Compliance Getting Theory. The framework comprised three theoretical components: TRA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), and Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers, 1983).

TRA is a psychological model that was developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in 1975. According to this model, a person's behavior is determined by personal intentions. Fishbein and Ajzen stated that humans tend to behave rationally, considering available information and the consequences of their actions before deciding to act.

In terms of persuasion, norms were among the most important elements to consider when crafting persuasive messages. Ajzen (1991) and Fishbein & Yzer (2003) reported that these norms play an essential role in the behavior-maintenance and change model. Additionally, TRA comprised four major components, including Beliefs, Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Intentions, which were described as follows.

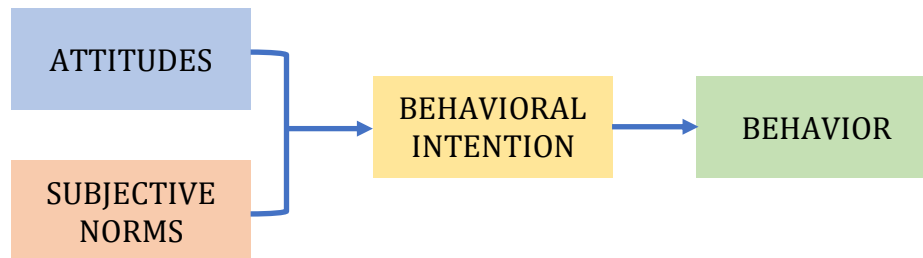


Figure 1: Four Elements of TRA

Source: *simplypsychology.org*

Respondents' responses to persuasive messages about the vaccination process were analyzed from a TRA and compliance-gaining perspective.

1.3. Public Compliance

Compliance-gaining refers to a type of persuasive communication that exerts influence, altering both attitude and behavior. This influence is intentional or unintentional communication intended to change the beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behavior of individuals or groups. Furthermore, compliance-gaining strategies included both verbal and nonverbal communication, often accompanied by rewards and punishments.

John French and Bertram Raven, along with Littlejohn and Foss (2009: 155), reported five basic forms of power used in social interactions. These five basic forms of powers were reported as follows:

- Reward power, namely, the ability to provide benefits to others.
- Coercive power is the power focused on the ability to punish others.
- Expert power, including power centered on expertise or competence.
- Legitimate power, namely, power based on a person's official rank or formal position.
- Referent power, such as power related to people admired or respected. A person would obey the orders of someone respected.

Compliance-gaining theory explored the dynamics between doctors and patients. During each interaction, doctors frequently suggested that patients take specific medications or avoid unhealthy habits. This theory, proposed by Gerald Marwell and David Schmitt, outlined 16 common strategies for gaining compliance, including promises, threats, aversive stimuli, moral appeals, and debt collection.

Marwell and Schmitt used the exchange theory as the basis for formulating the compliance-gaining model. This states that a person would comply in exchange for something given by another. For example, if you do what I want, I will give you something in return, including esteem, approval, money, relief from obligations, and good feelings. This model is fundamentally power-oriented, implying that a person can obtain compliance from others when they have sufficient power, such as resources, as well as by providing or withholding something wanted. The most important theoretical question about tactics for gaining compliance is how to reduce the set of all possible plans to a manageable set of general strategies or dimensions that explain what people do when persuading others. To create this set of principles, Marwell and Schmitt developed five strategies or groups of tactics to address various situations that lead to compliance. The strategies include rewarding (e.g., promising), punishing (e.g., threatening), demonstrating expertise (e.g., showing knowledge of rewards), making impersonal appeals (e.g.,

moral appeals), and making personal commitments (e.g., debt). Marwell and Schmitt (1976), as cited in Roberts and Gass (2018), outlined 16 tactics for applying compliance-gaining strategies, and these were stated as follows.

Table 1: 16 Tactics for Compliance-Gaining

1	Promising rewards or compensation	9	Creating moral obligations
2	Threatening punishment	10	Promoting positive self-esteem
3	Using statements from experts or specialists	11	Promoting negative self-esteem
4	Using negative statements	12	Using positive reinforcement
5	Promoting liking	13	Using negative reinforcement
6	Using the principle of reciprocity	14	Being altruistic
7	Implementing administrative penalties	15	Using positive admiration
8	Creating debt inability	16	Using negative admiration

The government expected the public to follow the COVID-19 vaccination policy when it was introduced. This implied adhering to recommendations or calls for vaccination. However, as the vaccination discourse was promoted, resistance emerged among some. The resistance or rejection raised critical questions about the efficacy rate, the effects of vaccination on the recipient's body, and the vaccine's halal status. These questions could potentially decrease public compliance with the vaccination call. Of the 16 compliance-gaining tactics, not all were used during the vaccination campaign. Additionally, this study reviewed some critical questions from the perspective of Compliance Gaining Theory.

2. Method

A qualitative method was adopted, and according to Creswell (2021), this investigative method followed traditional procedures for study in the social, behavioral, and health sciences. The process entailed reviewing an issue, as well as proposing and answering questions that contributed to the problem. The questions were reviewed using data collected and analyzed from participants in the answering process. A study report was written, and the results were summarized after collecting and analyzing the acquired information.

This study employed three data collection methods: in-depth interviews, FGDs, and document reviews. The aim was to present a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the facts associated with the messages delivered by the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, including the focus objects. Various subjects were interviewed and grouped accordingly to gather the diverse facts. This study was conducted in Serang and Padang Cities, in Banten and West Sumatra, respectively. Previous studies in Serang and Padang focused on exploring respondents' opinions and perceptions of COVID-19 vaccination campaign messages through FGDs. Data was also collected through FGD with selected respondents in Serang and Padang Cities.

3. Result and Discussion

The public compliance responses to the COVID-19 vaccination campaign in Indonesia included several respondents from Banten and West Sumatra Provinces. These respondents were interviewed to understand their responses and perceptions after exposure to the vaccination campaign messages delivered by the Directorate General of Public Information and Communication (DJKP) of the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo).

The FGD in Serang and Padang Cities took place on May 14 and June 2, 2024, respectively. Both cities were selected based on the vaccination acceptance rate in the country. Banten ranked among the regions with the highest acceptance rate, according to a 2020 UNICEF survey. This outlined that nearly 69 percent of the people were willing to be vaccinated, with hesitancy below 20 percent (Ministry of Health, 2021). However, West Sumatra had the highest resistance, with an acceptance rate of approximately 65 percent, and public doubts about the vaccine's effectiveness exceeded 30 percent. The selected respondents in Banten and West Sumatra Provinces totaled 7 and

9, respectively. Based on the analysis, these individuals were categorized under three age groups, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: List of FGD Participants in Serang City

List of FGD Participants in Serang City					
No	Name	Age	Occupation	Last Education	Domicile
1	AI	22 years	University Student	Vocational High School	Serang City
2	CEA	23 years	Teacher	Senior High School	Tangerang Regency
3	AMS	24 years	Employee	Bachelor's Degree	South Tangerang City
4	AR	35 years	Manual laborer	Elementary School	Serang City
5	G	38 years	Laborer	Senior High School	Serang City
6	A	45 years	Entrepreneur	Junior High School	Tangerang Regency
7	R	62 years	Craftsman	Elementary School	Tangerang Regency

Table 3: List of FGD Participants in Padang City

List of FGD Participants in Padang City					
No	Name	Age	Occupation	Education	Domicile
1	LA	18 years	Student	Junior High School	Padang City
2	RH	18 years	Student	Junior High School	Padang City
3	SM	20 years	Employee	High School	Padang City
4	MA	45 years	Journalist	Bachelor's Degree	Padang City
5	RJ	46 years	Housewife	Junior High School	Padang City
6	DY	49 years	Housewife	High School	Padang City
7	EE	50 years	Housewife	High School	Padang City
8	W	53 years	Housewife	Diploma (Associate Degree)	Padang City
9	YP	56 years	Housewife	High School	Padang City

During FGD, respondents answered several questions regarding: (1) Perception of risk in receiving information about the vaccination process, (2) confidence or self-efficacy in controlling feelings related to the reception of the vaccine, and (3) perception of the message cues, which included accessibility in getting the relevant information concerning the vaccination.

3.1. Risk Perceptions in Receiving COVID-19 Vaccination Information

The rumors were conflicting during the early stages of the vaccination campaign. The government described the vaccine's benefits, including protection for individuals and their family members. However, both mass and social media paid considerable attention to the possible side effects. Some media outlets formulated and released frightening news, leading to differing risk perceptions among the public, including doubt, fear of vaccination, delays, and refusals. The results of FGD in Serang and Padang Cities showed varying public perceptions of these risks, which subsequently influenced vaccination acceptance. The respondents' initial perceptions regarding receiving information on COVID-19 vaccination are as follows.

Table 4: Initial Perceptions of the Respondents in Serang City

FGD Location: Serang City	
Name	Statement
AR	Regarding the issue of refusing vaccination, I honestly refused at the time. I wanted to find out the perspective of the village people, because I felt healthy at the time.
A	I was out and about, working, when I received the vaccine information.
R	I completely accepted the information because the programs were government-funded. Obviously, government officials are smart, and as ordinary citizens, we just follow the regulations.

AI	I did not object because I wanted to gather more information to determine whether to get vaccinated.
CEA	I myself did not object, I kept searching for information
AMS	Eventually, we agreed to the vaccination because it was related to our daily activities.
G	I agreed, but I looked at the situation and the government's good intentions towards public health. My family and I were ready to get vaccinated because it was for our well-being.

The FGD in Serang City showed that most respondents expressed a positive attitude toward the vaccination. Moreover, of the seven respondents, four had accepted the vaccine from the start. The reasons given were related to trust in the government and considerations of protecting themselves and their respective families. R (62) stated that government policies could not be made without careful consideration, and it was natural for the public to follow the directions given. The remaining two respondents were more cautious, not refusing the vaccine but postponing the process to seek additional information. For example, a student named Arifah stated that she wanted to be certain of the vaccine's validity and safety before being immunized. C further reported that she had to "check and recheck" before making decisions regarding her personal health. A particular respondent, A, a 45-year-old entrepreneur, explicitly refused at the start. It was reported that the social conditions of his people influenced his decision. Considering that most people in the village had postponed vaccination, he decided to follow suit, despite being in good health.

Table 5: Initial Perceptions of the Respondents in Padang City

FGD Location: Padang City	
Name	Statement
MA	I accepted the invitation because it was the first of its kind, and I did not know the reason.
RJ	I, like Uncle Arif, accepted the invitation too.
DY	At the time, I accepted the invitation to be vaccinated because we had to comply.
LA	I accepted
SM	I accepted because it was a requirement, perhaps, or there was something else.
RF	Initially, I refused because I wasn't sure what the vaccine contained.
EE	I accepted the invitation to be vaccinated.
W	I was forced to accept.
YP	I refused the vaccination, but I accepted after being sick and needing to get the vaccine.

The FGD in Padang City found that six respondents accepted the vaccine from the start, but not all reasons were based on personal beliefs. Several respondents received the vaccine due to administrative requirements. SM, a student, stated that she was vaccinated because it was required to return to in-person school. According to RJ, a housewife, she was vaccinated due to repeated government recommendations, not out of personal preference.

Two other respondents were hesitant or reluctantly accepted the vaccination. W admitted to taking the vaccine, even though she was initially unsure. This was simply because she felt "uncomfortable" in refusing the vaccine invitation. YP agreed to be vaccinated when she contracted COVID-19 and suffered from declining health problems. This personal experience with the disease was a decisive factor compared to the government's intensive campaign messages.

Another respondent, RF, refused at the initial stage due to distrust in the vaccine. The vaccination process was considered after further information regarding its safety was provided. This refusal showed that the narratives about side effects and issues surrounding the vaccine ingredients affected people's perspectives in Padang. Although the majority of respondents accepted the vaccine, their decision was driven by administrative coercion or personal experience rather than by absolute confidence in government messaging.

The comparison of the two provinces showed that initial acceptance levels were similar, but the drivers differed. Respondents' acceptance of Serang was based on trust in the government and healthy bodies. Meanwhile, people from Padang often appealed to administrative needs or to strong personal experiences, factors they regarded as

driving acceptance. The hesitancy in Serang was overcome through alternative explanations, whereas in Padang it developed into a refusal or a forced acceptance.

The results suggested that the initial perceptions of the respondents regarding vaccination against COVID-19 were influenced by two main factors: self-efficacy (beliefs about being healthy and deserving the vaccine) and social authority (influence from the government, schools, and the surrounding environment). Individuals who were initially confident in their respective physical condition and trusting of government authority were likely to accept the vaccine willingly. However, those who were still unsure or refused to suggest the need for more explanation either in the form of descriptive medical information or real-life examples from their closest associates.

3.2. Individual Confidence or Self-Efficacy in Controlling Feelings as a Vaccine Recipient

The individual responses were explored after understanding respondents' perceptions to assess their respective abilities (self-efficacy) to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. Additionally, the self-efficacy dimension was related to the belief that the vaccine had no serious adverse effects, including the ability to manage emotions under widespread news coverage of the side effects.

At this stage, the FGD focused on respondents' understanding of the physical conditions and their doubts about the vaccine's eligibility. This question is relevant because many people weighed respective vaccine decisions against administrative obligations and government directives, as well as confidence in their own health. Furthermore, vaccine side effects are among the factors that most influence self-confidence. Health communication strategies often require a threatening message (fear appeal), outlining that the risks of not being vaccinated far outweigh the discomfort caused by the vaccine. This method was crucial for motivating individuals who are still hesitant to become more confident in accepting the vaccine to protect both their own and their family's health.

Table 6: Respondents' Confidence in Serang City to Receive the Vaccine

FGD Location: Serang City	
Name	Statement
A	Before the campaign, I wasn't sure about vaccines. However, after hearing from the people and village government officials, I became convinced that vaccination was feasible.
AR	I feel my body is ready to receive the vaccine
R	I am ready to receive the vaccine, as it is essential for maintaining immunity and health.
AI	Regarding my fitness, I feel I am fit. However, I am still trying to confirm the information because no campaign has been launched yet. I want to double-check that the vaccine is safe for my body.
CEA	If I feel my body is fit to receive the vaccine
AMS	I am confident that our bodies can accept the vaccine, as campaigns usually include information about the specific requirements.
G	I am still unsure about getting the vaccine because the news is still unclear. I will agree after the information has been confirmed to be accurate. Before vaccination, the individual underwent a re-examination, and if it was determined that the individual was fit to receive the vaccine, the person was willingly vaccinated.

In this context, 5 of 7 respondents from Serang stated that they were fit to be vaccinated. For example, RY reported feeling healthy but was ready to be vaccinated. R and CEA also had similar sentiments, stating that the vaccine was required to sustain long-term immunity. For these respondents, being healthy without comorbidities was a sufficient reason to be vaccinated. Two respondents remained hesitant; AI acknowledged the need for further confirmation despite feeling she was fit to receive the vaccine. G also postponed vaccination until he received confirmation from a medical examination and was willing to be vaccinated only when declared healthy.

Table 7: Respondents' Confidence in Padang City to Receive the Vaccine

FGD Location: Padang City	
Name	Statement
MA	I do not think I need the vaccine, because I'm healthy. But after receiving the vaccine, I was exposed to COVID-19.
RJ	Before the vaccine, my body was still healthy. It was up to us to follow the government's instructions (the government - ed.). Therefore, whether we like it or not, we have to get vaccinated.
DY	At that time, I was forced to get vaccinated. The school administrators mandated that we get vaccinated. If we had refused, we wouldn't have received certain benefits, so I got vaccinated. After getting the vaccine, I felt fine.
LA	I do not think I need the vaccine because I feel healthy. However, after getting the vaccine, I felt dizzy or had a fever.
SM	Salsa felt unfit and was afraid that after getting the vaccine, she would get sick. Many people were hospitalized and died after being vaccinated.
RF	I felt fit, although some reports suggested the vaccine caused side effects in certain people. Additionally, because vaccination was mandatory at school at the time, I had to be ready.
EE	I felt ready to be vaccinated. As a child, my father was a civil servant; the whole family was ready for any vaccine.
W	When I received the information about the vaccine, I actually did not agree at all. Why? Several people were anxious about receiving the vaccine, specifically in the media, because it was not accepted. However, with the mandatory vaccination, I was fit, specifically when traveling and engaging in certain activities. But presently, it is okay, thank God. The important aspect is trying to ensure our bodies and immune systems are strong.
YP	I felt unworthy of the vaccine because I felt healthy. I heard other information and realized that vaccination was actually being given.

Three of the nine respondents in Padang City reported being fit for vaccination. For example, EE reported that her family had been accustomed to vaccination programs since childhood; hence, the COVID-19 vaccine was not unfamiliar. This reflected a belief based on positive experiences. Six respondents felt unfit or were still hesitant to receive the vaccine for various reasons. In addition, the reasons ranged from personal experiences of dizziness or fever after vaccination to worries about contracting the illness after hearing negative news from others. Others were forced to get vaccinated because it was required for school or travel. Another respondent, Salsa (SA), reported being afraid after hearing several stories of people getting sick from the vaccine.

In both cities, 9 of 16 respondents were considered eligible for vaccination, while the remaining 7 were unfit or still hesitant. In Serang, many respondents reported feeling healthy and ready to receive the vaccine, with a few waiting to be examined by a doctor. However, in Padang, more respondents expressed negative feelings about the vaccine, influenced by circulating negative narratives.

All respondents were asked to share their respective views on the acceptance of the vaccination. This was in line with personal beliefs or self-efficacy regarding health, references to credible communicators, and exposure to negative news coverage about the vaccine.

Table 8: Informants' Perceptions in Serang City Regarding the Receipt of COVID-19 Vaccination Information

FGD Location: Serang City	
Name	Statement
A	I am becoming increasingly confident in getting vaccinated.
AR	My body is strong enough to take the vaccine.
R	I was willing to take the vaccine after undergoing a medical examination. I feel perfect, and I am ready.
AI	I intend to get vaccinated because I have heard information that boosted my confidence.
CEA	I am confident, not because of the orders of the government officials.
AMS	First, I am confident of the vaccine.

G	Personally, I agreed to be vaccinated, not because of any other influence. Even though I am healthy, nobody knows what the future holds. In addition, I need the vaccine to be healthy.
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The seven respondents from Serang reported that the choice to get vaccinated was based on self-efficacy. This included the belief that people were healthy and willing to take the vaccine. For example, CEA stated that being confident in her physical condition was not because she had seen officials or others who had been vaccinated. Similar narratives were reported by other respondents, who felt healthy with no comorbidities. This was the actual cause of the willingness to get vaccinated, even before external influences were considered. The results suggested that in Serang, self-confidence in physical condition and the belief that vaccination strengthens long-term immunity strongly influenced vaccine acceptance.

Table 9: Informants' Perceptions in Padang City Regarding the Receipt of COVID-19 Vaccination Information

FGD Location: Padang City	
Name	Statement
MA	I was vaccinated because the government mandated it.
RJ	I also received the vaccine, but it turned out my body wasn't responding. I was compelled to do so because of a government notification.
DY	I was also forced to receive the vaccine. They told me that if I did not participate, I wouldn't be able to engage in certain activities.
LA	I was forced to because it was a requirement for school entry; if I did not get vaccinated, I couldn't attend school.
SM	I accepted because the school compelled me.
RF	I accepted the vaccine because I was healthy. Secondly, the school mandated the entire process.
EE	I was ready to be vaccinated because the government recommended it. Moreover, my body was ready for the vaccine.
W	I was forced to get vaccinated because I often travelled long distances.
YP	I previously did not want to be vaccinated, but after being ill with COVID-19 for several months, which was critical, I recovered. Eventually, I accepted the vaccine because my doctor recommended it, to enable me stay healthy.

The nine respondents in Padang City focused on external factors in vaccination decisions. Five people were willing to be vaccinated because of administrative obligations imposed by the government or schools. According to SM, she was vaccinated because the school mandated it to enable her to continue studying. Others took the vaccine due to work demands, travel needs, or doctor recommendations after suffering from COVID-19. However, only a few respondents, such as RF, reported that the reason for vaccination was personal belief in health, given its effect on school obligations.

The acceptance of 8 out of 16 respondents from the two cities was determined by self-efficacy, while external factors influenced the remaining. Serang showed a dominance of self-efficacy, with physical readiness as the main reason. Padang was strongly influenced by external factors, including regulations, social pressure, and personal experience with the virus's impact.

The results suggested that self-efficacy and external influences play a crucial role in shaping public attitudes toward vaccination. Respondents with high confidence in their physical health were more open to voluntary vaccination. In contrast, those who expressed hesitancy required further validation, such as government mandates, institutional requirements at school or work, or professional medical advice. Furthermore, public perception was heavily shaped by how individuals processed information and their ability to manage anxiety regarding rumored side effects.

Table 10: Respondents' Perceptions of Self-Efficacy in Serang City

FGD Location: Serang City	
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Name	Statement
A	I received the first dose due to village government regulations and my overall health. However, after hearing so much about the negative side effects, I became afraid and decided not to receive the second dose.
AR	After receiving the first vaccine and hearing about the negative side effects, I became afraid. I received only the first dose and skipped the second.
R	The second vaccine may require a slightly higher dose, as many people shivered, like when experiencing a hangover. However, I do not believe there's any information about negative side effects. The most important thing is immunity and maintaining good health. We're ready to be vaccinated if our bodies are compatible.
AI	After learning about the vaccine's side effects, I regretted getting vaccinated. I only found out about it after receiving the vaccine, and I regret rushing into the entire process.
CEA	Initially, I did not like the vaccine because of the lengthy side effects. The first time I received it, I had no adverse effects.
AMS	After my first vaccination, I heard about potential side effects, but I did not experience any.
G	I was slightly hesitant because of conflicting news about the vaccine. But after reviewing the entire situation and for health purposes, I was ready to get vaccinated.

Among the 7 respondents in Serang, 4 reportedly received negative information about the vaccine's side effects. Some stopped after the first dose out of fear, such as A, who decided not to go for the second dose after learning about many people falling sick. Additionally, two others expressed regret for having been vaccinated too quickly without being fully informed. A particular respondent postponed the next dose due to concern.

In this context, three of the respondents had a high level of self-confidence. The RN stated that, despite hearing the bad news, he did not readily accept the doctor's message because he felt healthy. Moreover, it was believed that vaccination was important for boosting immunity. CEA was hesitant, but after the first dose, she felt well and continued with the rest of the process. This showed that in Serang, aside from the negative rumors, most people were able to control their personal emotions and proceed with the vaccination.

Table 11: Respondents' Perceptions of Self-Efficacy in Padang City

FGD Location: Padang City	
Name	Statement
AI	I received the vaccine because of work pressure.
RJ	I heard it out of necessity. It was a government regulation that needed to be accepted.
DY	I accepted the vaccine out of necessity, following government recommendations. Drinking coconut water was easy, and other medications, including Pocari Sweat, had also been tried at the time. Because I also contracted COVID-19, I felt ostracized by people and neighbors for fear of contracting the virus at the time. So, I was forced to take the vaccine.
LA	I am not sure, because everyone's body is different in how it responds to vaccines.
SM	I accepted it because of the need for in-person school. Before getting vaccinated, I drank fresh coconut water.
RF	Initially, I was worried and upset, but I eventually received the vaccine because of the demands. I received it because I was anxious, and immediately I got home, I drank fresh coconut water.
EE	With this news, I remained confident until my second booster dose. The government's recommendation cannot be wrong. That's my assessment because I feel healthy enough to receive the vaccine.
W	Since I was forced to travel long distances and work in the office, I drank young coconut water before and after work.
YP	When I first heard the news, I was skeptical and incredulous because I felt healthy. In fact, after getting vaccinated, I saw on the news that many people were getting sick. And I became skeptical. My family also felt healthy and took vitamins. We were all healthy, so we felt skeptical.

Six of the nine respondents in Padang City admitted to being influenced by news about the vaccine's negative effects. These respondents accepted the vaccine despite the pressure or anxiety they faced. For example, SM reportedly drank fresh coconut water before being vaccinated because she was afraid of becoming weak after the shot.

Regarding health communication, several messages were transmitted through formal written or visual stories, such as action cues and experiences of public figures. During the campaign, the government used the vaccination of prominent state officials as a symbol of trust while ensuring the program's inclusive implementation. Logistical accessibility dimensions, such as location distance, quota availability, and vaccine distribution mechanisms, played a significant role in gauging whether government messages aligned with the realities experienced by the public.

Table 12: Respondents' Perceptions of Vaccination Accessibility Barriers in Serang City

FGD Location: Serang City	
Name	Statement
A	Regarding health issues related to vaccination, I did not experience any problems because I already had antibodies. The doctor also checked my health. The distance from my house to the vaccination site wasn't a problem because it is very close to the village office.
AR	Regarding post-vaccination issues, I haven't experienced any problems; everything is normal. [vaccination sites] Yes, there are many, and they're located close together.
R	I did not encounter any issues because the government fully supported the opening of the vaccination center at the village office. It was very close to our house, and as a result, we did not experience any problems.
AI	Regarding the first obstacle, I was at the public health center in Serang City. However, the queues kept getting longer every day. So I got my vaccine at the Banten Lama public health center, and I had to arrive at dawn to get a queue number.
CEA	As for the challenges, my experience was quite different. My problem was not getting a quota. I was at Tobat Hospital, then transferred to Tigaraksa Public Health Center. It turned out the COVID-19 vaccine was out of stock that day; therefore, I had to wait again.
AMS	Personally, I had no problems during the first and second vaccinations.
G	Previously, quota constraints due to the current vaccine boom led to a surge in quotas. Subsequently, the program has been under control and is safe.

Among the seven respondents in Serang City, four reported experiencing no significant obstacles in accessing vaccination. RN stated that the local government opened a vaccination service at the village office, very close to home, allowing people to receive the vaccine without traveling long distances. The other respondents shared similar sentiments regarding the easy accessibility of the vaccination site.

Three respondents faced challenges associated with low quotas and large queues. AI reportedly visited the health center (Puskesmas) at dawn to get the queue number. Additionally, when these numbers were exhausted, she had to visit other health centers. CEA had similar experiences in trying to gain a spot at another hospital or health center. Furthermore, G added that during peak vaccination periods, quotas were often full, so not everyone could be served immediately.

Table 13: Respondents' Perceptions of Vaccination Accessibility Barriers in Padang City

FGD Location: Padang City	
Name	Statement
AI	Because I work in the media, I did not receive any vaccine. Instead, I provided information to the public at the vaccination site.
RJ	I also got that information from friends, but when the second vaccination was available near my house, there were no issues.
DY	At the time, I was a bit confused about where to get vaccinated, but I have already received two doses. The first time, there was a BNI promotion for free vaccination, and the second time, I also got it from BNI. Therefore, there were no issues at that time; someone did provide information.

LA	I do not think there were any issues because they're available at every health center.
SM	I did not have any issues because the school provided the vaccination.
RF	The school vaccination is free and provided in the school hall. There were no issues.
EE	I had some issues with my body from the first vaccination to the next stage; I developed hypertension, but thank God, I am fine.
W	Luckily, I got the vaccine from school. Then, for the second vaccination, I happened to find a health center, because I was going out of town and there were no issues.
YP	I had an issue because I had COVID-19 and was sick for several months. After that, the vaccine was out of stock. Luckily, at that time, there was an agency responsible for the vaccination, and I registered directly, even though it took a long time to wait.

Among the nine respondents in Padang City, six reportedly experienced no significant obstacles in accessing vaccination. For example, RF stated that getting vaccinated at school was easy and free, and that no obstacles were encountered. Similar experiences were reported by other respondents who were vaccinated at health centers, schools, or through special channels, such as health cadres.

Certain challenges were faced; for example, EE had her vaccination put off because of hypertension. YP was only able to get the vaccine after recovering from a bout with COVID-19 and had to wait for supplies to become available. Furthermore, W reportedly found another location because she was out of town. This enabled her get vaccinated without any significant difficulties. Some positive experiences outside the official channels were also encountered. DY received a free vaccine in a bank promotion and avoided having to queue at public facilities.

Based on this view, 10 of the 16 respondents in the two cities had not experienced any significant obstacles in accessing vaccination, while the remaining 6 encountered major challenges. The survey conducted in Serang found that people often faced quotas and long queues, particularly during the busiest vaccination periods. Respondents in Padang City found it relatively easier, despite personal challenges related to health conditions or the need to find alternative locations.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of respondents who accepted the vaccination, including those who refused, showed that the evaluation of outcomes, or behavioral consequences, was a major determinant of attitude formation. Respondents who assessed vaccines positively, based on their health benefits, the legitimacy of the policy, and trust in the government, had a strong disposition to accept the procedure. However, those who weighed the negative frameworks, such as the possibility of side effects, lack of clarity, or distrust of authorities, did not get vaccinated or were reluctant to do so.

Based on this perspective, the effect of positive information strengthened attitudes towards vaccination. Negative information triggered attitudes of vaccination refusal or hesitation, and the basic principles of TRA supported this pattern. The principle stated that attitudes toward behavior are formed from cognitive evaluations of the benefits and risks of an action by individuals.

Subjective norms played a critical role in the decision-making process regarding vaccination, in connection with an individual's perception of social pressure or the influence of significant others on a particular behavior. Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) stated that subjective norms are derived from normative beliefs and the motivation to comply. In the case of the vaccination, it was exemplified through pressure from schools, the government, and public figures.

Respondents reported being influenced to receive the vaccine by the government, schools, and leaders. For example, some respondents were vaccinated because schools mandated in-person learning, RF, SM, and LA, or because government regulations required vaccination for travel. Furthermore, television broadcasts of President Jokowi receiving the vaccine served as a symbolic social norm, boosting confidence in some communities.

Considering that social norms motivated individuals to receive the vaccination, FGD results suggested a contradictory side. Some respondents expressed distrust of official norms or authoritative sources that should guide behavior. This situation suggested that subjective norms often reinforced behavioral intentions and could also become a source of resistance when trust in public institutions declined. Therefore, social norms were dual in nature: they served as a motivating factor when the source was credible, and as a deterrent when suspicion arose about the motives or transparency of public policies. This phenomenon confirmed that the effectiveness of vaccination norms was highly dependent on the level of public trust in the figures and institutions conveying the messages.

Behavioral intention was a significant element in social psychology and the study of consumer behavior. This attribute referred to the degree of strength of an individual's intention to exhibit a particular behavior. The essence of this study was to determine the behavioral intentions of several respondents who had received a vaccination. The respondents' intention to receive the vaccine was developed through a reciprocal relationship between personal attitudes and existing subjective norms. Respondents with positive attitudes who supported social norms showed a strong intention to be vaccinated. However, vaccination intentions decreased when negative attitudes clashed with weak or distrusted norms.

In some cases, respondents initially refused but later accepted due to normative pressure. For example, some were forced to accept the vaccine because of school or travelling long distances. This implied that subjective norms overrode the effect of individual attitudes, causing individuals to be influenced by social pressures rather than subjective factors. Respondents' accounts showed that TRA was inadequate for determining a person's reason for complying with vaccination. Additionally, external factors such as information exposure, trust in institutions, and government-level policies had dynamic effects on subjective norms.

The results of the FGD showed that a trade-off between perceived benefits and risks influenced public attitudes toward vaccination. Respondents with brain biases used vaccines to protect themselves and their family members. Meanwhile, people exposed to the side effects of vaccines or rumored information were hesitant and refused to be vaccinated. Schools and government agencies served as enforcers of social norms that motivated compliance. The motivation was often external and not entirely based on personal conviction. As a result, the need for credible public communication has become an important factor, as misinformation disseminated through the media has been shown to decrease trust levels and undermine the public's positive attitude.

Public attitudes were formed based on an assessment of both the benefits and risks of the vaccination. The majority considered vaccines beneficial for boosting immunity, while others were concerned about side effects and safety. This suggested that the vaccination campaign failed to develop a sustainable positive attitude. Therefore, a method of messaging grounded in belief was required to present evidence of the vaccine's benefits and safety, using credible, factual, and empathetic procedures. This method was designed to ensure that an attitude change was achieved through compliance and the public's rational and emotional beliefs.

Subjective norms increased behavioral intentions, which declined at low levels of trust in institutions or related sources. Institutional norms such as government, schools, workplaces/services were heightened, but appeared fragile without trust.

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From Law Enforcement to Cultural Security: Integrating Nudge Theory into Collaborative Policing for Intangible Heritage Protection

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Abstract

The safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) faces mounting challenges amid globalization, intergenerational transmission erosion, and declining public participation. Conventional top-down regulatory approaches have proven insufficient to foster sustained community engagement, particularly in cultural practices rooted in symbolic meaning and collective identity. This article examines how Nudge Theory can be integrated into collaborative policing to strengthen ICH safeguarding through non-coercive behavioral change and participatory governance. By using a qualitative case study conducted at Rumah Singgah Tuan Kadi in Pekanbaru, Indonesia, this research employs participatory observation, in-depth interviews, a limited Delphi process, and policy document analysis. Data were analyzed using thematic coding to identify patterns of interaction between choice architecture mechanisms, collaborative policing practices, and community participation dynamics. The findings reveal four interconnected themes: (1) cultural framing and symbolic activation of public spaces as catalysts for social re-identification; (2) the transformation of police roles from public order enforcers to community facilitators; (3) the effectiveness of nudge mechanisms in cultivating voluntary participation and collective ownership; and (4) a shift in outcomes from conventional public order toward cultural security, reflected in increased trust, strengthened social cohesion, and early conflict prevention. Synthesizing these findings, the article proposes a Cultural-Nudge Policing model that positions police as behavioral catalysts within participatory cultural governance. The primary contribution of this study lies in its original integration of Nudge Theory, collaborative policing, and cultural safeguarding, alongside the conceptualization of cultural security as an expanded policing mandate. By providing empirical evidence from a Global South context, this article advances the literature on behavioral governance and policing studies while offering practical policy implications for culturally grounded policing through program design within the Indonesian National Police, the establishment of cultural units, and the development of behavioral policy laboratories. Overall, the findings underscore the potential of more inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable security governance through the synergy of behavioral change and institutional collaboration.

Keywords: Cultural-Nudge Policing, Nudge Theory, Collaborative Policing, Cultural Security, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Behavioral Governance, Global South

1. Introduction

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) constitutes a living manifestation of culture, encompassing traditions, expressions, skills, knowledge systems, and social practices transmitted across generations by communities, groups, and individuals as part of their collective identity (Benfafa, 2025). The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage recognizes ICH not merely as cultural artifacts but as dynamic networks of social practices sustained through continuous enactment and social meaning-making (UNESCO, 2003). Within contemporary cultural policy, ICH safeguarding is increasingly positioned as a strategic instrument for strengthening social cohesion, shared identity, and community resilience amid globalization and structural societal change (Zabulis et al., 2025). Empirical studies further demonstrate that ICH contributes significantly to sustainable development and cross-cultural social cohesion, while simultaneously generating challenges related to access, representation, and the politics of identity (Zabulis et al., 2025).

At the same time, globalization has accelerated the circulation of external cultural values that often dominate local cultural spaces, thereby threatening the continuity of unique and marginalized cultural practices that function as reservoirs of social knowledge (Benfafa, 2025). Cultural globalization tends to promote value homogenization, which in many contexts results in declining intergenerational transmission of traditional practices. These pressures are compounded by transnational cultural claims over similar heritage forms, intensifying symbolic and representational contestation over what counts as legitimate cultural heritage (Benfafa, 2025). Moreover, ICH transmission is increasingly fragmented by population mobility, urbanization, and transformations in communication technologies, which, without strategic intervention, risk eroding local cultural practices over time (Jiang, 2025).

In response, many states have adopted formal regulatory frameworks aligned with international conventions. However, normative and coercive policy instruments frequently demonstrate limited capacity to generate sustained behavioral change at the community level. Top-down regulatory approaches tend to overlook local social contexts, embedded value systems, and power dynamics that fundamentally shape community participation in cultural safeguarding (Konach, 2025). Public policy scholarship has consistently shown that formal regulation alone does not produce authentic civic engagement, as it often fails to internalize social motivations and cultural values as drivers of collective action (Konach, 2025). This limitation is exacerbated by persistently low levels of public participation in cultural heritage initiatives, where social capital remains fragmented and concentrated among elite or bureaucratic actors rather than broadly distributed within communities.

Against this backdrop, Nudge Theory has emerged within contemporary policy discourse as an innovative approach that leverages choice architecture to influence behavior and decision-making without eliminating individual freedom, a principle commonly described as libertarian paternalism (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; Victor et al., 2023). A growing body of research demonstrates that nudge-based interventions can predictably shape behavior across policy domains, including public health, energy consumption, and pro-social conduct, by strategically configuring decision environments in context-sensitive ways (Victor et al., 2023). Despite its rapid development within behavioral public policy, the application of Nudge Theory to cultural heritage safeguarding, particularly as a mechanism for fostering community participation in ICH, remains remarkably underexplored. This gap highlights a disconnect between behavioral governance scholarship and the pressing need for inclusive, participatory cultural policy strategies.

Within policing and public security studies, parallel debates have emphasized collaboration between police and communities as a response to the limitations of enforcement-centered approaches. Collaborative governance and co-production policing frameworks reconceptualize citizens and law enforcement institutions as partners in the joint production of public security, with the aim of enhancing legitimacy, trust, and civic engagement (Sorrentino, 2018). Meta-analytic research further suggests that collaborative policing strategies can strengthen police-community relations and generate more holistic security outcomes, despite persistent implementation challenges (Aditya & Kusumastuti, 2023). However, the relationship between behavioral interventions such as nudging and collaborative policing remains conceptually and empirically underdeveloped, particularly with respect to mobilizing community participation in cultural heritage safeguarding.

Addressing this gap is critical given that policing increasingly extends beyond law enforcement to encompass the facilitation of social relations, dialogue, and participatory public spaces (Sorrentino, 2018). Integrating Nudge Theory into collaborative policing opens the possibility of a novel governance strategy that motivates voluntary community engagement in ICH safeguarding while respecting individual autonomy and local cultural dynamics. Such integration reframes policing not as a coercive authority over culture, but as an enabling institution capable of shaping social environments conducive to collective participation.

Accordingly, this article addresses the following central research question: How can Nudge Theory be operationalized within collaborative policing frameworks to foster participatory safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage? This question extends beyond the effectiveness of behavioral interventions per se to examine how their integration transforms the role of policing—from a traditional enforcement function toward the promotion of cultural security, a domain of security that prioritizes the protection of cultural values, institutional legitimacy, and social co-production between police and communities.

This article makes three primary contributions. First, it conceptually develops a Cultural-Nudge Policing model that integrates Nudge Theory with collaborative policing principles to design choice architectures that encourage pro-cultural behavior in ICH safeguarding. Second, it advances policing scholarship by foregrounding cultural security as a strategic extension of the policing mandate within contemporary public governance. Third, by presenting empirical evidence from Indonesia, the study contributes a Global South perspective to international debates on behavioral governance and culturally grounded security practices, enriching existing literature that remains predominantly Global North-centric.

2. Conceptual Framework: From Behavioral Governance to Cultural Security

The conceptual framework of this article is built upon three interrelated theoretical foundations: Nudge Theory within behavioral public policy, collaborative policing as co-production of security, and UNESCO's safeguarding paradigm for intangible cultural heritage. The integration of these perspectives informs the development of a novel model, Cultural-Nudge Policing, which repositions policing beyond conventional law enforcement toward facilitating collective behavioral change in support of cultural security.

This approach departs from critiques of conventional governance models that rely heavily on coercive regulation and administrative control, which have proven limited in fostering sustained social participation, particularly in cultural domains characterized by symbolic meaning, affective attachment, and identity-based practices. By synthesizing behavioral governance, collaborative policing, and participatory safeguarding, the framework advances an alternative mode of public governance centered on voluntary engagement, community agency, and relational institutional practices.

2.1. Nudge Theory and Choice Architecture in Cultural Contexts

Nudge Theory was systematically articulated by Thaler and Sunstein (2008) as a policy approach aimed at influencing individual decision-making through the design of choice environments, commonly referred to as choice architecture, without restricting options or substantially altering economic incentives. Within this framework, a *nudge* is defined as any aspect of choice architecture that predictably alters behavior while preserving freedom of choice, a principle often described as *libertarian paternalism*.

In contemporary public policy, nudging is increasingly conceptualized as a core element of *behavioral governance*: a mode of governance that draws on insights from cognitive psychology and behavioral economics to shape social action through subtle, non-coercive mechanisms (*soft behavioral change*), rather than legal compulsion (John, 2018; Oliver, 2013). Empirical research demonstrates that nudging is effective across diverse domains, including public health, environmental sustainability, and pro-social behavior, particularly when interventions combine framing, default options, social norms, and salient cues (Sunstein, 2014; Benartzi et al.,

2017). In cultural contexts, nudging holds particular relevance because cultural practices cannot be sustained through formal instruction alone. Cultural transmission is inherently relational, symbolic, and grounded in collective affect. Coercive interventions, therefore, risk producing resistance or superficial compliance. By contrast, nudging enables the activation of intrinsic motivation through the reinforcement of symbolic meaning and social identity.

Four choice architecture mechanisms are especially salient for cultural safeguarding. *First*, framing, which presents cultural participation as a source of collective pride rather than an administrative obligation. *Second*, default options, whereby engagement in cultural activities becomes the standard pathway within public spaces and community routines. *Third*, symbolic cues, including the placement of cultural symbols, artifacts, and representations in everyday environments, strengthen emotional attachment. *Fourth*, collective identity narratives, which situate cultural practices within shared understandings of “*who we are*” as a community (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010; Sunstein, 2016). Accordingly, nudging in cultural settings functions not merely as an instrument of individual behavioral modification but as a mechanism of social identity activation that fosters voluntary participation and the sustainability of cultural practices.

2.2. Collaborative Policing as Co-Production of Security

Parallel shifts in public governance have reconceptualized modern policing not solely as a state function but as a socially embedded process involving multiple actors. Policing scholarship emphasizes that public security cannot be produced unilaterally by law enforcement agencies; rather, it emerges through co-production among police, communities, local governments, and civil society organizations (Loader & Walker, 2007; Terpstra, 2018).

Within this perspective, collaborative policing represents a transformation from state-centric models toward co-production of security, where communities are no longer treated as passive recipients of protection but as active agents in shaping social order. This approach foregrounds partnership, dialogue, and joint problem-solving as foundational sources of policing legitimacy. A central dimension of collaborative policing is *procedural justice*, defined as public perceptions that policing processes are fair, transparent, and respectful of citizens’ dignity. Tyler (2006) demonstrates that police legitimacy is shaped more by procedural fairness than by coercive effectiveness. When individuals experience fair treatment and meaningful participation in decision-making, they are more likely to engage in voluntary compliance and civic cooperation.

Within this framework, police roles shift from law enforcers to social facilitators. Police act as mediators of conflict, connectors among stakeholders, and community partners in addressing social challenges. Beyond maintaining order, they facilitate dialogue, strengthen social networks, and create deliberative spaces for collective problem-solving (Skogan, 2006; Fleming & Rhodes, 2018). This evolution expands the policing mandate from crime control toward harm reduction and community well-being, conceptualizing security as a collectively produced social condition rather than the outcome of coercive intervention.

2.3. Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: From Protection to Participation

Under the 2003 UNESCO Convention, safeguarding is defined as a set of measures aimed at ensuring the viability of ICH, including identification, documentation, protection, promotion, transmission, and revitalization. Crucially, this definition explicitly positions communities as primary actors in heritage preservation rather than passive policy beneficiaries (UNESCO, 2003).

Safeguarding thus marks a paradigmatic shift from passive protection toward active participation. The principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) underscores that interventions must be grounded in informed community agreement, free from coercion, and respectful of cultural autonomy. Safeguarding, therefore, cannot be reduced to technocratic state projects; it must be understood as a socially embedded process rooted in *community agency*. Heritage studies further emphasize that cultural sustainability depends on communities’ capacity to continually reproduce meaning and practice in everyday life (Smith & Akagawa, 2009; Harrison,

2013). Effective safeguarding does not merely preserve artifacts or traditions but ensures that culture remains a living, socially relevant practice.

Nevertheless, many cultural policies continue to operate within administrative logics emphasizing inventorying and formal certification, while underemphasizing participation and behavioral change. This disconnect underscores the importance of integrating behavioral approaches and institutional collaboration to bridge policy intentions with social practice.

2.4. Integrative Model: Cultural-Nudge Policing

Synthesizing these three frameworks, this article advances Cultural-Nudge Policing as an integrative model that combines Nudge Theory, collaborative policing, and UNESCO safeguarding principles within a participatory governance approach.



Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Cultural-Nudge Policing

As illustrated in Figure 1, the model positions police as *behavioral catalysts*—institutional actors who facilitate collective behavioral change through the design of social environments that encourage cultural participation. Rather than relying on directives or sanctions, police mobilize symbol-based choice architectures, identity narratives, and community activities to stimulate voluntary engagement.

Within this framework, security is reconceptualized as cultural security, a condition in which cultural values, practices, and identities are protected through active social participation. Cultural security extends conventional notions of security by incorporating social cohesion, institutional legitimacy, and the sustainability of collective identity.

Operationally, Cultural-Nudge Policing functions through participatory governance, whereby decisions, activities, and safeguarding responsibilities are collaboratively distributed among police, cultural communities, local governments, and civil society actors. The model offers a novel conceptual bridge between behavioral public policy and policing studies, expanding the analytical horizon of police science toward the domain of cultural security. Conceptually, the model integrates nudge mechanisms (framing, default options, symbolic cues), collaborative policing functions (facilitation, mediation, partnership), and safeguarding objectives (community agency and cultural sustainability), collectively producing cultural security as the primary outcome.

3. Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to examine in depth how Nudge Theory can be operationalized within collaborative policing frameworks to foster community participation in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables contextualized understanding of social processes, symbolic meanings, and relational dynamics between policing institutions and cultural communities—dimensions that cannot be adequately reduced to quantitative variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Drawing on interpretive policy analysis, this design treats policy practices as socially constructed processes shaped by actor interactions, collective narratives, and localized institutional arrangements (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014).

Specifically, the study employs a single embedded case study strategy, allowing for intensive analysis of one primary site with multiple internal units of analysis, including police actors, cultural communities, local government representatives, and civil society organizations. This design is particularly suited to examining the integrative mechanisms linking behavioral interventions (nudging), collaborative policing practices, and cultural safeguarding dynamics within a specific empirical context (Yin, 2018).

The research is grounded in an interpretive qualitative paradigm that views social reality as co-constructed through practices, symbols, and power relations. A case study approach was selected to enable process-oriented exploration of contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, especially where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly delineated (Yin, 2018). This design aligns with the study's objective to understand how collective behavioral change is mediated by socially embedded choice architectures and collaborative policing practices. The framework facilitates analytical integration between behavioral governance and collaborative policing perspectives, focusing on mechanisms of implementation at the community level. Accordingly, the methodological orientation extends beyond descriptive documentation to interpret how meanings of security, culture, and participation are socially negotiated.

3.1. Case Selection

The empirical focus centers on “*Rumah Singgah Tuan Kadi*” in Pekanbaru, Riau Province, Indonesia, selected through purposeful sampling as an exemplar of police–community collaborative cultural revitalization. The site constitutes a historic Malay cultural space that had previously experienced declining socio-cultural function but was subsequently reactivated through a collaborative initiative involving regional police, municipal authorities, cultural communities, micro-enterprise actors, and youth arts groups.

Case selection was guided by three principal criteria. First, the site represents a concrete context of intangible heritage safeguarding challenged by urbanization and limited public engagement. Second, it demonstrates active police involvement not merely as security providers but as facilitators of cultural activities and community mobilization. Third, the case offers a rich empirical setting to observe nudge mechanisms in practice, including symbolic activation of cultural spaces, collective narrative framing, and the creation of default participation pathways within collaborative policing. This selection strategy aligns with Patton's (2015) principle of information-rich cases, which prioritizes analytical depth over statistical representativeness.

3.2. Data Collection

Data collection employed four complementary techniques to ensure methodological triangulation. *First*, participatory observation was conducted during cultural events and police–community interactions at the research site. This method enabled direct documentation of social dynamics, symbolic practices, and patterns of citizen engagement in cultural public spaces, while also capturing how police enacted facilitative roles (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

Second, semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with key actors, including police personnel, cultural community leaders, local government representatives, and community members. Interviews explored perceptions of policing roles, experiences of cultural participation, and the social meanings attributed to revitalization

activities. This approach facilitated both subjective accounts and critical reflection on collaborative practices (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Third, a limited Delphi process was employed to elicit cross-sector expert perspectives on cultural safeguarding strategies and the potential scalability of the Cultural-Nudge Policing model. The Delphi technique supported reflective consensus-building through iterative, structured feedback rounds among stakeholders (Hsu & Sanford, 2007).

Fourth, policy document analysis encompassed regulatory texts, program reports, public communication materials, and archival records related to cultural revitalization initiatives. These documents were examined to contextualize field practices within broader institutional narratives and policy frameworks (Bowen, 2009).

3.3. Data Analysis

All qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding through an inductive–deductive process. Initial open coding identified emergent patterns across empirical materials, followed by axial coding to organize core themes related to nudge mechanisms, collaborative policing roles, and community participation dynamics. The final stage involved selective coding, integrating these themes into the overarching Cultural-Nudge Policing conceptual framework.

Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility in capturing complex social experiences while enabling systematic linkage between empirical data and theoretical constructs (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Analytical rigor was enhanced through data source triangulation, limited member checking with key informants, and peer debriefing during interpretation to strengthen credibility and reflexivity.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles of social research, including informed consent, participant confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. All participants received clear explanations regarding research objectives, their right to withdraw at any stage, and the academic use of collected data. Given the sensitivity of cultural contexts, the research also followed the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) as recommended in intangible heritage safeguarding, positioning communities as active subjects rather than objects of inquiry. Researcher reflexivity was maintained throughout the study to minimize interpretive bias and ensure that representations of cultural practices and policing roles remained proportional and contextually grounded (Tracy, 2020).

4. Results: Operationalizing Nudge within Collaborative Policing

This section presents the core empirical findings on how nudge mechanisms were operationalized within collaborative policing practices to foster community participation in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Thematic analysis identified four interrelated patterns that collectively constituted Cultural-Nudge Policing at the research site: (1) cultural framing and symbolic activation, (2) the transformation of police roles into community facilitation, (3) nudge mechanisms in cultivating voluntary participation, and (4) a shift in outcomes from conventional public order toward cultural security.

Together, these themes demonstrate that behavioral interventions and collaborative policing did not function as discrete strategies but as mutually reinforcing social processes, integrating symbolic environmental design, institutional relationships, and citizen participation dynamics.

4.1. Cultural Framing and Symbolic Activation

The first theme reveals that cultural safeguarding at “*Rumah Singgah Tuan Kadi*” did not originate from formal directives but emerged through cultural framing and symbolic activation of public space. Revitalization efforts

repositioned Malay cultural elements such as traditional performances, pantun recitations, visual ornaments, and local historical narratives as focal points of weekly social activities. Previously passive spaces were reconfigured into vibrant arenas of cultural expression, enabling residents to move beyond spectatorship and re-engage with the site as part of their collective identity.

This cultural framing operated as a symbolic cue that strengthened emotional attachment to traditional practices. Rather than presenting activities as government programs or policing initiatives, events were framed as celebrations of togetherness and local pride. The narrative positioned culture as shared heritage rather than administrative responsibility. In this sense, nudging functioned through meaning reconstruction: cultural participation was not communicated as an obligation but as an identity expression.

Empirically, symbolic activation triggered processes of social re-identification. Residents who had previously remained disengaged began attending regularly, while younger generations exhibited renewed interest in traditional arts. These patterns indicate that cultural framing served as an initial catalyst for collective behavioral change by expanding affective spaces in which communities renegotiated their relationship with heritage. Within the Cultural-Nudge Policing framework, this mechanism underscores the centrality of symbol-based choice architecture in cultivating intrinsic motivation rather than external compliance.

4.2. Police as Community Facilitator

The second theme highlights a transformation in policing roles from public order guardians to community facilitators. In field practice, police presence was not marked by authoritative surveillance but by social orchestration, connecting cultural communities, municipal authorities, micro-enterprise actors, and youth arts groups. This facilitative role materialized through citizen dialogues, support for artistic activities, and the promotion of local cultural economies.

Informal exchanges between police and residents became key platforms for trust-building and participatory engagement. These interactions extended beyond conventional security concerns to encompass cultural aspirations and community needs. Traditional art performances and cultural micro-enterprise exhibitions were actively facilitated as integral components of policing strategy, integrating creative economy initiatives into broader ecosystems of social security.

This transformation reflects a shift from command-and-control policing toward relational policing, where legitimacy is constructed through social proximity and participatory presence. Police functioned as mediators among stakeholders and as community partners, reducing psychological distance between state institutions and citizens. Within Cultural-Nudge Policing, this facilitative role constitutes an institutional precondition for nudge effectiveness: behavioral interventions gain traction only when embedded in trust-based relationships and procedural fairness.

4.3. Nudge Mechanisms and Voluntary Participation

The third theme illustrates how nudge mechanisms generated behavioral change without coercion. Community participation was not driven by formal obligations or direct material incentives but by socially designed environments that rendered attendance a “natural” choice. Cultural activities were scheduled regularly, framed as open-access events, and disseminated through local social networks, effectively establishing participation as a default pathway within community life.

Over time, attendance increased substantially, including among groups previously uninvolved in cultural activities. More importantly, engagement evolved from passive presence to active contribution, encompassing idea generation, logistical support, and resident-initiated programming. This trajectory reflects the emergence of collective ownership over cultural spaces, as communities increasingly perceived activities as their own rather than externally imposed. These findings indicate that nudging operated as an initial behavioral catalyst, followed by deeper processes of value internalization. Once participation became socially institutionalized, reliance on

behavioral interventions diminished. Within Cultural-Nudge Policing, this pattern signifies a transition from behavioral activation to community self-organization, an essential indicator of sustainable cultural safeguarding.

4.4. From Public Order to Cultural Security

The fourth theme captures the broader social impacts of integrating nudging with collaborative policing. Cultural space activation and increased citizen participation contributed to strengthened trust between communities and police, alongside enhanced social cohesion across diverse groups. Previously sporadic interactions evolved into more stable and dialogical relationships.

Routine community presence in cultural public spaces also generated mechanisms of early conflict prevention. Potential social tensions were identified through informal communication channels, while cross-group engagement reduced fragmentation. Consequently, security was no longer defined merely by the absence of disturbance but emerged as a socially produced condition sustained through collective relationships and cultural continuity. This transformation marks a paradigmatic shift from public order policing toward cultural security. Security was reconceptualized as a community's capacity to sustain identity, reinforce solidarity, and manage difference through dialogue. In this context, Cultural-Nudge Policing produced outcomes extending beyond order maintenance, establishing social foundations for the sustainability of living heritage practices.

5. Discussion

This discussion situates the empirical findings within broader debates on policing transformation, behavioral governance, and the expanding meaning of security beyond conventional law enforcement paradigms. The results demonstrate that integrating Nudge Theory into collaborative policing practices enables the emergence of a novel governance mode that combines non-coercive behavioral interventions with social co-production, producing what this article conceptualizes as Cultural-Nudge Policing. This model marks a conceptual shift from policing as a mechanism of control toward policing as facilitation of social change grounded in cultural identity and community participation.

5.1. Redefining Policing: From Enforcement to Facilitation

The findings reinforce arguments in critical policing literature that police effectiveness in democratic societies increasingly depends on the capacity to cultivate social relationships rather than relying primarily on coercive state power. The roles of police as community facilitators, social mediators, and cultural partners observed in the Pekanbaru case provide empirical grounding for this transformation. Rather than positioning citizens as objects of protection, collaborative policing reframes communities as active subjects in the production of security.

This transformation aligns with the concept of co-production of security, which emphasizes that security emerges through sustained interaction between formal institutions and social actors (Loader & Walker, 2007; Terpstra, 2018). The principal contribution of this study lies in extending this framework by incorporating behavioral and symbolic dimensions. Collaboration, as demonstrated here, is not established solely through formal partnership structures but also through socially designed environments that facilitate emotional engagement and collective identification.

Through nudge mechanisms, police operate less as rule enforcers and more as social orchestrators who create conditions for voluntary participation. This approach expands understandings of procedural justice from fairness in legal encounters toward recognition of cultural identity. Police legitimacy, in this context, is constructed through participatory presence and cultural dialogue rather than institutional dominance. These findings enrich existing literature that locates legitimacy primarily in legal compliance, demonstrating that legitimacy can also be produced through everyday cultural engagement.

5.2. Nudge as a Democratic Governance Instrument

The integration of Nudge Theory into collaborative policing reveals nudging's potential as an instrument of democratic governance. Unlike traditional policy approaches reliant on regulation and sanctions, nudging operates through choice architecture that encourages pro-social behavior while preserving freedom of choice. In this study, nudging was enacted through cultural framing, symbolic activation of public spaces, and the creation of default participation pathways that normalized cultural engagement as a routine social practice.

Behavioral policy scholarship has long emphasized that nudge-based interventions are most effective when aligned with individuals' values and social identities (Sunstein, 2016; Benartzi et al., 2017). This article extends that argument by demonstrating that nudging becomes substantially more effective when embedded within trust-based collaborative structures. In other words, the success of nudging depends not only on choice design but also on the quality of institutional relationships between state actors and communities.

Within this framework, nudging functions as an initial behavioral trigger that opens space for value internalization. Once participation becomes socially institutionalized, it transitions into processes of community self-organization. This trajectory suggests that nudging can operate as a bridge between public policy and collective action, particularly in culturally sensitive domains.

Moreover, these findings challenge normative critiques of nudging as subtle manipulation. In Cultural-Nudge Policing, nudging expands communities' deliberative capacities by creating spaces for cultural expression and social dialogue. Rather than serving as a technocratic tool, nudging functions as a facilitative instrument that strengthens community agency.

5.3. Cultural Security as an Expansion of the Policing Mandate

One of the article's central theoretical contributions is the introduction of cultural security as an expansion of the policing mandate. Traditionally, security in policing studies has been framed in terms of public order, crime prevention, and social stability. The findings demonstrate that cultural practices constitute a strategic arena for security production, as collective identity, social cohesion, and conflict resolution mechanisms are forged within cultural engagement.

Cultural security refers to conditions in which cultural values and practices are protected through active social participation, generating more inclusive and resilient social relations. In Pekanbaru, cultural space activation not only increased citizen engagement but also facilitated early conflict prevention through informal communication and cross-group interaction. Consequently, security was produced through the continuity of cultural practices rather than through patrol or enforcement alone.

This conceptualization expands the analytical horizon of policing studies by positioning culture as an integral component of public security. Within this framework, Cultural-Nudge Policing offers an operational model in which police act as catalysts of collective behavioral change oriented toward sustaining identity and social solidarity. The approach complements community policing by introducing behavioral and symbolic dimensions, while bridging policing scholarship with heritage studies.

5.4. Implications for Global South Governance

Empirical insights from Indonesia provide critical perspectives for Global South governance, where states frequently confront institutional capacity constraints, cultural plurality, and social fragmentation simultaneously. In many Global South contexts, security strategies centered on state control tend to widen the gap between institutions and communities. The findings indicate that integrating nudging with collaborative policing offers a more adaptive, community-rooted governance alternative.

Cultural-Nudge Policing is particularly relevant for culturally diverse societies, as it enables local identity preservation while strengthening institutional legitimacy. By positioning police as facilitators of social change, this approach opens new possibilities for public policy that integrates security, culture, and social development. In

resource-constrained settings, behavioral strategies combined with community participation also offer relative efficiency compared to large-scale structural interventions.

Theoretically, this article extends behavioral governance and collaborative policing literature by providing empirical evidence beyond Western contexts that have dominated nudge and policing research. Accordingly, the study contributes not merely geographic diversity but a deeper conceptual understanding of how behavioral interventions interact with cultural and institutional dynamics in plural societies.

Overall, this article advances three core contributions: (1) the formulation of Cultural-Nudge Policing as an original integration of Nudge Theory, collaborative policing, and cultural safeguarding; (2) the conceptualization of cultural security as an expanded policing mandate; and (3) empirical evidence from a Global South context demonstrating how behavioral governance can be operationalized in policing practice. Collectively, these contributions extend police science beyond law enforcement paradigms toward participatory governance oriented to socio-cultural sustainability.

6. Conclusion

This article has examined how Nudge Theory can be integrated into collaborative policing frameworks to strengthen community participation in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Drawing on a qualitative case study at Rumah Singgah Tuan Kadi in Pekanbaru, Indonesia, the findings demonstrate that choice architecture-based behavioral interventions, when combined with relational and participatory policing practices, can catalyze collective behavioral change without coercion. Symbolic cultural activation, cultural framing, and the creation of default participation pathways were shown to increase citizen engagement, foster collective ownership of cultural spaces, and strengthen social cohesion.

Conceptually, these findings indicate that policing can no longer be understood solely as an instrument of law enforcement, but rather as a mechanism for facilitating social change rooted in cultural identity and everyday practices. The integration of nudging and collaborative policing gives rise to the Cultural-Nudge Policing model, which positions police as *behavioral catalysts* within participatory governance. This model simultaneously introduces cultural security as an expanded policing mandate, wherein security is produced through the continuity of cultural practices, institutional trust, and inclusive social relations.

The primary theoretical contribution of this article lies in integrating three domains that have largely evolved separately, behavioral public policy, collaborative policing, and intangible heritage safeguarding, into a unified analytical framework. By providing empirical evidence from Indonesia, the study also advances Global South scholarship on culturally sensitive security governance, challenging the predominance of Western-centric perspectives in nudging and policing literature. The findings demonstrate that behavioral approaches can be operationalized contextually in plural societies, provided they are supported by trust-based institutional relationships and meaningful community participation.

6.1. Policy Implications

The policy implications of this study point toward the need to reorient policing strategies toward more integrative approaches that connect security, culture, and social behavioral change.

First, the Indonesian National Police may develop culturally grounded policing programs that systematically embed nudge mechanisms within community engagement initiatives. Such programs should extend beyond conventional public order objectives to include the activation of cultural public spaces as platforms for strengthening social cohesion. This orientation enables policing to function as a catalyst for citizen participation rather than merely as a provider of security services.

Second, establishing or strengthening cultural units within police organizations represents a strategic pathway for institutionalizing collaboration with arts communities, customary leaders, and creative economy actors. These

units can serve as cross-sector coordination hubs, facilitating cultural dialogue, supporting traditional arts activities, and integrating heritage safeguarding into local security agendas.

Third, the development of behavioral policy laboratories within policing institutions, or in partnership with universities and research organizations, could enhance capacity for designing context-sensitive behavioral interventions. Such laboratories would enable pilot testing of choice architecture strategies, systematic evaluation of their impact on community participation, and the generation of empirical evidence to inform data-driven policy refinement.

More broadly, these implications underscore the importance of viewing policing as part of a socio-cultural governance ecosystem rather than as a sector isolated from community development. Integrating security, culture, and behavioral policy innovation opens pathways toward more adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable governance models.

6.2. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that warrant consideration. First, the single-case design constrains the generalizability of findings across different geographical and cultural contexts. While the approach offers analytical depth, replication in diverse settings is necessary to test the robustness of the Cultural-Nudge Policing model. Second, the study primarily examines qualitative dimensions of behavioral change and social relations, without longitudinal quantitative measurement of impacts on security indicators or cultural sustainability.

Future research could adopt mixed-methods designs to integrate qualitative insights with quantitative measures of citizen participation, public trust, and social cohesion. Comparative studies across regions or countries would further illuminate variations in Cultural-Nudge Policing implementation across cultural contexts. Additionally, subsequent research may explore the role of digital technologies in expanding cultural choice architectures and assess how interactions between offline and online nudging influence community participation dynamics.

By integrating Nudge Theory into collaborative policing, this article offers a new framework for understanding security as a participatory socio-cultural process. Cultural-Nudge Policing extends policing scholarship beyond enforcement paradigms toward behavioral governance oriented to identity sustainability and social cohesion. In Global South contexts characterized by cultural diversity and resource constraints, this approach provides a strategic alternative that not only strengthens institutional legitimacy but also empowers communities as central actors in sustaining living cultural heritage.

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Ethics / Informed Consent: All participants involved in the study were informed about the objectives of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection commenced. All data were analyzed and reported anonymously to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of participants.

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Preventing Institutional Radicalization in Policing: Reconstructing the Staircase through Multi-Level Governance Framework

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Abstract

Radicalization has long been framed as a phenomenon emerging outside the state within civilian communities, informal networks, and marginalized social spaces, while security institutions are typically positioned as counter-actors presumed to be relatively immune from ideological infiltration. This article challenges that assumption by advancing the concept of *institutional radicalization*: a gradual and latent process through which extremist ideologies develop within formal state organizations and potentially reshape their normative orientation and operational capacity. By reconstructing the *Staircase to Terrorism* within the context of policing institutions, this study extends radicalization theory from the individual level to the institutional domain. Drawing on a qualitative institutional case study based on multi-actor interviews, document analysis, and thematic coding, the findings reveal that radicalization within policing organizations cannot be reduced to individual ideological deviance. Rather, it emerges from the convergence of three mutually reinforcing dynamics, such as vertical psychological escalation triggered by perceived injustice and professional identity dissonance; horizontal legitimation through closed relational networks and ideological solidarity; and structural facilitation through access to coercive authority and institutional resources. Institutional risk intensifies when ideological commitment intersects with organizational capacity. Building on this synthesis, the article develops the Integrated Multi-Level Model of Institutional Radicalization Risk and Prevention, reframing radicalization as a governance vulnerability rather than a purely individual pathology. Normatively, the study cautions against excessive internal securitization and emphasizes the necessity of proportionate, multi-level prevention strategies grounded in organizational justice, relational inclusivity, and accountable oversight. By extending radicalization theory into the institutional sphere, this article contributes to critical terrorism studies while offering an analytical framework for strengthening ideological resilience within security organizations.

Keywords: Institutional Radicalization, Staircase to Terrorism, Security Governance, Policing, Institutional Vulnerability, Multi-Level Prevention, Ideological Resilience

1. Introduction

Radicalization has classically been understood as a social and psychological process unfolding within civilian communities and non-state networks. Mainstream terrorism scholarship explains how individuals move from perceptions of injustice toward the internalization of extremist ideology and, under certain conditions, engagement in violence (Hoffman, 2006). This perspective conceptualizes radicalization as an escalatory process rooted in identity dynamics, marginalization, and social conflict (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017), often associated with relative deprivation and grievance formation (Gurr, 1970). Despite the extensive development of research on pathways into extremism, attention to radicalization within formal state institutions, particularly policing organizations, remains comparatively limited.

At the macro-security level, terrorism has increasingly been recognized not merely as episodic violence but as a defining non-traditional security threat in the post-Cold War era. Yunanto and Damayanti (2017) argue that the end of bipolar ideological confrontation shifted global security typologies from conventional military threats toward asymmetric and non-traditional challenges, with terrorism emerging as a primary concern in national and international security policymaking. In this framing, terrorism is not only an extraordinary crime but also a crime against humanity, given its capacity to destabilize political order, erode social trust, and polarize societies. Moreover, effective counterterrorism requires a strategic balance between coercive security measures (hard approach) and interventions addressing ideological, social, and psychological root causes (soft approach). This dual strategic logic is analytically significant. If terrorism is both a security threat and an ideological phenomenon requiring governance-sensitive responses, then radicalization cannot be conceptualized solely as an external societal problem. The question becomes more complex when ideological processes unfold within institutions entrusted with coercive authority. Despite the extensive development of research on pathways into extremism, attention to radicalization within formal state institutions, particularly policing organizations, remains comparatively limited.

Moghaddam's (2005) *Staircase to Terrorism* provides one of the most systematic frameworks for understanding radicalization as a staged process. The model conceptualizes radicalization as a progression beginning with perceived injustice (the ground floor), followed by frustration and the search for alternatives, displacement of aggression, moral engagement with extremist narratives, and ultimately terrorist action. Radicalization is thus portrayed as progressive and selective, shaped by structural and social contexts that condition movement between stages (Moghaddam, 2005).

However, subsequent scholarship suggests that while the staircase model remains analytically robust, its linear progression may not fully capture contemporary radicalization dynamics. Prindani and Syauqillah (2025), in their study on digital-era radicalization in Indonesia, argue that radicalization processes increasingly unfold through interconnected and overlapping phases, particularly under the influence of social media ecosystems and encrypted communication platforms. Rather than moving strictly step-by-step, individuals may experience accelerated cognitive and relational reinforcement due to algorithmic exposure and online network clustering. This digital compression effect challenges purely sequential interpretations of escalation. Therefore, although Moghaddam's framework offers a powerful psychological architecture, its application in contemporary institutional contexts requires integration with network-based and digitally mediated radicalization dynamics (Prindani & Syauqillah, 2025). Subsequent theoretical syntheses have emphasized that radicalization reflects the interaction of cognitive, relational, and environmental mechanisms rather than a simple linear pathway (Hafez & Mullins, 2015).

However, the staircase model has been predominantly applied to individuals operating within broader society. Formal organizations such as the police possess hierarchical structures, institutional cultures, and legally sanctioned coercive authority that significantly differentiate internal radicalization dynamics. Policing institutions are not ordinary social arenas; they hold access to armed force, control over sensitive intelligence, and state-legitimized authority to use violence (Kraska, 2007). In this context, radicalization cannot be treated solely as an individual deviation but may shift the normative and professional orientation of the institution itself. Organizational identity and justice theories suggest that members internalize institutional norms and respond to

perceived fairness or injustice within hierarchical systems (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tyler, 2006), potentially creating openings for ideological realignment.

Contemporary radicalization literature further indicates that pathways to extremism involve interactions among cognitive shifts, group dynamics, and environmental exposure (Borum, 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). Individuals rarely radicalize in isolation; they progress through stages of identification, moral justification, and solidarity formation (Wiktorowicz, 2005). Group processes and social networks reinforce ideological commitment and normalize radical narratives (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When such processes unfold within formal institutions, internal networks and subcultures may function either as accelerators or restraints of radicalization.

In the digital era, these dynamics have become increasingly complex. Sageman (2008) stated that contemporary extremist networks operate through decentralized online communication, while Silber and Bhatt (2007) highlight the role of virtual platforms in facilitating radicalization pathways. Digital transformation enables the internalization of extremist narratives without physical group presence (Neumann, 2013). Members of policing institutions remain embedded within the same digital ecosystem as the broader public and, therefore, are not immune to exposure to extremist ideologies.

The concept of radicalization itself remains contested. Kundnani (2012) critiques policy approaches that reduce radicalization to a linear progression toward violence, arguing that such simplifications risk legitimizing excessive securitization. This critique is particularly relevant within policing organizations, where overly repressive responses to suspected internal radicalization may generate distrust and legitimacy paradoxes. A more comprehensive conceptual framework is therefore required, one that explains escalation processes while also accounting for governance implications and proportional intervention.

Empirical evidence from Indonesia demonstrates that radicalization within state security institutions is not merely theoretical but documented. Data collected in this study indicate that personnel within the Indonesian National Police have been identified as exposed to radical ideologies across ranks, with the majority concentrated at the non-commissioned officer level (128 personnel), followed by seven junior officers, one senior officer, and one civil servant, respectively. Additionally, in 2019, a national survey by the SETARA Institute reported that nearly 4% of military and police personnel were exposed to radical ideologies (SETARA Institute, 2019). These findings illustrate that radicalization is not confined to civilian society but has penetrated institutions normatively mandated to uphold national stability.

Concrete cases further reinforce the urgency of this issue. The dissertation documents instances of police personnel allegedly affiliating with extremist organizations, including the case of Brigadier S, reported to have joined ISIS, the arrest of a police woman affiliated with Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), and indications of intolerant narratives disseminated through internal communication groups involving regional police officials. Moreover, data from Densus 88 and the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) indicate a significant increase in violent extremist content in digital spaces, with thousands of accounts and tens of thousands of pieces of content identified in recent years (BNPT, 2023). These developments demonstrate that radicalization within policing institutions unfolds through the interaction of ideological narratives, social networks, and digital ecosystems.

Although internal measures, such as the formulation of intolerance and radicalism indicators by the Professional and Security Division (Propam) and ideological screening during recruitment, have been implemented, responses remain largely reactive and enforcement-oriented. A systematic conceptual framework explaining how radicalization develops gradually within formal organizational structures, and how psychological, relational, and structural dimensions interact in that process, remains underdeveloped. This gap underscores the need to integrate escalation-based radicalization theory, particularly the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005), with organizational theory in order to build a more comprehensive understanding of institutional radicalization and a stronger foundation for governance-based prevention strategies.

Building upon this problem, this article reconstructs radicalization within the institutional context by integrating the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005) with group radicalization scholarship and theories of security organization (Borum, 2011; Kraska, 2007). It advances the concept of institutional radicalization as a staged process of extremist ideological internalization within formal organizations, mediated by the interaction of psychological escalation, relational legitimation, and institutional operational structures. Radicalization is thus conceptualized as a multi-level dynamic capable not only of affecting individuals but also of transforming the normative orientation and operational capacity of security institutions.

As a conceptual implication, this article develops a multi-level risk and prevention model. If radicalization follows an escalatory pattern as described in Staircase Theory (Moghaddam, 2005), and if relational and structural dynamics reinforce that escalation (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Kraska, 2007), then prevention must be designed simultaneously across three levels: psychological, social-relational, and operational-institutional. This approach extends radicalization studies into the domain of state organizations while offering a proportionate, governance-based, and risk-sensitive framework for institutional resilience.

2. Theoretical Framework

Radicalization in contemporary terrorism literature is understood as a gradual process involving cognitive, affective, and normative transformations prior to the adoption of violent behavior (Borum, 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). Within this framework, radicalization is not a singular event but a dynamic progression shaped by the interaction between individuals and their environments. Moghaddam's (2005) *Staircase to Terrorism* provides one of the most systematic representations of this dynamic. The model places perceived injustice at the "*ground floor*," which may evolve into frustration, displacement of aggression, moral legitimization of violence, and ultimately terrorist action. At each stage, fewer individuals proceed to the next level, rendering radicalization both selective and context-dependent (Moghaddam, 2005). This staged understanding is further supported by theoretical syntheses emphasizing that radicalization involves the interplay of grievance, identity, and environmental conditions rather than a simple linear pathway (Gurr, 1970; Hafez & Mullins, 2015).

However, the staircase model remains conceptually centered on individuals operating within broader societal contexts. A critical yet underexplored question concerns how escalation mechanisms function when individuals are embedded within formal organizations characterized by hierarchical structures, normative cultures, and coercive authority. In policing institutions, individuals interact not only with external social environments but also with promotion systems, internal relational patterns, and professional norms that shape institutional identity. Organizational identity theory suggests that members internalize institutional values and norms (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), while organizational justice theory underscores the role of perceived fairness in shaping institutional legitimacy (Tyler, 2006). Consequently, perceived injustice at the "*ground floor*" may stem not only from external socio-political dynamics but also from internal bureaucratic experiences such as dissatisfaction with promotion processes, perceptions of discrimination, or conflicts between professional and personal value systems.

Group radicalization theory further emphasizes that social legitimation plays a central role in accelerating ideological commitment (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). When individuals encounter support or resonance within their social networks, extremist ideas are no longer perceived as deviant but as collectively validated identities. Processes of identification and moral alignment within groups facilitate what Wiktorowicz (2005) describes as cognitive openings that deepen ideological engagement. In policing organizations, internal relational networks, both formal and informal, may function as arenas for the normalization of extremist discourse, particularly when formed within closed groups or ideological affiliations. Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), such dynamics can generate strong in-group cohesion and ideological solidarity. This process produces what may be termed "*horizontal escalation*," whereby ideological commitment is reinforced through social legitimation, operating alongside the "*vertical escalation*" described in Moghaddam's staircase model.

Beyond psychological and relational dimensions, organizational structure plays a decisive role in determining radicalization risk. Policing institutions possess distinctive characteristics, including access to weapons, control

over sensitive intelligence, and legally sanctioned authority to use force (Kraska, 2007). When individuals who have undergone psychological escalation and obtained social legitimation gain access to operational resources, the potential transformation of ideology into actionable capacity increases significantly. In this sense, organizational structure may function as a high-risk facilitator when control mechanisms and oversight structures are insufficiently effective.

Based on this integration, this article reconstructs radicalization as a multi-level phenomenon involving three primary dimensions: (1) a psychological dimension that follows the pattern of vertical escalation articulated in the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005); (2) a social-relational dimension that reinforces ideological legitimation through networks and collective identity (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1979); and (3) an operational-institutional dimension that determines the capacity for ideological actualization within formal structures (Kraska, 2007). These dimensions do not operate independently but interact dynamically. Institutional radicalization emerges when vertical individual escalation converges with horizontal network legitimation and structural opportunity within the organization.

Accordingly, the concept of institutional radicalization proposed in this article is defined as a staged process of extremist ideological internalization within formal organizations, shaped by the simultaneous interaction of individual cognitive escalation, group-based social legitimation, and institutional operational structures. This reconstruction extends Moghaddam's staircase model from the individual level to the institutional domain and provides the theoretical foundation for the development of a multi-level risk and prevention framework discussed in the subsequent section.

3. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach using an institutional case study design to reconstruct the dynamics of radicalization within policing organizations. This approach was selected because the primary objective is not merely to identify the presence of radical ideological exposure, but to understand how ideological escalation unfolds gradually within the formal structure of the state. The research paradigm is descriptive-analytical, oriented toward the development of conceptually grounded constructs based on empirical data. Accordingly, the study does not seek statistical generalization but rather analytical generalization, namely, the development of theoretical propositions that may be examined and potentially replicated within other security institutions.

Data collection was conducted through a combination of in-depth interviews, document analysis, and contextual observation. Interviews were carried out with diverse categories of informants to ensure perspectival variation and minimize single-source bias. These included police personnel identified as exposed or vulnerable to radical ideologies, internal police officials, representatives from counter-terrorism agencies, academic experts, and former terrorism convicts. This multi-actor approach enabled the exploration of radicalization dynamics from individual, organizational, and external ecosystem perspectives. In addition, internal policy documents, institutional regulations, and preventive indicators implemented within the organization were analyzed to understand structural responses to radicalization risks. Observations of mentoring practices and internal oversight mechanisms were conducted to contextualize the findings and assess the consistency between normative policy frameworks and implementation practices.

Data analysis followed an interactive analytical model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification. Thematic coding was supported by NVivo software to identify recurring patterns and interrelationships across categories. The coding structure was developed iteratively based on three primary analytical dimensions: psychological, social-relational, and structural-operational, which were subsequently synthesized with the *Staircase to Terrorism* framework (Moghaddam, 2005). The first stage of analysis focused on identifying gradual escalation patterns within informants' narratives and experiential accounts. The second stage reconstructed the interaction among dimensions in order to conceptualize institutional radicalization as a multi-level phenomenon. To ensure credibility, the study employed source triangulation and cross-verification among informants. Given the sensitivity of researching security institutions, informant identities were

anonymized, and data were presented categorically to preserve institutional integrity and adhere to ethical considerations.

4. Results

The findings indicate that radicalization within policing organizations does not unfold as a singular or isolated event but rather as a layered and gradual process involving the interaction of psychological, relational, and structural dimensions. The identified patterns of escalation are consistent with the logic of the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005). However, within institutional settings, each stage is shaped not only by individual experiences but also by organizational dynamics and internal networks.

4.1. Psychological Dimension: Perceived Injustice and Cognitive Escalation

At the initial stage, institutional radicalization frequently originates from perceived injustice or dissatisfaction arising from internal bureaucratic experiences. Informants reported that factors such as dissatisfaction with promotion processes, perceptions of discrimination, and tensions between professional norms and personal ideological convictions functioned as catalysts for what can be described as a cognitive opening. This stage corresponds to the “ground floor” in Moghaddam’s (2005) model, where perceived injustice creates space for the search for alternative narratives.

The dissertation data reveal that several personnel identified as exposed to radical ideologies were situated at ranks relatively vulnerable to structural pressures, particularly at the non-commissioned officer level. This pattern suggests that organizational factors such as hierarchical stratification and unequal access to career advancement may interact with individual psychological dynamics. At this stage, radicalization does not yet manifest in overt action; rather, it develops through the internalization of narratives that morally justify dissatisfaction and reinterpret professional grievances through ideological lenses.

4.2. Social-Relational Dimension: Ideological Legitimation and Normalization

Escalation intensifies when individuals obtain social legitimation for their ideological views through relational networks. The findings indicate the formation of closed discussion groups, communication via online messaging platforms, and expressions of ideological solidarity both within and beyond institutional boundaries. This process reflects what may be termed “horizontal escalation,” whereby ideological commitment is reinforced through group interaction and social validation.

In several cases documented in the dissertation, the involvement of police personnel in networks affiliated with extremist groups demonstrates how relational support can function as an accelerator of ideological commitment. At this stage, extremist narratives are no longer perceived as deviant but as morally legitimate expressions of collective solidarity. This dynamic aligns with group radicalization literature emphasizing the role of collective identity and network reinforcement in intensifying ideological commitment (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). The normalization of discourse within closed networks reduces cognitive dissonance and lowers the psychological threshold for further escalation.

4.3. Structural-Operational Dimension: Institutional Access and Capacity

The most critical phase within policing organizations emerges when psychological escalation and relational legitimation intersect with structural access to operational resources. Policing institutions provide access to firearms, intelligence information, and legally sanctioned authority to use force. In such contexts, the risk of radicalization increases substantially because ideologically internalized beliefs may be translated into actionable capacity.

The dissertation documents instances in which ideological exposure among police personnel did not remain confined to belief systems but extended to indications of support for extremist networks or the dissemination of intolerant narratives within internal spaces. Furthermore, data from national counter-terrorism authorities indicate a significant increase in violent extremist content circulating within digital environments in recent years. These developments illustrate how digital ecosystems expand opportunities for ideological infiltration even within formal institutions. When ideological commitment intersects with institutional authority, radicalization acquires structural leverage.

4.4. Multi-Level Interaction: Vertical and Horizontal Escalation

The central finding of this study is that institutional radicalization does not follow a strictly linear progression. Rather, it evolves through the simultaneous interaction of vertical escalation psychological stages corresponding to Moghaddam's staircase—and horizontal escalation, whereby ideological commitment is socially reinforced through networks. These two dynamics acquire heightened risk when they intersect with the operational structure of the organization.

Institutional radicalization thus occurs when three conditions converge: (1) individual cognitive escalation, (2) relational legitimation through group networks, and (3) structural opportunity within the organization. This configuration demonstrates that radicalization within policing institutions is not merely a matter of individual ideology but a matter of institutional governance. Organizational structures may function as brakes through effective oversight and normative reinforcement, yet they may also act as accelerators when oversight gaps or permissive subcultures remain undetected.

4.5. Integrated Multi-Level Model: Risk and Prevention of Institutional Radicalization

As a synthesis of empirical findings and theoretical reconstruction, this article develops an Integrated Multi-Level Model of Institutional Radicalization Risk and Prevention (see Figure 1). The model emerges from the integration of the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005), group radicalization literature (Borum, 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017), and theories of organizational vulnerability within security institutions (Kraska, 2007). The diagram conceptualizes institutional radicalization as a multi-level process consisting of three interacting layers of risk: psychological, social-relational, and operational-institutional. These levels do not unfold linearly; rather, they form a dynamic configuration that determines the intensity of escalation and the likelihood of operational actualization.

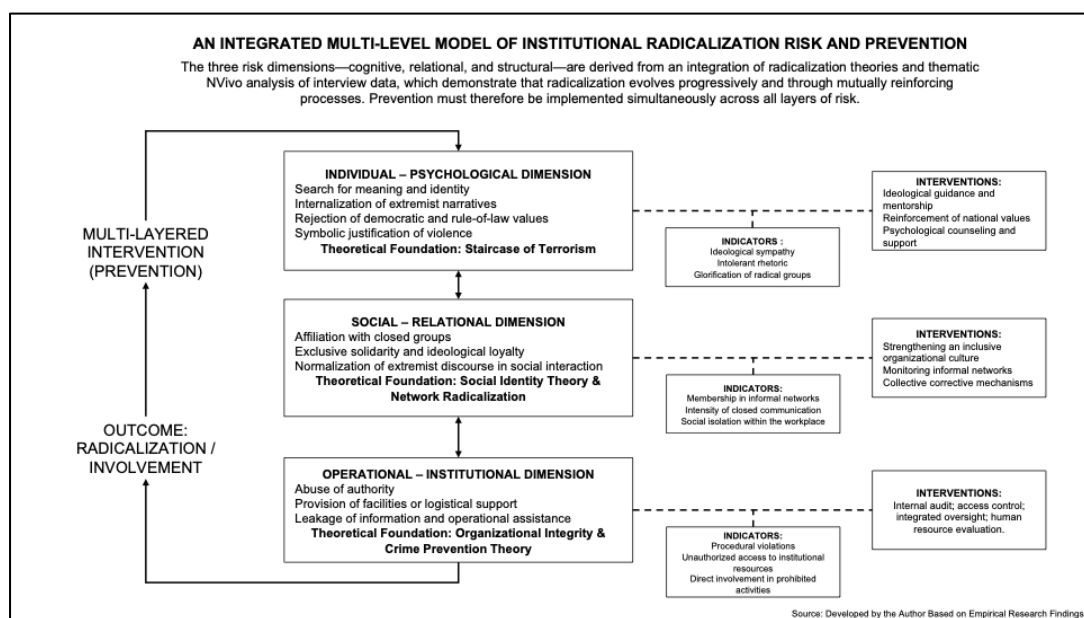


Figure 1: Model of Institutional Radicalization Risk and Prevention

Source: processed by the author

At the top of the diagram lies the individual-psychological level, explicitly grounded in the theoretical foundation of the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005). Indicators at this level include identity-seeking, internalization of extremist narratives, rejection of democratic values, and glorification of radical figures. These elements represent stages of vertical escalation within the radicalization staircase. The empirical findings demonstrate that early stages of radicalization are frequently linked to perceived injustice and bureaucratic dissatisfaction within the organization. In institutional settings, the “ground floor” may derive not only from external socio-political inequalities but also from internal dynamics such as promotion systems, distribution of authority, and conflicts between professional norms and personal convictions. The model positions the psychological dimension as the initial risk layer, but not as a sufficient determinant on its own.

The second layer of the diagram represents the social-relational level, drawing upon scholarship on network radicalization and group identity formation (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Borum, 2011). Indicators at this level include affiliation with closed groups, social exclusivity, and the normalization of extremist discourse in internal interactions. The diagram illustrates how psychological escalation acquires horizontal legitimation through relational networks. Empirical findings reveal instances of closed communication channels and ideological solidarity that reinforce commitment to extremist narratives. At this stage, extremist ideology is no longer perceived as individual deviation but as a socially validated collective identity. This layer functions as a bridge between cognitive internalization and structural actualization, amplifying the risk trajectory.

The third layer constitutes the operational-institutional level, depicted in the diagram as the highest-risk domain. It is at this level that radicalization gains structural capacity to transform into action. Indicators include access to authority and operational resources, potential information leakage, misuse of institutional power, and operational support for extremist networks. These indicators reflect the coercive and strategic characteristics of policing institutions (Kraska, 2007). Empirical evidence documents cases involving the dissemination of intolerant narratives within institutional spaces and indications of personnel connectivity with extremist networks. Moreover, the documented rise in violent extremist digital content expands opportunities for ideological infiltration into formal organizational structures. The model visualizes that when psychological escalation and relational legitimation intersect with structural access, radicalization risk reaches a critical threshold.

At the bottom of the diagram appears the concept of multi-layered intervention, representing the governance implications of the model. Interventions are structured into three categories, including pre-emptive (value-based education and ideological literacy), preventive (monitoring relational risk and auditing organizational culture), and corrective (targeted intervention and strengthened structural oversight). This structure is derived directly from the logic of the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005), which emphasizes that the higher the stage of escalation, the narrower the window for effective intervention. The diagram, therefore, not only depicts the architecture of risk but also asserts that effective prevention must operate simultaneously across multiple levels.

Overall, the model illustrates that institutional radicalization occurs when three conditions converge: vertical escalation at the psychological level, horizontal legitimation at the relational level, and structural opportunity at the operational level. By extending Moghaddam’s staircase from the individual to the institutional domain, the model demonstrates that the highest risk lies not in ideology alone, but in the convergence of ideological commitment and institutional capacity. The proposed Integrated Multi-Level Model thus serves not merely as a descriptive schema, but as an analytical framework for developing early warning systems and proportionate governance-based prevention strategies within security institutions.

5. Discussion

5.1. Extending the Staircase: From Individual to Institution

The principal contribution of this article lies in reconstructing the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005) from an individual-centered framework to an institutional one. In its original formulation, the staircase model

depicts a psychological process through which individuals move from perceived injustice toward the moral legitimization of violence. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that when individuals are embedded within formal organizations characterized by hierarchical structures and coercive capacity, escalation is no longer purely individual. Instead, it is mediated by internal relational networks and facilitated, or constrained, by organizational structures.

Institutional radicalization, therefore, is not merely the radicalization of individuals who happen to work within state institutions. Rather, it emerges from the interaction among vertical escalation (psychological dynamics), horizontal legitimization (relational reinforcement), and structural opportunity (operational capacity). This reconstruction extends radicalization scholarship by demonstrating that organizations may function either as accelerators or as containment mechanisms within the escalation process. The institutional context shapes how grievances are interpreted, how identities are reinforced, and how ideological narratives acquire operational relevance.

In this sense, institutional radicalization challenges the assumption that the state and its security apparatus stand outside the spectrum of ideological vulnerability. Security institutions are themselves social spaces shaped by identity dynamics, frustration, and ideological solidarity (Borum, 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). By extending the staircase model to the institutional level, this article positions state organizations not merely as counter-radicalization actors but as components within the broader ecosystem of radicalization processes.

5.2. Institutional Radicalization and the Politics of Security

From the perspective of critical terrorism studies, these findings carry broader implications for the politics of security. The concept of radicalization has frequently been mobilized as a policy instrument to justify surveillance, intervention, and preventive governance targeting specific communities (Kundnani, 2012; Neumann, 2013). When radicalization is understood as a phenomenon that may also unfold within state institutions, the security narrative becomes more complex. The state can no longer be positioned as wholly neutral or immune to processes of ideological escalation.

The multi-level model advanced in this article demonstrates that the highest institutional risk does not arise from ideological belief alone, but from the convergence of ideology and structural capacity. Within policing organizations, access to firearms, intelligence resources, and legally sanctioned coercive authority amplifies the potential consequences of ideological escalation (Kraska, 2007). Institutional radicalization thus becomes not only a matter of individual deviance, but a matter of governance over power within organizations entrusted with legitimate force.

At the same time, acknowledging internal vulnerability introduces a normative dilemma. Efforts to prevent radicalization within security institutions may inadvertently encourage excessive internal securitization. Ideological surveillance of personnel can generate climates of distrust and potentially infringe upon principles of intellectual freedom and professional rights. Kundnani's (2012) critique of radicalization as an elastic and politically instrumentalized concept is therefore particularly relevant in this context. The model proposed here explicitly emphasizes proportional intervention and the distinction between personal belief and operational threat, thereby seeking to avoid conflating ideological heterogeneity with actionable risk.

5.3. From Securitization to Institutional Resilience

The findings further suggest that preventing institutional radicalization cannot rely solely on repressive measures or intensified surveillance. If radicalization originates in perceived injustice and bureaucratic dissatisfaction as identified in the psychological "ground floor," then control-oriented strategies may reinforce the very conditions that initiate escalation (Moghaddam, 2005). Excessive securitization may therefore prove counterproductive.

Instead, the multi-level framework directs attention toward strengthening institutional ideological resilience. Such resilience is cultivated through a combination of organizational justice, inclusive relational culture, and transparent

structural oversight. Organizational justice theory underscores that perceptions of fairness influence legitimacy and compliance (Tyler, 2006), suggesting that fair promotion systems, equitable treatment, and accountable leadership may function as preventive safeguards. Moreover, group radicalization scholarship emphasizes that early intervention and collective norm reinforcement can limit escalation (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). Prevention, in this sense, should be understood not as the expansion of security control, but as the reform of internal governance structures that reduce structural vulnerabilities.

This article offers two primary contributions. First, it expands the analytical focus of radicalization studies from civilian populations to state institutions, thereby enriching debates about reciprocal security vulnerability. By foregrounding institutional contexts, the analysis disrupts the conventional dichotomy between the radicalized “other” and the securitizing state.

Second, the article avoids reductionism by rejecting the framing of radicalization as purely individual deviance. Instead, it demonstrates how organizational structures and power relations mediate escalation processes. By integrating the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005) with group radicalization theory and organizational vulnerability perspectives, the study argues that institutional radicalization is a multi-level phenomenon requiring reflective and proportionate governance responses.

In doing so, the article shifts the analytical debate from the question of “who is radical?” toward the more structural question of “how do institutional power configurations mediate ideological escalation?” This reframing contributes to a more nuanced and governance-oriented understanding of radicalization within security institutions.

6. Conclusion

This article began from a significant gap in radicalization scholarship, which has largely concentrated on individuals and civilian communities, while the vulnerability of formal state institutions, particularly policing organizations, remains insufficiently theorized. By reconstructing the Staircase to Terrorism (Moghaddam, 2005) within the context of formal organizational structures, this study advances the concept of institutional radicalization as a gradual and latent process mediated by the interaction of individual psychological escalation, social legitimation through networks, and structural opportunity embedded within the institution.

The primary contribution of this article is both conceptual and analytical. First, it extends the staircase model from an individual-centered framework to a multi-level institutional perspective, demonstrating that organizations may function either as accelerators or containment mechanisms of ideological escalation. Second, through the development of the Integrated Multi-Level Model of Institutional Radicalization Risk and Prevention, the study argues that the highest institutional risk lies not in ideology alone, but in the convergence of ideological commitment and structural capacity within security institutions. Institutional radicalization, therefore, is reframed not merely as personal deviance but as a governance issue concerning the management of power and authority within organizations entrusted with legitimate force.

From a normative standpoint, the findings underscore that preventing radicalization within security institutions cannot be reduced to repressive ideological surveillance. Excessive internal securitization may inadvertently reinforce perceptions of injustice, thereby strengthening the very “ground floor” conditions identified in the staircase model (Moghaddam, 2005). Effective prevention must instead be multi-layered and proportionate, emphasizing organizational justice, inclusive relational culture, and transparent structural oversight. Within this framework, institutional ideological resilience emerges as a broader agenda of security governance reform.

Ultimately, this article argues that radicalization is not solely a social phenomenon external to the state, but also a latent possibility within state structures themselves. By shifting analytical attention from the question of “who is radical?” to “how do institutional structures mediate ideological escalation?”, the study contributes to critical debates on terrorism and security governance. It invites further research into ideological vulnerability across

diverse state institutions and encourages a more reflexive understanding of the relationship between power, organization, and radicalization.

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Ethics / Informed Consent: All participants involved in the study were informed about the objectives of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection commenced. All data were analyzed and reported anonymously to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of participants.

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From Nemangkawi to Damai-Cartenz: The Paradigm Shift of Polri's Peacebuilding in Papua

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Abstract

This article analyzes how the Indonesian National Police (Polri) conceptualize and implement peacebuilding in the Papua conflict through the transition from Operation Nemangkawi to Operation Damai Cartenz and the subsequent design and partial implementation of Operation Rasaka Cartenz. It argues that although the discourse of humanist, non-traditional security approaches was formally adopted, particularly via the Binmas Noken community policing programs, peacebuilding largely remained at the narrative level and was not coherently translated into operational doctrine, institutional design, or evaluation parameters. Using Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, field observations, and interviews, the study shows that the absence of a Papua-specific peacebuilding roadmap, the dominance of quantitative and militaristic success indicators under Chief of Indonesian Police Regulation No. 1 of 2019 on System, Management, and Operational Success Standards (Perkap No. 1/2019), fragmented and unsustained programs, weak synergy with local stakeholders, and insufficient attention to gender and local wisdom have collectively undermined long-term efforts to build trust, well-being, and sustainable peace for Papuans. The article concludes that effective police-led peacebuilding in Papua requires reorienting legal and institutional frameworks, success indicators, and program design toward inclusive, context-sensitive, and locally grounded notions of justice, recognition, and welfare.

Keywords: Papua Conflict, Polri, Peacebuilding, Binmas Noken, Damai-Cartenz; Nemangkawi

1. Introduction

1.1. The Conundrum of the Papua Conflict

The protracted conflict between the Free Papua Organisation (OPM) and the Indonesian Government cannot be reduced to a straightforward struggle for independence, but is rooted in multiple, overlapping grievances. Several widely circulated narratives at national and international levels highlight why demands for Papuan self-determination remain salient.

First, there is enduring contestation over the 1962 New York Agreement between the Netherlands and Indonesia concerning the status of West Papua (United Nations, 1962). The Agreement mandated the transfer of administration from the Netherlands to Indonesia via the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA), formally to safeguard human rights and facilitate the transition (United Nations, 1962: 278–282). However, the process largely excluded the voices and aspirations of Orang Asli Papua (OAP), leading many observers to characterise it as a top down arrangement that enabled the de facto annexation of West Papua without genuine Papuan consent (Sariols, 2019).

Second, sociocultural cleavages reinforce a distinct Papuan identity vis à vis the rest of Indonesia. OAP are generally identified as part of the Melanesian family, in contrast to the predominantly Austronesian populations elsewhere in Indonesia, and are mostly Christian, whereas most Indonesians are Muslim (Sariols, 2019). This ethnic and religious divergence deepens “Us vs. Them” dynamics and strengthens Papuan identification with other Melanesian societies in the Pacific (Yambeyapdi, 2022: 169).

Third, serious and persistent allegations of human rights violations further fuel grievance. Reports by the International Coalition for Papua indicate a high incidence of violations attributed to Indonesian security forces (ICP, 2020), while the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented alleged unlawful arrests, torture, killings, enforced disappearances, and other ill treatment (OHCHR, 2019). In UN forums, Pacific states—particularly Vanuatu—have repeatedly condemned Indonesia for patterns of violence, exploitation, and arbitrary detention in Papua (United Nations, 2019; 2020).

1.2. Nemangkawi to Damai-Cartenz

During the Jokowi administration, economic growth, social welfare, and equitable infrastructure development were prioritized, with Papua explicitly designated as a key focus area. Within this broader agenda, the police were mandated to develop a context sensitive policing model for Papua based on a soft, non military approach that emphasizes humanity, equality, and peace (Sudarto, 2023: 226).

A central innovation was the Binmas Noken program, a community based policing model that relies on amicable, culturally attuned engagement rather than repressive methods. Under this paradigm, police officers exercise discretion not only to maintain public order but also to adapt law enforcement practices to local norms and expectations. The program seeks to reduce tensions rooted in Papuan perceptions of discrimination and human rights violations by the Indonesian state, and to counter the antagonistic image of government security forces that feeds support for independence movements such as OPM.

In 2022, Operation Nemangkawi was formally terminated and replaced by Operation Damai Cartenz, which, despite its name and stated objectives, has increasingly relied on hard security measures (Achmad & Santosa, 2023). Binmas Noken now operates under the banner of Rasaka Cartenz (Operasi Samara Kasih Cartenz), reconfigured as a regional rather than centrally controlled initiative, which has raised concerns that, without strong national oversight, this soft approach operation remains marginal and structurally overshadowed by the more dominant Damai Cartenz framework.

1.3. The Problem Defined

OPM’s position within Indonesia’s national security discourse is difficult to pin down, as policy responses have increasingly framed the Papua conflict through a militaristic rather than human centred lens. Operation Nemangkawi, particularly through the introduction of Binmas Noken, initially reflected Polri’s commitment to a soft, human centred policing model that emphasizes community engagement, protection, and service in addressing long standing conflict. Yet despite public praise for Binmas Noken’s contribution to de escalation, Nemangkawi was discontinued and replaced by Operation Damai Cartenz, which, while formally retaining peacebuilding objectives, operationally leans back toward traditional security practices that contradict the earlier soft approach ethos.

This tension raises a central research question: how does the transition from Nemangkawi to Damai Cartenz signify a paradigm shift in Polri's peacebuilding doctrine toward the Papua conflict?

1.4. The Research Gap

Numerous previous studies have discussed the nomenclature of the Papua conflict, including preceding research in formulating the best policing model to combat OPM activities—let it be framed within the traditional security approach nor the contemporary human-based outlook. Nevertheless, none have examined that Polri's peacebuilding programs are without any specific roadmap, often sporadic, lack of synergy, and ceased once there is change in the leader's position, which make the peacebuilding process hovers in stagnancy with no clear trajectory on what to do next to achieve peace in Papua conflict with welfare as the concrete end goal, as I plan to do as the Research Gap.

1.5. The Research Purpose and Benefits

The aim of this research is particularly In the academic context, the research may contribute to flourish the discourse of policing in Indonesia, particularly scrutinising the philosophy behind Polri's peace-building outlook through the transition from Operation Nemangkawi to Damai-Cartenz. Whereas, in practical sense, this study draws a distinct line on the future and subsequent trajectory of Polri's peacebuilding; identifying its current strength, struggles and future threats as well as improvement in handling the sustained Papua conflict. In the long run, this research may implicate for agenda setting specifically aimed at creating long-term peace resolutions in handling the Papua conflict, which has not been previously studied in police science studies.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Binmas Noken

Binmas Noken is a soft-approach policing implemented by Polri in Papua. "*Binmas*" stands for "*Pembinaan Masyarakat*" which translates to "Community Empowerment", while "*Noken*" refers to a traditional Papuan bag made from woven fibers. Utilisation of Noken extends to a vast array of unique applications. The head of the village may be seen wearing a small Noken as an accessory, or a Mother carrying a medium size Noken to carry her child, or replacing regular ballot boxes with Nokens during elections in Papua. Noken was officially regarded as an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO. Noken is a significant cultural symbol in Papua, in other words: *Noken is a source of life for the people in Papua*. The use of the term "Noken" in the program's name symbolises the local cultural context and emphasizes the importance of community involvement and collaboration in maintaining law and order.

In essence, Binmas Noken was a refined concept originated from "Binmas Pioneer"—which first introduced in 1993. Principally, the essence of Binmas Pioneer pivoted in building an amicable interaction between Polri officers by means of giving example (acting as pioneer) as they were assigned to teach the skills of carpentry, fishery, plantation, farming and stockbreeding to the local community (Yamin, 2018).

However, there were numerous obstacle which hinder the effectiveness of the Binmas Pioneer, which one of them was due to lack of skill acquired by the Polri officers who were incompetent nor possess less than a rudimentary knowledge in regards of the aforementioned skills which are needed to be taught to the local people in Papua. Therefore, Binmas Pioneer was gradually eroded. The concept remained dormant until in the early 2018, Tito Karnavian, the (then) Chief of Republic of Indonesia Police officially introduced the concept of Binmas Noken.

Basically, both Binmas Pioneer and Binmas Noken comprised similar value. There are however, 2 (two) main distinction between those human-centered policing models: *firstly*, in Binmas Noken, the assigned law operatives have been deliberately trained to certain skills (i.e. have an adequate expertise in carpentry, stockbreeding, etc.). Moreover, Binmas Noken also deals in the activity relating to maintaining healthcare and fostering education, in which Binmas Pioneer rather overlooked (Sudarto, 2023).

The Binmas Noken task force was initially introduced alongside the deployment of the Operation Nemangkawi on the 5th January 2018. Differing from the traditional law-enforcing operations, Nemangkawi was popularly known for its acknowledgement to soft-approach policing which put a great respect toward human rights. National Police Chief General Tito Karnavian has ordered the establishment of the Binmas Noken Task Force.

With Binmas Noken program, the local community is expected to be self-sufficient in terms of overcoming obstacles in accessing basic necessities such as healthcare, welfare, and food security. Ultimately, the final target is initiating collaboration, strategy, and integration approach amongst stakeholders which leads to enhance communal well-being and forestall resistance against the Indonesian government through involvement in constructive undertakings alongside regional authorities, as their need of attaining a comfortable livelihood are already fulfilled (Zakaria, 2021).

2.2. Security Sector Reform

Security Sector Reform (hereinafter, referred as 'SSR') refers to a comprehensive set of policies, programs, and activities designed to improve the way a country's security apparatus operates. A key objective of SSR is to restore or build trust between the population and the security forces. To put this research into a much deeper context, I specifically describe the SSR landscape through Mietzner's approach. Mietzner views on SSR in Indonesia notably focus on how militarisation impacts the Indonesian security reform. Mietzner observes that, due to the Indonesian military (TNI) "dual function" (or "*dwifungsi*") where the military armed forces were substantially involved both in defence and civilian affairs, hence TNI exerts informal influence over politics, economics, and regional security, making the reform more superficial than substantive. Albeit the military dual function was officially abolished since the early 2000s following the fall of Soeharto administration in 1998, the military influence purportedly persists to date (Mietzner, 2011).

The inevitable TNI involvement post-authoritarian era during the 1960s-1990s leads into the incomplete nature of security sector reform caused by a lack of political will amongst the military and civilian leaders to fully reform the security sector, by which although there has been endeavour to remove military parties from formal politics and limiting its role in civilian governance, the military retained significant influence. Mietzner stresses the tension between civilian elites who are often unable, or to some extent, unwillingly to assert control over the military (Mietzner, 2009). As a ramification of such incomplete security sector reform, the military continues exercises autonomy in various spheres, including economic enterprises, politics, businesses, which were supposed to be dismantled as part of the reform (Mietzner, 2013).

Security sector reform also entails police reform. By which, the police force was eventually separated from military, as a consequence of the downfall of Soeharto regime in the 1990s, nonetheless, this has not necessarily resulted in a more accountable or effective institution. Despite efforts keep police force reformed, it remains plagued by the ardent military influence. (Mietzner, 2006). However, establishing an effective civilian oversight over the military and police remains a challenge, taking into account that, of the weak institutional capacity of civilian bodies to control the security sector (Mietzner, 2014).

2.3. Giddens Structuration Theory

Anthony Giddens, a prominent sociologist, introduced structuration theory as a framework to understand the relationship between social structures and human agency. This theory posits that social practices are both shaped by existing structures and are the means through which structures are reproduced and transformed over time. Giddens' work challenges traditional dualisms in sociology, such as structure versus agency, by emphasising their interdependence and continuous interaction in shaping social life.

At the heart of structuration theory is the concept of the "duality of structure". Giddens argues that structures are not external constraints imposed on individuals but are constituted by the practices of those individuals. Structures encompass not only formal institutions like laws and norms but also informal rules, routines, and patterns of social

interaction. These structures provide frameworks within which individuals act, guiding their behaviors and choices (Wheeler-Brooks, 2009).

Simultaneously, individuals' actions and practices contribute to the reproduction and transformation of these structures. This ongoing process of structuration occurs through what Giddens terms "recursive practices", where individuals draw upon and modify existing structures in their everyday interactions. For example, in a workplace setting, employees' daily routines and interactions contribute to maintaining organizational norms and hierarchies while also potentially challenging or reshaping them.

Agency, in Giddens' theory, refers to the capacity of individuals to act intentionally and make meaningful choices within the constraints and opportunities provided by social structures. Unlike deterministic views that suggest individuals are merely products of their social environments, structuration theory emphasizes that agency is inherent in human action and is crucial for social change and innovation (Chatterjee, Kunwar and Hond, 2019: 61-62).

2.4. Social Identity Theory: The Dynamics of 'Us vs. Them'

Social Identity Theory (SIT) offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals perceive themselves and others within social groups. This essay provides an in-depth analysis of SIT, exploring its key concepts, empirical evidence, and implications for intergroup relations. At the core of SIT is the concept of social categorization, whereby individuals classify themselves and others into social groups based on salient characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, or nationality (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

SIT delineates several social identity processes that influence intergroup attitudes and behaviors. Ingroup differentiation entails accentuating the differences between ingroups and outgroups to reinforce group boundaries and cohesion. It provides insights into the dynamics of intergroup conflict and cooperation. Intergroup conflict arises from perceived threats to ingroup identity, competition for scarce resources, or historical grievances between groups. In contrast, intergroup cooperation can be fostered through superordinate goals that necessitate intergroup collaboration, intergroup contact that promotes positive intergroup attitudes and empathy, and intergroup dialogue aimed at reducing stereotypes and enhancing mutual understanding (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006).

Social Identity Theory offers a powerful lens through which to understand the complexities of "Us vs. Them" dynamics in social groups and societies. By elucidating the psychological mechanisms underlying ingroup favoritism, outgroup prejudice, and intergroup conflict, SIT provides valuable insights into human behavior and intergroup relations. As societies grapple with increasing diversity, inequality, and polarization, the principles of SIT offer guidance for promoting social harmony, cooperation, and collective well-being (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Ellemers, Spears and Doosje, 2002).

2.5. Well-being

Well-being in this context means living happily and leading a satisfying life (Sangha et al., 2015: 198). For indigenous peoples, it goes beyond physical health to embrace harmony with nature, spiritual ties to ancestral lands, and the natural cycles that sustain life (Sangha et al., 2015: 200).

These perspectives view humans as part of an ecological and spiritual web, prioritising collective well-being and interdependence among people, animals, plants, and the environment. Natural rhythms—seasons, celestial events, and ecological cycles—guide livelihood activities and ceremonies, sustaining both material needs and cultural-spiritual continuity.

Supporting indigenous well-being therefore requires respecting sovereignty over ancestral territories, aligning development with indigenous values, revitalising cultural practices, and ensuring meaningful participation in decision-making. By honouring ancestral knowledge and ecological rhythms, indigenous communities offer

holistic models of well-being that promote sustainability, resilience, and a more just, environmentally sound future for all (Sangha et al., 2015: 203–204).

2.6. Peacebuilding

The theory of peacebuilding was inspired by Johan Galtung's (1969) idea, which aims to create sustainable peace by addressing the root causes of conflict, rather than merely stopping violence temporarily (Erçoşkun, 2021: 3). Galtung views peace as something more complex than the mere absence of war. Galtung distinguishes two main types of peace: the first is negative peace, which refers to the absence of direct violence or war, but without addressing the root causes of conflict. The second is positive peace, which is the creation of a social, political, and economic ecosystem that is fair and prevents violence from reoccurring.

Galtung's peacebuilding theory focuses on creating positive peace through several approaches, namely: 1) conflict prevention, which involves identifying and addressing potential causes of conflict before they develop into violence. This can be achieved through dialogue between ethnic groups to prevent disputes; 2) conflict transformation, which involves changing the perspectives and relationships between conflicting parties by building mutual understanding and reconciliation. An example of this is mediation between warring communities; 3) Post-conflict reconstruction, which involves efforts to help communities recover after conflict, including rebuilding infrastructure, social institutions, and intergroup relations. (Erçoşkun, 2021: 7). Johan Galtung's theory of peacebuilding offers a comprehensive framework for understanding and resolving conflicts. It focuses on positive peace and a transformative approach, whereby true peace means not only the absence of violence, but also the creation of social justice, reconciliation, and harmonious relationships.

3. Research Methods

This research is framed by a qualitative research design. It is a type of research that explores and unearths understanding or opinions of a social phenomenon within their natural setting (Wahyuni, 2023: 34-36). Such qualitative approach will assist in acquiring an in-depth insight on how Polri respectively perceives the Papua conflict; to examine the philosophical ground to which why the Operation Nemangkawi famous for its applauded Binmas Noken to the Damai-Cartenz as the hallmark of its shift of policing approach—which once was stressed on a rather more humanist approach by maintaining Binmas Noken to now angling to the more 'traditional' law enforcement measures.

This research uses a case study outlook. There are 2 (two) underpinning reasons in which why I choose case study: *firstly*, a case study in qualitative research helps when it comes to the problem research related to exploring questions of “why” and “how” (Yin, 2018: 173), this function is in parallel with my research, as I intent to overarchingly look into any paradigm shift on Polri's peace building definition within the interplay of the militarisation phenomena and its further implication to Binmas Noken. *Secondly*, a case study provides a clear definitive research result because it only examines a specific scope of analysis by focusing on one specified event, at certain time period and circumstance. In the context of this research, examining the perception of paradigm shift on Polri's peace building will create foreseeable difficulties since the analysis spectrum will be too wide. Therefore, to attain a vivid evident to the research, I specifically limit the case study scope particularly in the transition from Operation Nemangkawi to Damai-Cartenz.

3.1. Data Collection

This research uses three data collection techniques. It first analyzes key documents, including the Nemangkawi Phase I–II and Damai Cartenz 2023–2025 peace operation plans and the Chief of Police Regulation No. 1/2019 on operational success standards. It then conducts indirect observation through secondary and third party reports on the 2022 transition from Nemangkawi to Damai Cartenz, and finally carries out semi structured in depth interviews in Papua and Jakarta with: Binmas Noken formulators, Nemangkawi and Damai Cartenz planners, Binmas Noken task force members, Damai Cartenz managers and operators, and community leaders and members (OAP and non OAP) who experienced Binmas Noken.

Because of the sensitivity of peace operations, many potential informants are reluctant to share information, so conventional sampling is ineffective. The study therefore uses snowball sampling (chain referral), a qualitative, non random technique suited to hard to reach populations, where initial informants recommend others based on their roles and knowledge (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981; Wahyuni, 2023: 87). For instance, access to operational level actors in Nemangkawi and Damai Cartenz was obtained through the Head of the Binmas Noken Task Force, who then referred additional relevant informants. Snowball sampling is thus considered the most efficient and effective method to obtain rich, context specific insights into peacebuilding efforts in Papua.

3.2. Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study is inseparable from data collection and proceeds through three main stages to build a meaningful picture of the phenomenon. First, data reduction filters and simplifies large, diverse, and complex raw data from interviews, document studies, and indirect observations by selecting only information relevant to the research focus and discarding what does not serve the research objectives. Second, data presentation organizes the reduced data into structured forms such as descriptive narratives and matrices, helping the researcher logically display emerging themes and patterns and summarize documents and interview transcripts so they are easier to understand. Third, data verification ensures the accuracy and validity of the findings by re examining and cross checking the data to find coherence, significance, and relevance across sources. At this stage, the researcher interprets what the data collectively mean for understanding the Indonesian National Police's peacebuilding efforts in the Papua conflict through the Binmas Noken program during Operation Nemangkawi and Operation Damai Cartenz.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles of social research, including informed consent and respect for local cultural values. All participants received clear explanations regarding research objectives, their right to withdraw at any stage, and the academic use of collected data.

4. Results

This section presents the core empirical findings on the dynamics of Polri's peacebuilding process for the Papua conflict through Operation Nemangkawi and Damai-Cartenz, in which identified by three key themes: (1) The role of Binmas Noken as a mean of peacebuilding in Operation Nemangkawi, (2) The paradigm shift happened during Operation Damai-Cartenz, (3) The current situation of Binmas Noken.

4.1. Binmas Noken: How Peacebuilding Is Achieved in Operation Nemangkawi

The Binmas Noken Task Force was created by National Police Chief General Tito Karnavian to optimise police programmes in tackling social problems and to initiate peacebuilding in conflict areas (Fahmi, 2018). Nemangkawi combined law enforcement with Binmas Noken to build trust and improve livelihoods, education, and health in conflict zones. The programme is operationalised through local wisdom-based components: Kasuari promotes welfare through support for farming, livestock, carpentry, fisheries, and health; Koteka builds emotional bonds between police and customary leaders; Polisi Pi Ajar involves police teaching children through playful, creative methods; Peka encourages community concern for security and environment; Matoa mobilises millennials; Papeda nurtures young scholars via intellectual forums; and Tifa highlights culture and indigenous knowledge as resources for resolving problems (Sudarto and Samah, 2022: 16-31).

In practice, Binmas Noken has reportedly improved welfare and income for local farmers in areas such as Timika and Nabire (Syah, 2018). The task force in Jayawijaya successfully ran Polisi Pi Ajar, enabling children in Kampung Parema to access proper educational materials, while Yahukimo District achieved more stable food security with Binmas Noken's support through the provision of seeds and tools (Firmansyah, 2022). These efforts coincided with an increase in Papua's Human Development Index in 2021, for which Binmas Noken received public praise (Jurnal Madani, 2022).

Overall, the implementation of Binmas Noken within Operation Nemangkawi is portrayed as a landmark soft approach policing model that nurtures a peace dynamic between police and local communities (Sudarto, 2022). Like a “Noken” that carries many items together, the programme symbolically represents Polri’s willingness to hold and address community complaints and problems amicably and collectively. This is done while respecting sacred Papuan customs and embedding peacebuilding within everyday social, economic, educational, and cultural interactions (Sudarto, 2022).

4.2. Damai-Cartenz 2022 to Damai-Cartenz 2023: A Paradigm Shift

The findings unfold Polri’s peacebuilding through two phases of transition from Operation Nemangkawi to Operation Damai Cartenz. In the first phase (January–December 2022), the police embraced a more humanist approach: the very name “Damai Cartenz” was chosen to stress peaceful intent, Binmas Noken’s area expanded from 9 to 23 regions, and it became one of three main task forces alongside intelligence and preventive units. Interestingly, Operation Damai-Cartenz 2022 originally aims the expansion of community development function (Binmas) to a greater extent than what it has achieved during Nemangkawi by prioritising Binmas Noken, Intelligence, and preventive efforts.

In the second phase (from January 2023), the paradigm shifted back toward conventional law enforcement: Binmas was replaced by a regional law enforcement task force, the operational focus narrowed to 9 Papuan highland districts. Damai Cartenz was recentralized because the regional command model was judged ineffective: strategy, force composition, logistics, and parameters still followed Nemangkawi’s security logic, leading to vulnerable small posts, more firefights with armed groups (KKB), and casualties used as failure indicators by central leaders. Binmas Noken was then considered too costly and inefficient in 2023, and when Damai Cartenz became a centrally controlled operation in January 2023, Binmas Noken was removed so the operation focused almost solely on law enforcement (KPANRB, 2024).

4.3. The Current Situation of Binmas Noken

To preserve the Binmas Noken, Polri planned a separate regional operation, programs were moved on paper into the regional Rasaka Cartenz operation, whose content essentially continued and expanded Binmas Noken with additional programs and wider coverage, but implementation fell far short of the ambitious design. Initially conceptualized for 10 programs in 24 districts with large central funding, Rasaka Cartenz only materialized concretely in 2025, running 3 programs (Koteka, Keladi Sagu, Si Ipar) in 8 districts with much smaller provincial funding, constrained by limited local resources and the priority given in 2023–2024 to national election security operations.

5. Discussion

The Papua conflict is rooted in ideology, economic inequality, sociocultural alienation, racism, and a long history of serious human rights abuses, which have created collective grievance and a sense of “us vs them” between Papuans and the Indonesian state. This legacy, including military operations, killings, torture, and “memoria pasionis”, produces deep trauma toward uniformed forces that is even transmitted through songs and stories across generations. Informants emphasize that what Papuans need is recognition of past violence and an apology, not more traditional security oriented repression.

Using Anthony Giddens’s structuration theory, the article shows how peace operations are shaped and constrained by three structural dimensions: legitimacy (rules and legal frameworks), communication (how success is interpreted), and power (allocation of resources and authority). At the level of legitimacy, there is no specific peacebuilding roadmap for Papua, so Nemangkawi, Damai Cartenz, and Rasaka Cartenz are poorly synchronized, inconsistent in targets, documentation, and task design, and often misaligned with available budgets and infrastructure. At the communication level, Chief of Indonesian Police Regulation No. 1 of 2019 on System, Management, and Operational Success Standards. (Perkap No. 1/2019) imposes universal, quantitative operational

success indicators (weapons seized, posts hit, targets achieved) that do not fit the qualitative aims of gaining Papuan trust and welfare; as a result, even meaningful but intangible gains are invisible in evaluation.

At the power level, the article notes policy inconsistency tied to leadership changes, fragmented programs that run in silos, and lack of synergy even within Polri itself (for example, parallel literacy programs Si Ipar and GABUS operating without coordination). External collaboration is also weak: local governments and other stakeholders seldom actively support or sustain Binmas Noken initiatives, which hampers long term continuity and scale. On the ground, Binmas Noken faces resistance from local elites and communities, publication is poor, beneficiaries fear giving testimonials, and local mindsets and economic schemes (like village fund cash distributions) sometimes undermine sustainability of projects such as pig farming. Additionally, existing initiatives insufficiently address the specific needs of women and children, who are often the most vulnerable in conflict settings. Health and welfare programs rarely differentiate by gendered needs (maternal health, menstrual hygiene, protection from gender based violence), and broader planning does not clearly integrate a gender lens into peacebuilding.

Contradicting with what the police has claimed as a success, Binmas Noken and related programs for often becoming ceremonial showcases—distribution of goods, photo opportunities, events that highlight police image—rather than deeply rooted, sustained peacebuilding efforts with clear model villages and long term outcomes. It argues that the “Noken” label reflects local culture only semantically; the programs have yet to fully incorporate Papuan local wisdom, such as the conflict resolution ethos embodied in the bakar batu ritual, where dialogue seeks understanding rather than winners and losers. The author suggests that genuine peacebuilding should adopt Papuan formats of dialogue, acknowledge historical suffering, and be treated as a long term commitment, not just a police program cycle.

6. Conclusion

Overall, it concludes that Polri’s peacebuilding efforts in Papua remain mostly at the narrative level and fail at philosophical, planning, and operational depth. Key obstacles include: failure of elites to grasp the multilevel nature of the conflict and its roots in historical injustice, discrimination, and human rights abuses; the absence of a specific Papua peacebuilding roadmap; fragmented and unsynchronised operations; universal performance indicators (Chief of Indonesian Police Regulation No. 1 of 2019 on System, Management, and Operational Success Standards / Perkap No. 1/2019) that prioritize militaristic, quantitative success over qualitative gains like trust; a tendency to highlight ceremonial achievements; lack of inclusive focus on women and children; and weak engagement with local stakeholders and Papuan local wisdom where “Noken” functions more as a symbolic label than a lived, culturally grounded practice.

In addition, this study is constrained by its strong reliance on internal Polri documents—Nemangkawi, Damai-Cartenz, and Rasaka-Cartenz Operational Plans, as well as Chief of Indonesian Police Regulation No. 1 of 2019 on System, Management, and Operational Success Standards / Perkap No. 1/2019—which primarily reflect official institutional perspectives and success claims. This document driven, top down approach privileges headquarters’ planning and doctrinal narratives, while offering limited systematic engagement with community experiences, street level practices, and intra organizational contestation. Future research should therefore prioritise multi sited, community centred designs that incorporate the voices of *Orang Asli Papua*, local leaders, women and youth, as well as rank and file security personnel, ideally through ethnographic and participatory methods. Comparative studies—drawing on other Indonesian and international cases of police led peacebuilding—are also recommended to clarify the conditions under which community based programs such as Binmas Noken can evolve from symbolic “soft approaches” into durable, rights respecting components of conflict transformation.

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Ethics / Informed Consent: All participants involved in the were informed about the objectives of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection commenced. All data were analyzed and reported anonymously to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of participants.

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Governance Fragmentation and Multi-Stakeholder Dynamics in Vietnam's Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading System: A Policy Analysis

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Abstract

Vietnam's commitment to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050 and its updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) pledging a 43.5 percent reduction by 2030 have established the political imperative for a functional domestic emissions trading system (ETS). However, the translation of these high-level commitments into operational market governance faces profound challenges rooted not only in legal design but in the structure of institutional relationships, stakeholder interests, and political economy dynamics that shape policy implementation. This study employs a qualitative policy analysis framework to examine governance fragmentation, inter-ministerial coordination failures, and multi-stakeholder dynamics in Vietnam's emerging greenhouse gas market. Drawing on documentary analysis of official policy instruments, institutional mapping, and comparative insights from ASEAN regional experiences, the study identifies four critical governance deficits: the absence of a primary regulatory authority with sufficient mandate and capacity; structural conflicts of interest arising from the dual roles of state enterprises as both regulated entities and institutional actors; the marginalization of civil society and small-scale stakeholders from market design processes; and weak horizontal coordination mechanisms across the five ministries holding overlapping jurisdiction. The study further examines how these governance deficits interact with Vietnam's broader political-administrative context—particularly the constraints imposed by a single-party governance system and a tradition of consensus-based bureaucratic decision-making—to produce systemic delays in ETS implementation. Policy recommendations focus on restructuring inter-ministerial coordination, creating participatory mechanisms for non-state stakeholders, building political commitment for effective enforcement, and designing phased implementation pathways that are administratively feasible within Vietnam's institutional capacity.

Keywords: Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading, Vietnam ETS, Governance Fragmentation, Policy Implementation, Multi-Stakeholder Dynamics, Climate Governance, ASEAN

1. Introduction

The establishment of carbon and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions trading systems has emerged as a central pillar of climate governance strategies across the Asia-Pacific region in the twenty-first century. Market-based instruments for GHG reduction offer a theoretically efficient pathway to achieving emission reduction targets at

lower aggregate economic cost compared to uniform regulatory standards, by allowing abatement to occur where it is least costly across a covered economy (Stavins, 2019). This efficiency rationale, combined with the revenue-generating potential of emissions permit auctioning and the growing international recognition of carbon pricing as a standard policy tool, has motivated a wave of ETS adoption across major economies, including the European Union, China, South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand.

Vietnam represents one of the most significant—and most studied—cases of an emerging economy attempting to establish a domestic ETS in the context of binding international climate commitments, a transitioning centrally planned economy, and an institutional architecture shaped by decades of state-centric governance. At COP26 in Glasgow (2021), Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh's commitment to net-zero emissions by 2050 placed Vietnam in the vanguard of developing-country climate ambition. This commitment, reinforced by Vietnam's updated NDCs submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2022, creates a direct policy mandate for carbon market mechanisms capable of mobilizing substantial emission reductions across the energy, industry, and land-use sectors.

Yet the practical trajectory of Vietnam's ETS development since 2021 reveals a persistent gap between policy ambition and institutional reality. The original roadmap articulated in Decision No. 1775/QĐ-TTg (2021) envisioned the pilot operation of a carbon trading exchange by 2025, expanding to a fully operational market by 2028. As of 2025, however, the pilot phase has experienced significant delays, the national GHG registry remains incomplete, and inter-ministerial disagreements over regulatory jurisdiction have produced a fragmented governance architecture that creates uncertainty for market participants and undermines investor confidence (MONRE, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

The existing scholarly literature on Vietnam's carbon market development has predominantly adopted legal-doctrinal or technical-economic perspectives—analyzing the adequacy of legislative provisions or modeling the economic efficiency of different ETS design parameters. Far less attention has been directed at the political and governance dimensions that determine whether formally enacted laws and regulations translate into effective market governance in practice. This gap is particularly significant because, as comparative ETS experience consistently demonstrates, the institutional and political factors governing implementation capacity are often more determinative of market effectiveness than the technical features of market design (Haites, 2018; Zhang et al., 2022).

This study addresses this gap by applying a policy analysis framework to examine the governance architecture of Vietnam's emerging GHG market. It asks: What are the key governance deficits in Vietnam's ETS implementation, and how do they interact with the country's broader political-administrative context to constrain market development? The study is guided by three specific research questions: (1) How is regulatory authority over GHG markets distributed across Vietnamese government institutions, and what coordination failures emerge from this distribution? (2) How are the interests of diverse stakeholders—state enterprises, private business, civil society, and subnational governments—represented and mediated in ETS policy processes? (3) What governance reforms are necessary and politically feasible to advance effective ETS implementation in Vietnam's institutional context? The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the methodological approach. Section 3 presents the findings, structured around institutional mapping, stakeholder analysis, and comparative ASEAN governance insights. Section 4 discusses the theoretical and practical implications, and Section 5 presents conclusions and policy recommendations.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative policy analysis design, combining institutional analysis, stakeholder mapping, and comparative case analysis as its primary methodological components. Policy analysis, as a distinct mode of social-scientific inquiry, is concerned not merely with describing what policies exist but with evaluating their design, implementation dynamics, and governance structures in light of stated objectives and contextual constraints (Howlett et al., 2009). This analytical orientation is particularly appropriate for the study's focus on the gap between Vietnam's formally stated ETS goals and the institutional realities of implementation.

The primary data source consists of official Vietnamese policy documents, legal instruments, and government reports, including Decision No. 1775/QĐ-TTg (2021), Decree No. 06/2022/ND-CP, the Law on Environmental Protection 2020 (LOPE 2020), ministerial circulars and guidelines, annual environmental monitoring reports from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), and relevant reports from the Ministry of Finance (MOF), Ministry of Industry and Trade (MOIT), and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). These primary sources are supplemented by secondary data from international organizations, including the World Bank, UNDP, ADB, and GIZ, all of which have published detailed assessments of Vietnam's carbon market readiness and governance capacity.

Institutional analysis draws on the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework developed by Ostrom (2005), which provides a structured methodology for mapping the rules, norms, and physical/material conditions that shape the action arena in which institutional actors interact. Applied to Vietnam's ETS governance, this framework enables systematic identification of formal and informal institutional arrangements, their distributional implications for different stakeholder categories, and the incentive structures they create for compliance or non-compliance.

Stakeholder analysis follows the methodology of Reed et al. (2009), which classifies stakeholders according to their levels of interest in and power over a given policy domain. A stakeholder matrix is constructed identifying the primary actors in Vietnam's GHG market governance—state agencies, state-owned enterprises (SOEs), private sector actors, civil society organizations, and international development partners—and assessing their interests, influence, and relationships. This matrix serves as the analytical basis for evaluating the participatory adequacy of existing policy processes and identifying gaps in stakeholder representation.

Comparative analysis draws on the ETS governance experiences of Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia—Vietnam's most relevant ASEAN comparators in terms of economic development level, institutional traditions, and climate policy ambition. The comparative cases are analyzed using a structured, focused comparison (George & Bennett, 2005) organized around the key governance dimensions identified in the Vietnamese case: regulatory architecture, stakeholder participation mechanisms, enforcement capacity, and inter-institutional coordination.

3. Results

3.1 Institutional Mapping of Vietnam's GHG Market Governance

3.1.1 Fragmented Regulatory Architecture

The most structurally significant finding of the institutional analysis is the extreme fragmentation of regulatory authority over GHG markets across Vietnamese government ministries and agencies, unlike many comparable ETS systems—where a single agency holds primary regulatory authority, as with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the United States or the Ministry of Ecology and Environment in China—Vietnam's GHG market is governed by a constellation of agencies with overlapping mandates and no clear hierarchical authority.

The institutional mapping, summarized in Table 1, identifies five ministries with substantive regulatory claims over different aspects of the GHG market: MONRE holds overall GHG management responsibility, including MRV oversight; MOF exercises authority over financial market regulation and may claim jurisdiction over any exchange-based trading platform; MOIT regulates energy-intensive industries that constitute the primary source of covered emissions; MARD oversees forestry and land-use carbon credits under REDD+ and other nature-based solution mechanisms; and the State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) may exercise jurisdiction over carbon instruments classified as financial products. The National Committee on Climate Change, chaired by the Prime Minister, serves a nominal coordination function but lacks dedicated operational capacity.

Table 1: Institutional Distribution of GHG Market Regulatory Authority in Vietnam

Ministry / Agency	Primary Mandate	GHG Market Jurisdiction	Key Coordination Tension
MONRE	Environmental protection; climate change; GHG inventory	Overall GHG market governance; MRV oversight; national registry	Limited financial market expertise; conflicts with MOF over exchange regulation
MOF	Public finance; financial market regulation; taxation	Carbon exchange regulation; financial instrument classification; revenue management	Competing regulatory claim over trading platform; divergent interests on revenue use
MOIT	Energy; industry; trade	Sectoral emission targets for power, steel, cement industries	SOE protection interests; resistance to stringent caps; energy security framing
MARD	Agriculture; forestry; rural development	Forestry carbon credits; REDD+; land-use sector MRV	Conflicting land tenure rules; uncertainty over forest carbon ownership
SBV	Monetary policy; banking regulation; foreign exchange	Potential jurisdiction over carbon financial products; cross-border carbon flows	Unclear mandate boundaries; foreign currency concerns for international linkage

Description: Institutional mapping based on documentary analysis of legal instruments and policy reports, 2024.

This fragmentation is not merely an administrative inconvenience: it creates structural conditions under which each ministry has incentives to protect its jurisdictional prerogatives and expand its mandate, producing inter-ministerial competition rather than coordination. The most acute tension exists between MONRE and MOF over the regulation of the carbon trading exchange—a dispute that has contributed directly to delays in the establishment of the pilot exchange originally scheduled for 2025 (MONRE, 2024). Without explicit legislative designation of a primary regulator, these tensions cannot be resolved at the bureaucratic level and require political intervention from the Government or the National Assembly.

3.1.2 The State Enterprise Problem

A governance challenge of particular significance in the Vietnamese context is the dual position occupied by large state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as both the primary regulated entities in the ETS and influential actors in the policy processes that determine the design of the market. SOEs in the energy sector—particularly Vietnam Electricity (EVN), PetroVietnam (PVN), and Vietnam National Coal and Mineral Industries Group (Vinacomin)—collectively account for the large majority of emissions in the sectors slated for initial ETS coverage. These enterprises are therefore the largest potential compliance buyers in the carbon market, with strong financial incentives to influence the design of emission caps, baseline allocation rules, and offset eligibility criteria in ways that minimize their compliance costs.

At the same time, senior executives of these SOEs maintain close institutional relationships with the ministries that oversee them—particularly MOIT and the Ministry of Construction—through formal reporting lines and informal political networks. This creates structural conditions for regulatory capture: the agencies nominally responsible for setting and enforcing emission standards have organizational interests in the financial health and operational continuity of the enterprises they oversee, creating inherent conflicts with stringent emission regulation. Comparative evidence from China's ETS—where the power sector's influence over allowance

allocation methodologies has been extensively documented—suggests that this dynamic can significantly weaken the environmental integrity of an ETS even when the formal legal framework appears robust (Zhang et al., 2022).

3.2 Stakeholder Analysis: Interests, Power, and Participation

The stakeholder analysis maps the interests and influence of key actor categories in Vietnam's GHG market governance across two dimensions: their level of interest in ETS outcomes (high/medium/low) and their current power to influence ETS design and implementation (high/medium/low). The resulting stakeholder matrix, presented in Table 2, reveals a governance architecture characterized by significant power asymmetries that favor established state actors over the private sector, civil society, and subnational stakeholders.

Table 2: Stakeholder Matrix for Vietnam's GHG Emissions Trading System

Stakeholder Category	Level of Interest	Influence Power	Key Interests and Positions
Major SOEs (EVN, PVN, Vinacomin)	High	High	Minimize compliance costs; influence cap-setting; lobby for free allocation; resist stringent MRV
Relevant Ministries (MONRE, MOF, MOIT)	High	High	Protect jurisdictional mandates; expand regulatory authority; balance revenue generation with industrial competitiveness
Private Industrial Firms	High	Medium	Level playing field with SOEs; clear compliance rules; access to offsets; reasonable cap levels
Financial Institutions / Banks	Medium	Medium	New financial product opportunities; clear legal framework for carbon credit collateralization; international linkage
Civil Society Organizations	High	Low	Environmental integrity; equitable benefit distribution; transparency in market operations; community co-benefits
Provincial/Local Governments	Medium	Low-Medium	Local economic development; equitable distribution of carbon revenues; forestry credit proceeds
International Development Partners	High	Medium	Technical assistance provision; alignment with Paris Agreement standards; demonstration of developing-country ETS viability
Agricultural and Forest Communities	Medium-High	Very Low	Equitable sharing of REDD+ and forestry carbon revenues; secure land tenure; protection from carbon colonialism

Description: Stakeholder matrix constructed through documentary analysis and comparative ETS literature review. Interest and power levels are assessments based on available policy evidence, 2024.

The power asymmetries revealed by this matrix have direct implications for the political economy of ETS design. The high-power stakeholders—major SOEs and relevant ministries—have strong incentives to design a market with relatively lenient caps, generous free allocation of allowances, and limited enforcement capacity. This configuration would reduce compliance costs for regulated entities while maintaining the formal architecture of an ETS that satisfies international climate commitments. Civil society organizations and community-based stakeholders, who have the strongest interest in a genuinely functional and equitable market, possess the least institutional power to resist such an outcome.

The absence of formal participatory mechanisms for non-state stakeholders in Vietnam's ETS design process amplifies these asymmetries. Unlike the EU ETS, which operates through a regulatory process that includes formal stakeholder consultation requirements, or China's ETS, which has been shaped by extensive engagement with industry associations, Vietnam's ETS design to date has occurred primarily within inter-ministerial working groups with limited transparency. Published consultation records show that civil society input has been minimal, and no formal mechanism exists for affected communities—particularly forest-dependent communities that stand to benefit or lose significantly from REDD+ and forestry carbon programs—to participate in market design decisions.

3.3 Comparative ASEAN Governance Insights

Comparison with Vietnam's ASEAN neighbors that have more advanced carbon market governance provides useful reference points for reform. Singapore represents the most mature case in the region: its Carbon Pricing Act (2018, amended 2022) established a carbon tax with a clear transition pathway to a trading system, administered by a single primary agency (the National Environment Agency) with clear legislative authority, strong enforcement capacity, and a transparent stakeholder consultation process embedded in the regulatory development process. Singapore's institutional capacity is, however, exceptional within ASEAN and reflects decades of investment in regulatory governance that cannot be replicated quickly elsewhere.

Thailand and Indonesia offer more directly comparable cases. Thailand's Climate Change Bill, under legislative consideration since 2022, has encountered delays attributable to institutional dynamics closely paralleling Vietnam's experience: competing ministerial interests, resistance from industrial SOEs, and the difficulty of building political consensus for binding emission constraints in a growth-oriented policy environment. Thailand's experience is informative in demonstrating that even formally advanced legal drafts can remain stalled in implementation when the underlying institutional coordination problems are unresolved (UNDP, 2023).

Indonesia's voluntary carbon market (VCM) and early ETS preparations offer perhaps the most instructive parallel. Indonesia's carbon market regulation (Government Regulation No. 98/2021) establishes a framework for a domestic ETS with an ambitious sectoral coverage, but implementation has been constrained by many of the same governance challenges identified in Vietnam: fragmented institutional authority (shared between the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the Ministry of Finance, and the Financial Services Authority), weak MRV capacity, and unresolved questions about forestry carbon credit ownership and revenue sharing with indigenous and local communities. A comparative assessment of the two countries' ETS trajectories is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparative ETS Governance Assessment: Vietnam and Selected ASEAN Comparators

Governance Dimension	Vietnam	Indonesia	Thailand	Singapore
Primary regulatory authority	Fragmented (5 ministries)	Fragmented (3 agencies)	Contested (3 ministries)	Unified (NEA)
SOE influence on ETS design	Very High	High	High	Low-Medium
Civil society participation	Very Limited	Limited	Moderate	Structured
MRV system maturity	Early stage	Developing	Developing	Mature
Implementation timeline adherence	Delayed	Delayed	Delayed	On schedule
International linkage progress	Early-stage	Bilateral agreements	Exploratory	Advanced

Description: Comparative assessment based on UNDP (2023), World Bank (2024), GIZ (2023), and national policy documents. Assessments are qualitative and reflect conditions as of early 2025.

The comparative analysis confirms that Vietnam's governance challenges are not unique within the ASEAN region, but that they are among the most acute. Singapore's successful model is instructive but not directly transferable: its institutional capacity, rule-of-law environment, and political economy differ fundamentally from Vietnam's. The more directly comparable cases of Indonesia and Thailand suggest that governance fragmentation and SOE influence are structural features of ETS development in state-led ASEAN economies that require targeted political and institutional interventions, not merely technical market design improvements.

4. Discussion

4.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to three bodies of theoretical literature. First, they provide empirical support for and an extension of multi-level governance theory (Hooghe & Marks, 2003) applied to environmental markets in developing countries. The Vietnamese case illustrates how the vertical dimension of governance—tensions between national policy commitments and subnational implementation capacity—interacts with horizontal fragmentation across ministerial silos to produce coordination failures that are qualitatively different from, and more intractable than, the governance challenges encountered in established democracies with stronger rule-of-law traditions. Vietnam's single-party governance system creates both specific constraints (limited civil society voice, restricted media scrutiny of implementation failures) and specific opportunities (greater potential for top-down enforcement once political consensus is achieved) compared to pluralist democratic systems.

Second, the findings advance regulatory capture theory (Stigler, 1971; Dal Bo, 2006) by demonstrating how capture dynamics operate in the context of state-owned enterprises in transitional economies. Classical regulatory capture theory, developed in the context of Western regulated industries, assumes a relatively clear distinction between the regulating state and the regulated private sector. In Vietnam—as in China and other transitional economies with large SOE sectors—this distinction breaks down: SOEs are simultaneously market actors, major employers, political constituencies, and instruments of state industrial policy. This creates a distinctive form of capture that might be termed structural capture, where the interests of regulated entities are embedded within the state apparatus itself, rather than expressed through external lobbying.

Third, the stakeholder analysis findings contribute to political ecology literature on the governance of nature-based carbon solutions by documenting the systematic marginalization of forest-dependent communities from processes that will profoundly affect their land rights, livelihoods, and access to natural resources. The structural absence of these communities from ETS policy processes reflects broader patterns of exclusion from environmental governance that have been extensively documented in the global REDD+ literature (Corbera & Schroeder, 2011), and which are replicated in Vietnam's emerging carbon market architecture.

4.2 Practical Implications

For Vietnamese policymakers, the central practical implication of this study is that the ETS implementation delays and governance deficits are not primarily technical problems requiring better market design, but political and institutional problems requiring deliberate restructuring of governance relationships. Three specific policy interventions emerge as priorities from the analysis.

First, Vietnam should designate a primary ETS regulatory authority through explicit legislative or executive action. The current fragmented architecture cannot resolve the inter-ministerial coordination failures identified in Section 3.1 through informal coordination mechanisms: the institutional interests at stake are too significant, and the power relations among agencies too asymmetric, for voluntary coordination to succeed. A credible primary regulatory authority requires not only a formal legal mandate but also dedicated human resources, technical capacity, and political backing sufficient to withstand pressure from both industrial SOEs and competing line ministries. MONRE is the most logical institutional home given its existing GHG management mandate, but it requires substantial capacity investment and clear legal authority to override competing ministerial claims.

Second, the design of Vietnam's ETS must incorporate structured participatory mechanisms for non-state stakeholders. The current exclusion of civil society, private sector associations, and affected communities from market design processes creates dual risks: it produces policy outputs that may be technically flawed due to the absence of diverse knowledge inputs, and it generates legitimacy deficits that will impede compliance and enforcement when the market becomes operational. Practical mechanisms might include: formal public consultation requirements for major ETS regulatory decisions; an advisory council with representation from industry associations, environmental NGOs, academic institutions, and international organizations; and specific consultation protocols for forest and agricultural communities affected by nature-based carbon programs.

Third, Vietnam should design an ETS pilot specifically calibrated to the country's actual institutional capacity rather than imported from more institutionally advanced systems. The existing roadmap's emphasis on a broadly designed trading exchange with multiple sectors and complex market infrastructure may be premature given the governance conditions documented in this study. A more pragmatic approach would concentrate the pilot phase on a small number of large industrial emitters in a single sector (the power sector offers the most tractable entry point given its limited number of large installations), with simple compliance mechanisms, administratively feasible MRV requirements, and enforcement systems that leverage existing regulatory relationships rather than requiring new institutional capacities.

4.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The analysis relies primarily on documentary sources and published institutional assessments; primary qualitative data from interviews with Vietnamese policymakers and stakeholders would provide richer insight into the informal political dynamics, personal networks, and bureaucratic incentives that shape implementation in ways not fully captured by official documents. Future research should incorporate systematic interview-based fieldwork with key informants across the ministerial and stakeholder categories identified in the stakeholder matrix.

The comparative analysis is necessarily limited in scope: a deeper comparative study focused specifically on governance fragmentation in ASEAN ETS development, using process-tracing methodology to examine how and why specific governance decisions were made, would provide stronger analytical traction on the causal mechanisms linking institutional structure to implementation outcomes. Additionally, this study focuses on the national level of governance; subnational dimensions—particularly the role of provincial governments in implementing forestry carbon programs and managing local stakeholder conflicts—merit dedicated research attention.

Future research directions include: longitudinal tracking of Vietnam's ETS governance evolution as implementation proceeds through the 2025-2028 pilot phase; comparative political economy analysis of SOE influence on carbon market design across ASEAN transitional economies; empirical assessment of civil society capacity and organizational resources available for participation in Vietnamese carbon market governance; and evaluation studies of the effectiveness of specific governance reforms once implemented.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the governance architecture of Vietnam's emerging greenhouse gas emissions trading system through a qualitative policy analysis framework, identifying four critical and interrelated governance deficits: institutional fragmentation across five ministries with overlapping and contested jurisdictions; structural conflicts of interest arising from the dual position of state-owned enterprises as both regulated entities and embedded political actors; the systematic marginalization of civil society, private sector, and community stakeholders from market design processes; and weak horizontal coordination mechanisms that produce inter-ministerial competition rather than coherent policy implementation.

These deficits are not accidental or easily remediable through technical market design adjustments. They are rooted in structural features of Vietnam's political-administrative system—the fragmentation of sectoral regulatory authority, the centrality of SOEs in the economy and the state, and the constraints on civil society voice inherent in a single-party governance context—that require deliberate political and institutional interventions to address. The comparative analysis of ASEAN ETS governance experiences confirms that Vietnam's challenges are severe relative to regional comparators, and that the countries that have made the most progress are those that have invested most heavily in governance reform, not merely technical market design.

The study's policy recommendations—designating a primary regulatory authority, creating structured participatory mechanisms, and designing a pilot phase calibrated to institutional capacity—are presented not as a complete solution to Vietnam's ETS governance challenges, but as necessary conditions for progress. Vietnam's net-zero commitment and its NDC targets create a genuine imperative for effective carbon market development. Whether that imperative generates sufficient political will to drive the difficult institutional reforms required is ultimately a political question that lies beyond the reach of policy analysis to resolve. What this study can contribute is a clearer diagnosis of the governance architecture that must be reformed, and a set of evidence-based recommendations for how that reform might be structured.

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How Media Narratives Shape Public Opinion on the Papua Issue: A Strategic Communication Approach

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Abstract

The discourse surrounding the Papua issue has been heavily shaped by media articulations such as *#BlackLivesMatter*, *#PapuaLivesMatter*, *#FreeWestPapua*. These media articulations have gained significant traction and hegemonic influence across both new and conventional media platforms. The media narratives are largely driven by non-state actors and pro-independence advocates, who have constructed dominant narratives, emphasizing human rights violations, racism, marginalization, and conflict, often portraying the Indonesian government in a negative and colonial light. Media framing, which is implied on both the domestic and international scales, plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception. It contributes to a hyperreality in which Papua is predominantly represented as a conflict-ridden region. The contestation discourse about Papua in the media reveals a significant imbalance in media framing, marked by the limited presence of the Indonesian government in shaping the narratives. This imbalance has strengthened negative public opinion and weakened Indonesia's bargaining position at both national and international levels. Strategic communication is therefore needed as a counter-narrative to clarify information. It can also encourage more peaceful interpretations of the Papua issue.

Keywords: Strategic Communication, Public Opinion, Media Framing, Papua

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

The Papua issue is one of the most sensitive and long-standing political and social issues in Indonesia. In recent years, the rapid growth of digital communication has changed how this issue is discussed and understood. Information about Papua now spreads quickly through social media and international media, which reaches audiences far beyond Indonesia. In this situation, the media not only deliver facts but also play a strong role in shaping public perception and opinion (Jamieson & Waldman, 2003).

When examined more closely, the Papua discourse is carried by many political actors who actively communicate their messages through various media platforms. However, data show that in content with high impact and

engagement, actors representing the Indonesian state tend to be relatively absent. Santoso (2022) found that among the top five actors who shape the Papua discourse in the media, government actors were barely visible. Instead, the discourse was dominated by pro-independence actors, led by Veronika Koman with 168.306 engagements, followed by Dhandy Laksono with 123.571, Tirta ID with 62.800, PapuaItuKita with 49.025, and Christ Wamea with 44.017. Four of these five actors consistently promoted pro-independence narratives, while only one conveyed information from the government's perspective (Santoso, 2022).

Media coverage of Papua has also become closely linked to global movements and hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter, #PapuanLivesMatter, and #FreeWestPapua. These hashtags gained strong visibility, particularly during 2021-2022, and were repeatedly used in online campaigns and international media reports (Santoso, 2022). Pro-independence activists and non-state actors use these narratives to frame Papua as a space of racism, human rights abuse, underdevelopment, and marginalization. As Elisabeth (2017) explains, the Papua conflict is deeply rooted in issues of human rights, development inequality, and social exclusion. These issues do not remain local or static, but circulate widely through media channels. In media discourse, the dominant issue revolves around violence, racism, human rights violations, and land liberation (Santoso, 2022). Because pro-independence actors dominate this space, the narratives formed often carry negative sentiments toward the Indonesian government, portraying Indonesia as a colonial power, an exploiter of labor, and a source of ongoing socio-political problems.

The influence of individual actors further strengthens this discursive dominance. Veronika Koman, for example, is highly vocal in promoting referendum-related narratives and strategically uses the *PapuanLivesMatter* discourse to attract wider and more active audiences. Her influence is amplified by her multiple roles as an activist, legal advocate, visiting lecturer at an Australian University, and journalist. Santoso (2022) found that this multi-role positioning allows her to operate across different platforms and audiences, making it easier to dominate and sustain the Papua discourse in digital spaces.

Beyond new media, international mainstream media also play a major role in shaping public opinion on Papua. Outlets such as *The New York Times* frame the Papua conflict as a crystallization of longstanding human rights violations, relying heavily on sources who support Papuan independence (Zarwan et al., 2022). Similarly, Reuters portrays the Indonesian government as authoritarian by highlighting issues such as media control, internet shutdowns, and incidents of racist treatment toward Papuan students by security forces (Widyaningsih & Lestari, 2020). British media have also published provocative headlines that frame Papuan independence as a progressive step in the struggle of the Papuan people (Martianto & Isnaini, 2021).

Such international media framing has consequences beyond image-building. It contributes to negative global perceptions of Indonesia and increases the risk of public reactions that may threaten national unity (Harvey, 2015). Hayes et al. (2007) argue that media should not only be seen as a tool for transmitting narratives or information (Meyers, 2007), but also as a medium that mediates and shapes the information circulating in the public sphere. As Entman (1993) argues, human action is strongly influenced by interpretations shaped through media framing. In the Papua context, international media framing tends not to reduce conflict but instead sharpens tension by focusing on resistance rather than peace-building narratives (Martianto & Wahid, 2021). This condition reflects the logic of hyperreality, in which media representations become more powerful than actual social conditions on the ground and guide how audiences understand reality (Baudrillard, as cited in Santoso, 2022).

Although often absent in dominant media narratives, the Indonesian government has not remained entirely passive. One major effort is the implementation of Special Autonomy (*Otonomi Khusus*) through Law No. 21 of 2001, which grants Papua broader authority to manage its own governance. This policy was intended to address political grievances and reduce separatist activities (Lefaan, Nugroho, & Mudiono, 2012). However, special autonomy has also produced unintended effects. Some Papuan political elites interpret special autonomy (*Otonomi Khusus*) as a form of ethnic-based self-determination, leading to policies that require regional leaders to be indigenous Papuans. This has encouraged ethnocentric political mobilization, intensified ethnic-based conflicts, and worsened security conditions in areas such as Jayapura (Lefaan et al., 2012).

In this context, the imbalance of media narratives, the dominance of hyperreal representations, and the weak presence of state actors in high-impact discourse have significantly shaped public opinion. Domestically and internationally, public perceptions tend to follow dominant narratives, which weakens Indonesia's bargaining position and increases social and political polarization (Elisabeth, 2021). In response to these challenges, strategic communication becomes a crucial tool. Strategic communication enables the state to manage information, counter exaggerated or misleading narratives, and promote more balanced and peace-oriented interpretations of the Papua issue (Tatham, 2010; Fredriksson & Pallas, 2015).

2. Method

A constructive paradigm is employed, viewing social reality as the result of interpretation and meaning-making rather than as an objective and fixed entity (Kuhn, 1962; Friedrichs, 1970). Drawing on Popper's concept of the three worlds, reality is understood as the interaction between material conditions, subjective interpretations, and human-produced knowledge, including media discourse (Popper, 2026). Within this framework, media representations of the Papua issue are treated as socially constructed narratives shaped by political, cultural, and communicative contexts rather than neutral reflections of reality.

A qualitative approach with exploratory and explanatory designs is applied to examine the formation of public opinion on Papua through media narratives (Yin, as cited in Santosa, 2021). A total of 4,684 news articles were collected using web scraping techniques from major national and international media outlets, including Detik, Tribun, Kompas, and Tirto.id, CNN, Reuters, Al Jazeera, and Green Left. The collected texts are analyzed using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) with NVivo 12. Hierarchy charts are used to identify dominant events and discourses related to Papua, followed by thematic and cluster analysis to examine emerging topics and their correlations across media narratives. In-depth interviews are conducted to identify public opinion regarding the Papua issue and to understand how media discourse influences audience perceptions. Data selection and reduction are carried out to distinguish relevant from non-relevant information, enabling analysis of how Papua is constructed in public consciousness. Based on these analytical findings, a formulation of counter-narrative strategies is developed to support the reconstruction of public opinion through strategic communication.

3. Results

3.1 Media Narratives on the Papua Issue

Identification of how the media frames issues related to Papua in shaping public opinion can be conducted by examining the topics most frequently discussed in news coverage about Papua. These topics include armed conflict, infrastructure development, government policies, and human rights. Based on data collected from news reports on Papua, which are published by major national and international media outlets such as Detik, Kompas, and Tirto.id, CNN, Reuters, Al-Jazeera, and Greenleft, a total of 4.684 articles were gathered. The articles were collected using a web scraping method to compile Papua-related coverage from these media sources. A detailed breakdown of the number of articles discussing Papua is presented in the diagram below.

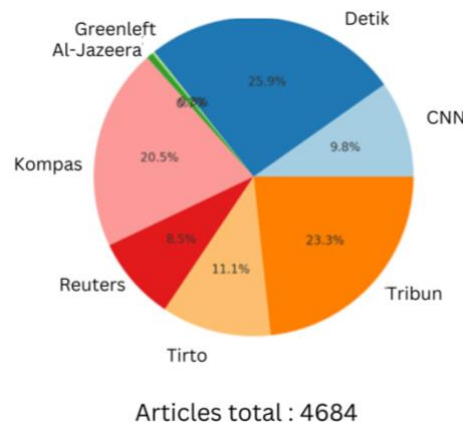


Figure 1. The percentage of articles published by each media outlet

Source: Researcher, 2023

The pie chart shows the percentage distribution of 4,684 articles across media outlets. Detik leads with 25.9 percent, followed by Tribun at 23.3 percent and Kompas at 20.5 percent, indicating the strong dominance of major national media. Tirto contributes 11.1 percent and CNN 9.8 percent, while international media such as Reuters account for 8.5 percent. Green Left and Al Jazeera contribute only a very small share. This distribution suggests that coverage of Papua is largely shaped by a few major media outlets, which may influence the dominant narratives presented to the public.

Further analysis of articles published between 2020 and 2023 shows that Papua is a highly prominent topic, with the word Papua appearing 14,971 times. Word cloud analysis using NVivo 12 highlights the most frequent and dominant themes in the coverage, revealing how media attention repeatedly centers on Papua and frames key issues related to the region. This pattern reflects the media's role in constructing and reinforcing public perceptions through repeated emphasis on certain themes.



Figure 2. Word Cloud of Main Themes Related to the Papua Issue in the Media

The word cloud shows how media narratives about Papua are mainly shaped by state involvement. Dominant terms such as *Papua*, *government*, *TNI (Indonesia Armed Forces)*, *health*, and *development* indicate that media coverage strongly emphasizes government policies, military presence, public services, and infrastructure projects. This framing often presents Papua as a region under close state control, with the government and TNI positioned as the main actors responsible for managing security, development, and social issues.

At the same time, the presence of words like *conflict*, *violence*, and *independence* highlights ongoing political and social tensions. Media narratives frequently link Papua to instability and resistance, while issues such as health inequality, environmental impact, and uneven development reflect deeper structural problems. Overall, the word cloud suggests that media coverage prioritizes political and security perspectives, while social, environmental, and local community voices receive comparatively less attention.

3.2 Actors Reported in Media Coverage

In media coverage of the Papua issue, several key actors are frequently mentioned or highlighted. These actors include government officials, civil society groups, international organizations, and figures or groups associated with Papua-related issues. Among the most prominent are the government, civil society organizations, Papuan figures, international organizations, and human rights institutions, as well as regional government leaders in Papua, as illustrated in the following graph.

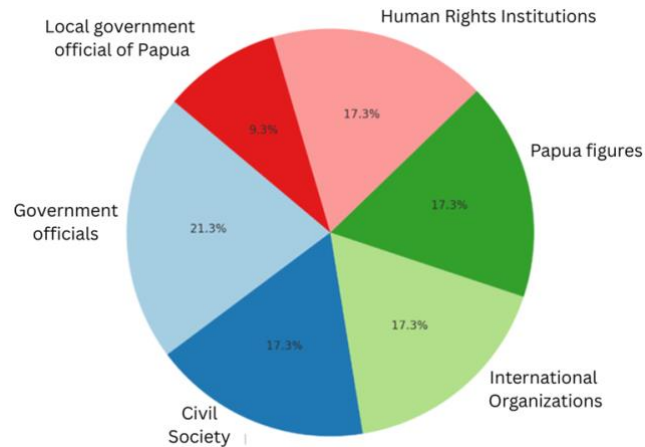


Figure 3: Distribution of Actor Mentions Related to the Papua Issue in National and International Media

The pie chart shows how actors in the Papua issue are represented in national and international media. Central government officials dominate the coverage with 21.3 percent of mentions, indicating that media coverage of Papua is most frequently associated with central government officials. Other actors, including Papuan figures, civil society, international organizations, and human rights institutions, each account for 17.3 percent, showing that non-state and global perspectives also receive notable attention. In contrast, Papuan local government officials appear far less frequently at 9.3 percent, suggesting limited media focus on local leadership. Overall, the pie chart shows which actors are most often mentioned in news about Papua in national and international media. This can help explain how the public sees those actors.

3.3 Dominant Topics in Media Coverage

Papua, a region rich in natural and cultural resources yet frequently affected by social, political, and economic issues, has attracted significant attention from both national and international media. Media representations of Papua play an important role in shaping public opinion and influencing broader public perceptions of the region. To gain deeper insight into how Papua is portrayed, a thematic hierarchy analysis was conducted to identify the main themes and subthemes dominating media coverage.

The thematic hierarchy visualization shows that media coverage of Papua extends beyond political issues as the primary focus and also addresses health, environmental, and economic concerns. These themes are interconnected, reflecting the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of the challenges faced by Papua. The following figure visualizes the thematic hierarchy of how Papua is portrayed in the media.

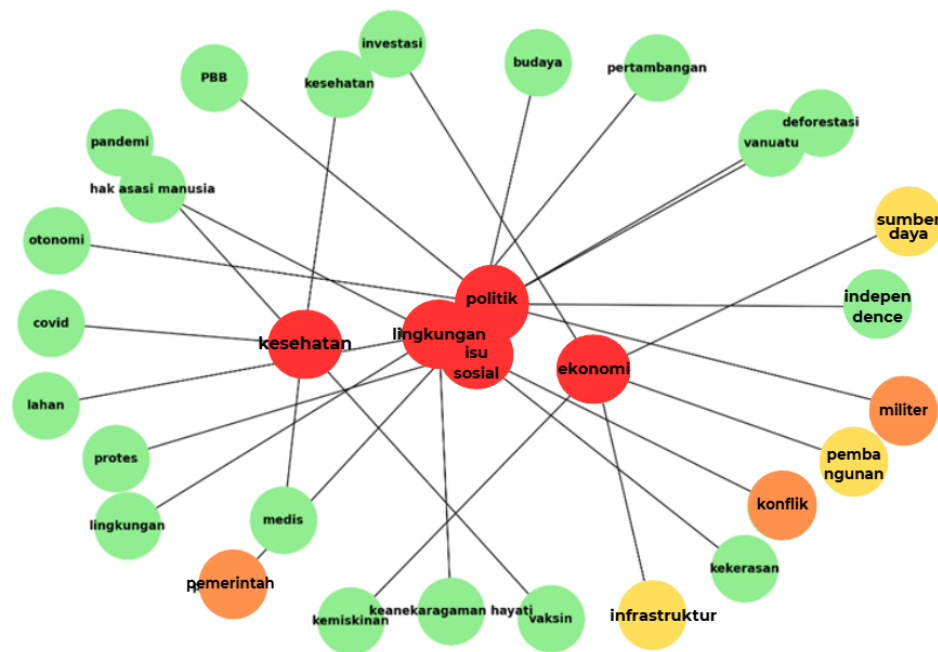


Figure 4: Thematic Hierarchy of How Papua Is Portrayed in the Media

The thematic hierarchy analysis shows that political and security (environmental, social, health, and economic) issues dominate media coverage of Papua. Topics such as government policy, state authority, conflict, and military involvement appear most frequently, indicating that Papua is often framed through a lens of control, stability, and governance. This emphasis reinforces perceptions of Papua as a region requiring strong state intervention.

Beyond politics and security, media narratives also highlight issues of medical, development, biodiversity, poverty and deforestation. These themes reflect ongoing challenges related to public services, infrastructure development, and resource management. However, they often appear as secondary narratives that support or contextualize the dominant political framing rather than standing as independent issues.

Overall, the thematic hierarchy reveals that media representations of Papua are shaped by interconnected topics that emphasize state-centered responses while placing social and humanitarian concerns in a supporting role. This pattern illustrates how media framing contributes to a particular construction of Papua that influences how the region is perceived and discussed in the public sphere.

4. Discussion

4.1 Public Opinion on Papua based on Media Consumption

Through semi-structured interviews, findings show how public opinion on Papua is formed through media exposure. Respondents rely on several media sources as references for understanding situations in Papua. These sources are broadly divided into two main categories, namely digital media and traditional media.

Digital media include internet-based and contemporary sources such as social media, online news, and YouTube. Traditional media consist of more conventional sources such as television and radio, newspapers, and news websites. The diagram indicates that both digital and traditional media play important roles in disseminating information about Papua, although they differ in approach and audience reach. Social media and YouTube tend to be more interactive and dynamic, allowing audiences not only to receive information but also to participate in

discussions and content sharing. Online news serves as a more structured and formal source, combining journalistic practices with digital accessibility.

Traditional media such as television, radio, and newspapers mainly operate through one-way communication, delivering information from institutional sources to the public with limited interaction. News websites, although internet-based, are categorized as traditional media because they generally maintain conventional journalistic formats and standards. Together, these media sources interact in shaping public perceptions of Papua, with digital media offering speed and interactivity, while traditional media provide credibility and legitimacy.

Although online news ranks second as a direct source of information for respondents, its influence on public opinion remains strong. Online news combines rapid information dissemination with journalistic credibility, enabling wide and fast circulation of narratives about Papua at both national and international levels. Articles from online news portals are often shared across social media and referenced by other media, amplifying their impact. As a result, public discussions and opinions frequently originate from narratives first constructed by online news.

In relation to public opinion, the data also reveal the presence of different respondent clusters, indicating diverse views on Papua. Cluster analysis conducted using NVivo 12 identifies several groups with distinct perspectives, as illustrated in the chart below.

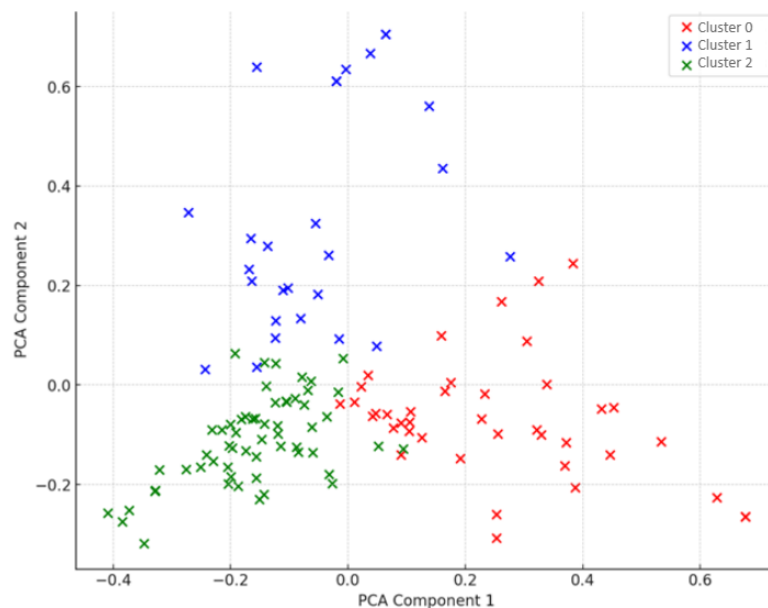


Figure 5: Cluster Analysis of Public Opinion on Papua

The chart presents the results of a cluster analysis of public opinion on Papua, with the data reduced using Principal Component Analysis (PCA). This technique generated two main components, PCA Component 1 and PCA Component 2, which serve as the horizontal and vertical axes of the two-dimensional plot. Three primary clusters are identified and distinguished by color: Cluster 0 in red, Cluster 1 in blue, and Cluster 2 in green. Each data point represents an individual or group opinion regarding Papua.

Cluster 0, shown in red, is concentrated in the central right and upper areas of the plot, indicating that the opinions within this group share similar characteristics that differentiate them from the other clusters, particularly Cluster 2. Cluster 1, shown in blue, is positioned more centrally but extends upward, suggesting relatively higher variation along the second component while remaining distinct from Cluster 0. Cluster 2, shown in green, is densely located in the lower left area, indicating a more homogeneous set of views that differ substantially from the other two groups. The clear separation among clusters suggests significant variation, and potentially polarization, in public opinion regarding Papua.

PCA Component 1 can be interpreted as representing the primary dimension of opinion differences. Based on the supporting textual data (word cloud, actor mentions, and thematic hierarchy), this axis may reflect a spectrum from critical or anti-government framing to more supportive or state-aligned perspectives. PCA Component 2 captures a secondary dimension, which may relate to the intensity, emotional tone, or focus of the discourse (for example, security-focused versus humanitarian-focused narratives).

Cluster 0 represents a group whose discourse is relatively more critical of the government, as indicated by the frequent appearance of terms related to human rights, militarization, and state violence in the word cloud, as well as references to civil society actors and international organizations. Cluster 1 can be interpreted as a more moderate or mixed group, combining both critical and institutional language, suggesting a more balanced or ambivalent stance. Cluster 2 appears more aligned with pro-government or state-centered narratives, reflected in a stronger emphasis on national stability, security forces, and official institutions in the actor distribution and thematic hierarchy.

Overall, the figure demonstrates that public opinion on Papua is segmented into three structured groups shaped by competing narratives. The main division lies along a spectrum between critical and state-centered framings, with a moderate cluster positioned between them. This suggests the presence of discursive polarization, though not complete fragmentation.

Differences among these clusters may be influenced by several interconnected factors, including sources of information, occupation, and educational background. Information sources are particularly influential. Individuals who rely on social media may encounter more diverse and less filtered content, including highly subjective perspectives. In contrast, those who depend on online news portals or traditional media are more likely to consume information that has undergone editorial processes, even though bias may still be present. As a result, audiences exposed to different media environments may develop differing interpretations of the Papua issue, ranging from supportive views of government policies to more critical perspectives shaped by independent or international reporting. See the following diagram.

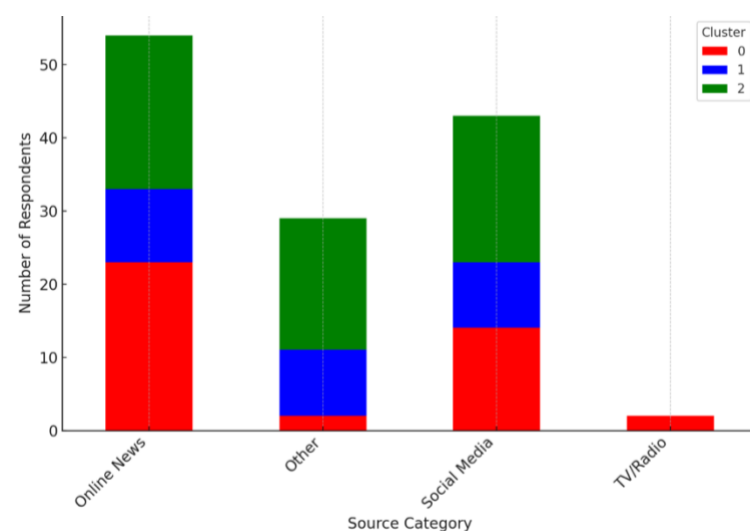


Figure 6: Cluster Comparison Based on Sources of Information

This bar chart illustrates the distribution of information sources used by respondents to understand the Papua issue. The sources are grouped into four main categories: Online News, Social Media, Other, and TV or Radio. Respondents are also classified into three opinion clusters, namely Cluster 0 shown in red, Cluster 1 in blue, and Cluster 2 in green. The data reveal a clear correlation between the type of information source accessed and differences in public perspectives on Papua.

Online News is the most dominant source, with Cluster 2 representing the largest proportion of respondents, followed by Cluster 1 and Cluster 0. This pattern suggests that more critical or progressive views on Papua are more commonly found among those who rely on online news. Digital news platforms provide fast and diverse access to investigative journalism, in-depth analysis, and international perspectives, which may encourage more open and critical interpretation of the issue.

Social Media also shows a significant distribution, again dominated by Cluster 2, although Clusters 1 and 0 are also represented. As an interactive and less regulated space, social media facilitates the rapid spread of diverse narratives and public debate. In contrast, TV or Radio has very limited respondents and is associated only with Cluster 0, indicating that those who depend on traditional media tend to hold more conservative or government-aligned views. The Other category, such as blogs, academic journals, or community discussions, also leans toward Cluster 2, suggesting that individuals who seek alternative or specialized sources may develop more independent perspectives.

In addition to information sources, occupation also appears to influence public opinion. Professions such as army personnel (TNI AD), teachers, and students tend fall within Cluster 2, possibly due to direct experience or exposure to critical and intellectual environments. Meanwhile, civil servants and private sector employees are commonly associated with Cluster 0, which may reflect more structured work environments and exposure to official or formal narratives. These patterns can be observed in the following diagram.

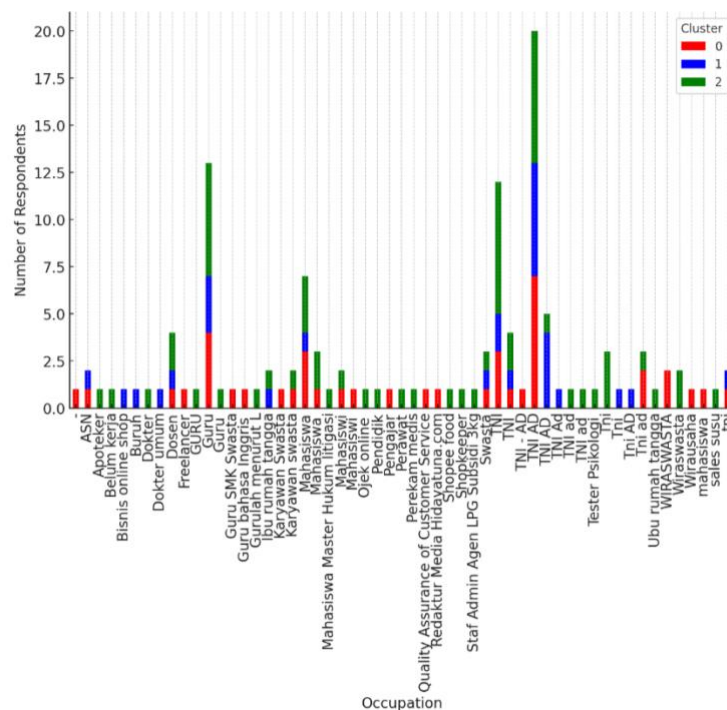


Figure 7. Cluster Comparison Based on Occupation

The bar chart above presents a comparison of public opinion clusters on Papua based on respondents' occupations. Three opinion clusters are identified and marked in red, Cluster 0, blue, Cluster 1, and green, Cluster 2. The data provide insight into how professional background influences perspectives on the Papua issue.

Cluster 2 dominates many occupational categories, particularly among Indonesian Army personnel, teachers, university students, and private sector employees. Its strong presence among Army personnel may reflect shared training, field experience, or direct exposure to conditions in Papua, leading to more consistent viewpoints. Among teachers and students, the dominance of Cluster 2 may indicate the influence of academic environments that encourage critical discussion and exposure to diverse information sources.

Cluster 0, although less dominant than Cluster 2, appears significant among civil servants, private employees, and medical doctors. Among civil servants, this pattern may reflect perspectives that align more closely with government policies, given their institutional roles. In the case of private employees and doctors, Cluster 0 may represent more cautious or stability-oriented views, possibly shaped by formal information channels and professional responsibilities.

Cluster 1 is distributed across various occupations without clearly dominating any single category. Its presence among teachers, students, and private employees suggests a more moderate stance, potentially influenced by both digital and traditional media. This cluster may represent individuals who are open to multiple perspectives but do not strongly align with more polarized positions.

Certain professions, such as editors, quality assurance staff, and administrative roles, have fewer respondents but show distinct tendencies. Editors, for example, may hold more critical or independent views due to their role in managing and evaluating information. Meanwhile, housewives, entrepreneurs, and freelancers are largely represented in Cluster 2, though Cluster 0 also appears significantly, indicating that broader social and economic dynamics shape their perspectives.

Overall, the chart suggests that occupation plays a meaningful role in shaping views on Papua. Professions closely linked to government institutions tend to be more represented in Cluster 0, which may reflect more conservative or status quo-oriented perspectives. In contrast, occupations in education, the military, and parts of the private sector show stronger representation in Cluster 2, which may reflect more critical or progressive views. The presence of Cluster 1 across many professions highlights the complexity and diversity of public opinion.

Educational level also significantly influences how individuals interpret information and form opinions. Those with higher education tend to have broader access to academic literature, critical discussions, and diverse information sources, which may enhance analytical and critical thinking skills. This may explain why individuals with higher educational backgrounds are more frequently found in Cluster 2. Conversely, individuals with lower educational attainment may rely more on easily accessible sources such as television or radio, which may correspond with the more conventional or official perspectives reflected in Cluster 0. See the diagram below.

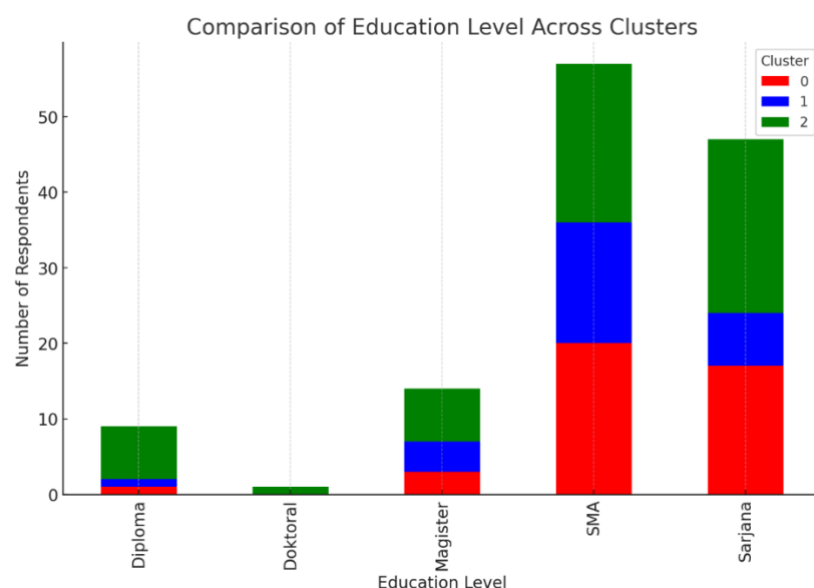


Figure 8: Cluster Comparison Based on Educational Level

The bar chart above illustrates the distribution of public opinion clusters in Papua based on respondents' educational levels, which are grouped into five categories: Diploma, Doctoral, Master's, Senior High School, and Bachelor's. Each education level shows how opinions are distributed across three identified clusters: Cluster 0 in red, Cluster 1 in blue, and Cluster 2 in green. This comparison provides insight into how educational background shapes the way individuals understand and evaluate the Papua issue.

Cluster 2 consistently dominates most education levels, particularly among Bachelor's and Senior High School graduates. This suggests that individuals in these groups tend to hold more critical or progressive views on Papua. For Bachelor's graduates, this may be influenced by greater exposure to academic literature, research, and diverse intellectual discussions that encourage critical thinking. Among Senior High School graduates, the dominance of Cluster 2 may reflect the influence of digital media and online news, which provide broad access to different perspectives even at earlier stages of formal education.

Cluster 0, which reflects more conservative or officially aligned views, appears notably among Senior High School and Bachelor's respondents, although it does not dominate. This indicates that even at higher education levels, some individuals may favor stability or established government narratives. Meanwhile, Cluster 1 is relatively evenly distributed across education levels, especially among Master's, Bachelor's, and Senior High School graduates. This cluster likely represents more moderate views or individuals who are still evaluating different perspectives before forming firm conclusions.

At the Master's, Diploma, and Doctoral levels, although the number of respondents is smaller, Cluster 2 remains dominant. This pattern suggests that higher levels of education are generally associated with more analytical and critical approaches to complex issues, such as Papua. Overall, the chart indicates that educational attainment plays a significant role in shaping public opinion, but it interacts with other factors such as information sources and professional background. Public views on Papua, therefore, emerge from a complex combination of access to information, critical thinking skills, and social experience, rather than from education alone.

4. Conclusion

This study examines how national and international media frame the Papua issue. The news often focuses on armed conflict, government policies, infrastructure projects, and human rights. Major media outlets such as Detik, Kompas, and CNN shape much of the narrative. Their reports mostly highlight the role of the central government and the military, which makes Papua appear mainly as a security issue. Local voices and humanitarian concerns receive less attention.

The findings show that central government officials are mentioned most often in news reports, while Papuan figures and civil society groups appear less frequently. This suggests that media coverage is not fully inclusive and does not always give enough space to local perspectives. Papua is also often described in connection with political tension, social problems, environmental issues, and health challenges.

Media attention usually increases during major events, such as armed clashes or controversial government policies. This shows that reporting is often reactive rather than consistent and in-depth. Public opinion is influenced by the type of media people use, as well as their job and education level. People who rely on social media tend to have more critical views, while those who use traditional media such as TV or radio are more likely to support official government narratives. Overall, the study shows that both media framing and personal background shape different views about Papua.

Among the various influencing factors, education emerges as a central determinant in shaping public interpretation of the Papua issue. Big investments in infrastructure or communication technology can make information easier to access. However, if the quality of education and critical thinking skills do not improve, these investments will not significantly change how people understand an issue. Hence, education functions to help people understand and judge the messages they receive from the media.

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Cultural Identity Management: Adaptation and Negotiation of Jaranan Thik in Ponoragan Society

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Abstract

This study examines the processes of cultural identity negotiation and communicative adaptation of Jaranan Thik within the Reyog dominated cultural hierarchy of Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia. Drawing upon Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory, the research explores how marginalized traditional art communities strategically manage identity through symbolic alignment, structural modification, and institutional engagement. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with key performers, cultural leaders, and community figures, supported by documentation and performance observation. The findings reveal four major patterns: symbolic assimilation through the adoption of shared mythological narratives and terminology; controlled moderation of trance practices to recalibrate public perception; religious and institutional affiliation to enhance moral and structural legitimacy; and aesthetic modernization to engage younger audiences. These strategies demonstrate that Jaranan Thik does not dissolve into dominant Reyog culture but negotiates legitimacy through selective alignment while preserving core ritual identity. The study extends the application of Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory to localized cultural hierarchies and traditional performing arts, highlighting communicative agency as central to cultural sustainability.

Keywords: Cultural Identity Negotiation, Co-Cultural Communication, Jaranan Thik, Reyog Ponorogo, Cultural Adaptation, Traditional Performing arts

1. Introduction

Cultural identity has long been a central concern in communication studies, particularly in plural societies where multiple cultural expressions coexist within unequal power relations. Identity is not merely a static attribute but is continuously constructed, negotiated, and contested through communication processes (Collier, 2005b; Collier & Thomas, 1988). Traditional performing arts represent important communicative spaces where cultural identity, legitimacy, and social recognition are articulated. However, within localized cultural hierarchies, certain art forms become institutionalized as dominant cultural symbols, while others are positioned as marginal or subordinate.

This issue is important because cultural marginalization threatens the sustainability of local cultural diversity (Smith, 2006). When dominant cultural forms receive institutional recognition, policy support, and symbolic legitimacy, marginal traditional arts often face stigma, exclusion, or pressure to assimilate (Sasaki & Baba, 2024). Understanding how marginal communities adapt and negotiate identity is essential for explaining how cultural diversity is maintained at the local level (Järvelä, 2023). In Ponorogo, Indonesia, Reyog Ponorogo has been officially established as the dominant cultural symbol (Yurisma & Bahrudin, 2020), while Jaranan Thik, despite its historical roots and growing popularity, occupies a marginal position (Saputro, 2023). Examining this dynamic provides insight into broader issues of cultural power, recognition, and communication in plural societies.

Cultural marginalization threatens the sustainability of local cultural diversity. When dominant cultural forms receive institutional recognition, policy support, and symbolic legitimacy, marginal traditional arts often experience stigma, exclusion, or pressure to assimilate (Orbe, 1998). In Ponorogo, Indonesia, Reyog Ponorogo has been officially established as the primary cultural identity of the region (Dharojah et al., 2024), whereas Jaranan Thik despite its historical roots and growing popularity and occupies a marginal position within the Ponoragan cultural landscape (Murdianto, 2016). This marginal position creates tensions related to legitimacy, recognition, and cultural continuity, particularly when Jaranan Thik communities interact with dominant cultural actors and institutions (Saputro, 2023; Zainul Hamdi, 2008). Understanding how such marginal communities adapt and negotiate identity is crucial for explaining how cultural diversity is maintained or constrained at the local level and for addressing broader issues of cultural sustainability and social inclusion.

Previous communication studies employing Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory have largely examined contexts such as migration, education, organizational settings, and minority experiences in multicultural societies (Collier, 2005b; Collier & Thomas, 1988; Orbe, 1998). These studies demonstrate how marginalized groups negotiate identity through communication strategies, including accommodation, assimilation, and resistance. However, they rarely address traditional performing art communities operating within localized cultural hierarchies.

Conflict and reconciliation constitute inherent dynamics within Indonesia's plural social landscape (Suparto, 2014). Tensions frequently emerge when cultural expressions compete for recognition within communities characterized by diverse traditions and dominant symbolic hierarchies. Such dynamics are not limited to a single art form but reflect broader patterns of negotiation between local traditions and socially endorsed cultural identities. For example, a study conducted by Eska Novita Prastiwi from the Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, titled "*Konflik Kelompok Masyarakat Terhadap Kesenian Dolalak Sekar Arum Dusun Capar Kulon, Kecamatan Leksono, Kabupaten Wonosobo*" in 2015, examines how the Dolalak performance group sought social acceptance within Wonosobo, where Lenggèr is the dominant traditional art form (Prastiwi, 2015). The research highlights the strategies employed by Dolalak practitioners to navigate intergroup tensions and negotiate legitimacy in a cultural environment structured by established artistic authority.

Studies on Jaranan Thik and other traditional arts in Indonesia have primarily focused on historical origins, ritual practices, trance phenomena, or cultural conflict (Groenendaal, 2012; Nugraheni, 2015; Rofiq & Erwin, 2020). Some research documents tensions between Jaranan Thik and dominant cultural forms such as Reyog Ponorogo, particularly in relation to stigma, legitimacy, and religious interpretations (Murdianto, 2016). Unlike prior studies that document the existence of conflict or cultural tension, this study differs by examining identity negotiation as an ongoing communicative process grounded explicitly in Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory. In doing so, it builds on earlier descriptive and cultural analyses by offering a theory-driven communication perspective.

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the process of cultural adaptation of Jaranan Thik within the dominant Ponoragan cultural structure through the analytical lens of Co-Cultural Communication Theory (Orbe, 1998). While co-cultural theory has been widely applied to understand minority communication strategies in organizational, educational, and multicultural contexts, its application to traditional performing art communities embedded in localized cultural hierarchies remains limited. By situating Jaranan Thik as a co-cultural group operating under the symbolic dominance of Reyog Ponorogo, this study reconceptualizes adaptation not as

passive assimilation but as a strategic communicative practice shaped by power relations, cultural legitimacy, and social positioning. This approach extends Orbe's framework beyond its conventional settings and demonstrates its relevance for analyzing cultural survival within traditional art systems.

The secondary objective is to advance the understanding of cultural identity negotiation within traditional art communities by employing Cultural Identity Theory developed by Mary Jane Collier (Collier, 2005a; Collier & Thomas, 1988). Rather than treating Jaranan Thik merely as a cultural artifact or site of conflict, this study positions it as an active arena of identity construction, where avowal, ascription, and identity salience are continuously negotiated. By integrating Cultural Identity Theory with Co-Cultural Communication Theory, this research offers a novel theoretical synthesis that illuminates how adaptation strategies and identity negotiation processes operate simultaneously within marginal cultural communities. This integrative approach moves beyond descriptive accounts of cultural tension and contributes a communication centered explanation of how traditional performing arts sustain legitimacy and continuity within dominant cultural regimes.

Theoretically, this study advances the application of Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory by extending their analytical scope to the domain of traditional performing arts, which remains comparatively underexplored within communication scholarship. By situating Jaranan Thik within a localized cultural hierarchy dominated by Reyog Ponorogo, the research demonstrates how identity negotiation operates not only in migratory, intercultural, or organizational contexts, but also within intra-cultural power structures shaped by symbolic dominance. In doing so, the study contributes to a more refined conceptualization of identity as a communicatively enacted and hierarchically mediated process embedded in regional cultural systems.

Practically, the findings carry important implications for cultural policy, heritage governance, and community-based cultural sustainability. Recognizing the communicative agency of marginal cultural communities such as Jaranan Thik highlights the need for inclusive cultural frameworks that move beyond privileging officially institutionalized traditions. The study suggests that sustainable cultural preservation requires not only formal recognition but also support for locally negotiated strategies of adaptation, alignment, and affirmation. In plural societies where dominant and subordinate cultural forms coexist, communication-based negotiation emerges as a critical mechanism for maintaining cultural continuity while accommodating structural inequalities.

2. Literature Review

Adaptation in communication refers to the capacity of individuals or social groups to adjust their communicative styles, linguistic choices, and interactional strategies in response to particular social contexts, audiences, or power structures (Edwards & Noller, 1993; Giles et al., 1991). This process involves shifts in both verbal and nonverbal behaviour in order to align with situational expectations, cultural norms, or dominant communicative patterns. However, adaptation should not be understood merely as interpersonal adjustment; rather, it is a strategic practice embedded within broader social hierarchies and power relations.

Within the framework of Co-Cultural Communication Theory, adaptation is conceptualized as a communicative strategy employed by marginalized or non-dominant groups when interacting with dominant cultural systems. Co-cultural groups make calculated decisions about how to communicate based on their desired outcomes, the perceived risks involved, and the structural constraints they face. Adaptation may take the form of accommodation—modifying communicative behavior to gain acceptance or legitimacy within dominant spaces—or selective assimilation, in which certain identity markers are minimized to reduce resistance or exclusion. At the same time, adaptation does not necessarily imply the abandonment of cultural identity; it may coexist with strategies of resistance or affirmation aimed at preserving symbolic distinctiveness.

From this perspective, communicative adaptation becomes a dynamic negotiation between relational goals and identity maintenance. Marginalized groups continuously balance the need to participate within dominant systems with the desire to sustain cultural coherence and autonomy (Giles & Ogay, 2013; Y. Y. Kim, 2001). Thus, adaptation within co-cultural contexts is not a passive process of conformity but an active, strategic, and identity oriented practice shaped by unequal power relations. This theoretical orientation provides a cohesive foundation

for understanding how cultural communities navigate marginalization while maintaining symbolic presence and cultural continuity.

Astriani, in her ethnographic study *Olahan dan Negosiasi Identitas Etnik dalam Komunikasi Antarbudaya*, examines the negotiation of ethnic identity between indigenous Muslim communities and migrant groups in Prabumulih, South Sumatra, highlighting how identity adaptation occurs within intercultural communication settings shaped by ethnic interaction and social boundaries (Astriani, 2015). Similarly, contemporary discussions on artistic adaptation appear in public discourse, including a report published by RRI that documents how Jaranan performances incorporate modern musical elements to remain relevant to contemporary audiences (Yuniartha, 2024).

Academic studies on traditional performing arts have also examined processes of adaptation within diaspora and performance contexts. Research on the adaptation and development of Ebeg Banyumasan among Javanese diaspora communities in South Sumatra demonstrates how traditional art forms evolve in response to migration and sociocultural transformation (Jantro & Kiswanto, 2023). Similarly, an analysis of the Barongan Samin Edan group in Semarang highlights how performance innovation and audience oriented strategies are employed to sustain public interest and cultural relevance (Putri & Arsih, 2019).

Although these studies contribute valuable insights into adaptation in intercultural, diasporic, and performance-based contexts, most of them focus primarily on aesthetic development, audience strategies, or intercultural coexistence. They tend to frame adaptation as artistic innovation or social adjustment rather than as a communicative strategy embedded within cultural power relations. Moreover, these works do not explicitly employ Co-Cultural Communication Theory or Cultural Identity Theory as analytical frameworks for understanding adaptation as a form of identity negotiation within dominant cultural hierarchies.

In contrast, the present study situates adaptation within a co-cultural framework, conceptualizing it as a strategic communicative practice shaped by structural inequality and symbolic dominance. By integrating adaptation with identity negotiation processes, this research advances beyond descriptive accounts of artistic development and provides a theory-driven explanation of how Jaranan Thik navigates marginality while sustaining cultural legitimacy within Ponoragan society.

In other ways, cultural identity is significantly shaped through ongoing interactions between individuals and groups, particularly through processes of cultural adjustment and communicative behaviour (Stets & Serpe, 2019). Identity does not emerge in isolation but is continuously negotiated within social relationships that involve adaptation, affirmation, and repositioning (Ting-Toomey, 2015). Within this relational framework, communication functions as a central mechanism through which identities are formed, maintained, transformed, or reinforced over time. These dynamics are equally evident in the case of Jaranan Thik, where cultural communication plays a crucial role in shaping and sustaining both the identity of the art community itself and the broader cultural identity of Ponorogo.

The identity of Ponorogo is not merely an inherited cultural label but a socially constructed and communicatively reproduced reality. Through performance practices, symbolic expressions, media representation, and intergroup cultural exchanges, Jaranan Thik contributes to an ongoing process of identity negotiation and reconstruction within the region. This dynamic process is influenced by multiple factors, including language use, public discourse, cultural policy, and shifting audience expectations. Identity negotiation, therefore, is not only about maintaining distinctiveness but also about cultivating collective confidence and symbolic legitimacy within broader social systems.

In this regard, the negotiation of cultural identity grounded in self-confidence and cultural affirmation becomes essential for national and regional identity formation. The strengthening of traditional cultural identity through communication is increasingly urgent in contemporary societies facing rapid globalization and cultural standardization (Jiang, 2024). The case of Jaranan Thik illustrates how traditional cultural communities engage in continuous communicative efforts to preserve symbolic autonomy while contributing to the construction of a

shared regional identity. Thus, identity negotiation in this context represents both a strategy of cultural survival and a constructive force in shaping the evolving identity of Ponorogo itself.

Pigeaud characterizes the horse dance as “a performance in which individuals imitate horses or horse riders by holding woven materials made of bamboo or leather” (Pigeaud, 1938). This description highlights the mimetic and symbolic nature of the performance, where bodily movement, costume, and material culture converge to create a culturally meaningful representation of strength, mobility, and martial heritage. Beyond its aesthetic dimension, Jaranan embodies layered cultural meanings that connect local history, ritual practice, and communal identity, positioning it not merely as entertainment but as a significant expression of Javanese cultural symbolism.

Identity negotiation has become an increasingly prominent topic in communication studies, particularly within contexts marked by expanding mobility and intensified intercultural interaction. As individuals and groups traverse social and cultural boundaries, they are required to continuously adjust, redefine, and negotiate both personal and collective identities in relation to shifting social environments. A growing body of scholarship has examined identity negotiation in intercultural and minority settings. For example, cultural identity negotiation between migrant Javanese Muslims and native Balinese Hindus in Denpasar has been analyzed in terms of communicative adaptation and boundary management (Srikandi, 2021). Identity struggles emerging from the negotiation of cultural meanings in translation processes have also been explored (Sajarwa et al., 2023), alongside studies investigating identity negotiation between migrant and local ethnic groups in Bangka Selatan (Erlangga et al., 2021). Additionally, cultural identity negotiation has been conceptualized as a conflict management strategy in Batak–Chinese marriages (Yunita et al., 2022), while research on minority youth highlights the complexities of negotiating identity within multicultural societies (Qumseya, 2018).

Although these studies contribute important insights into identity negotiation in migration, interethnic relations, and multicultural settings, they largely situate negotiation within contexts of demographic mobility or minority-majority encounters shaped by ethnic or religious difference. Far less attention has been given to identity negotiation within traditional performing art communities operating under localized cultural hierarchies, where dominance is expressed not through migration but through symbolic cultural authority. It is within this overlooked context that the case of Jaranan Thik becomes analytically significant. Rather than negotiating identity across geographic displacement, Jaranan Thik negotiates its cultural position within its own regional space, confronting symbolic marginalization under the dominance of Reyog Ponorogo. This shift in focus from intercultural mobility to intra-cultural hierarchy constitutes the central gap addressed by this study and underscores its theoretical contribution to the literature on cultural identity negotiation.

3. Theoretical framework

In Mark P. Orbe’s co-cultural theory, a *co-culture* refers to a social group that exists within a larger societal structure where power is unequally distributed, positioning certain groups as dominant and others as marginalized. Within this framework, co-cultural group members adopt distinct communication orientations in response to dominant norms and institutional power. Assimilation describes efforts to minimize cultural differences and align with dominant standards in order to gain acceptance or access to resources. Accommodation reflects attempts to maintain one’s cultural identity while simultaneously seeking structural inclusion or modification of dominant practices. Separation, in contrast, involves rejecting dominant norms and reinforcing in-group solidarity and cultural distinctiveness. These orientations demonstrate that co-cultural communication is not passive adaptation but a strategic and context-dependent negotiation of identity, power, and social positioning (Orbe, 1998).

While Co-Cultural Communication Theory illuminates how marginalized groups strategically respond to dominant power structures through assimilation, accommodation, or separation, it does not fully explicate the internal processes through which cultural meanings are co-constructed and sustained in interaction. To deepen the analysis of how identity is communicatively enacted, Cultural Identity Theory provides a complementary framework. Cultural Identity Theory shifts the focus from strategic orientation toward the dynamic processes of avowal, ascription, and identity salience, emphasizing that identity is not merely a response to power asymmetry but an ongoing co-construction shaped through relational interaction. By integrating these perspectives, identity

negotiation can be understood not only as a strategic positioning within unequal structures but also as a communicative process through which cultural meanings are affirmed, contested, and redefined in specific social contexts.

Beyond processes of adaptation, minority identities also undergo continuous negotiation within communicative contexts that shape behavioural responses aimed at sustaining cultural distinctiveness. Identity negotiation does not occur in isolation but emerges through dynamic interactions between adaptation and the reaffirmation of cultural values, norms, and symbolic practices. In this regard, Cultural Identity Theory (CIT), developed by Mary Jane Collier (Collier, 2005b; Collier & Thomas, 1988), provides a critical framework for understanding how cultural identity is neither fixed nor essentialized, but actively constructed and reconstructed through communication, particularly within intercultural or unequal power contexts.

This dynamic interplay reflects what Collier later conceptualizes as negotiated facework, in which cultural identity is strategically projected and managed through communicative choices that are sensitive to power relations and social hierarchies. Identity, therefore, is not merely expressed but carefully performed within relational and structural constraints (Collier, 2015). Supporting this perspective, research in ethnic conflict contexts demonstrates that minority groups often engage in identity negotiation through culturally grounded codes—such as indigenous languages, ritual practices, or symbolic markers—to preserve symbolic autonomy even under conditions of political dominance (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). These findings reinforce the view that identity negotiation is simultaneously relational and protective: it seeks connection without relinquishing distinctiveness. Such a framework is particularly relevant for understanding how marginalized cultural communities balance adaptation and cultural affirmation within hierarchical cultural systems.

4. Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach using an intrinsic case study design to explore processes of cultural identity adaptation and negotiation within the Jaranan Thik community in Ponorogo, Indonesia. The intrinsic case study approach was selected because Jaranan Thik represents a unique and context-specific cultural phenomenon that requires in-depth understanding rather than broad generalization. This design allows the researcher to examine communication practices, symbolic interactions, and identity negotiations as they occur naturally within the sociocultural setting of Ponoragan society.

The research is grounded in Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory, which guide the analytical focus on how marginal cultural groups communicate, adapt, and negotiate identity within dominant cultural structures. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate to capture the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of cultural actors involved in Jaranan Thik performances and community interactions.

The research was conducted in several locations within Ponorogo Regency, East Java, Indonesia, particularly in areas where Jaranan Thik communities are active and regularly perform. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that participants possessed direct experience and substantial knowledge relevant to the research objectives. The selection criteria emphasized active involvement in Jaranan Thik activities and familiarity with the interaction between Jaranan Thik and dominant cultural forms, particularly Reyog Ponorogo.

The key informants included Nur Salam, leader of Brandal Loka Jaya (Jl. Abimanyu 43, Ponorogo); Ali, leader of the Nogo Pertolo group in Dukuh Kebatan 1, Campurejo Village, Sambit District, Ponorogo; Yuli Rohmawati, leader of Putro Purbo Legowo; Mbah Tarom and Sabar from Turonggo Wengker or Pustoko Pamedhar Jati; Mbah Slamet, senior cultural elder of Nogo Baru Klinthing in Slahung; and Imam, leader of Prawiro Gathi Taruno in Sampung. These individuals were selected due to their leadership roles and long-standing engagement in Jaranan Thik performance traditions.

The main informants consisted of Purbo Sasongko, a practicing artist, and Ridho Kurnianto, an academic and cultural observer, both of whom provided analytical and reflective perspectives on cultural identity negotiation. Additionally, Sugeng Wibowo, a community leader from desa Bajang, Mlarak District, served as a supporting

informant to offer broader social insights into community perceptions and intergroup cultural dynamics. This multi-level informant structure enabled the study to capture diverse viewpoints on adaptation processes, identity negotiation, and intergroup communication within the local cultural hierarchy of Ponorogo.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with carefully selected informants who were considered knowledgeable and experienced in the fields of Jaranan Thik performance and Ponorogo cultural traditions. Informants were purposively chosen based on their expertise, leadership roles, long-term involvement in traditional arts, and recognized authority within local cultural networks. This selection ensured that participants possessed a comprehensive understanding of the historical development, performance practices, and cultural positioning of Jaranan Thik within the broader Ponoragan cultural hierarchy. The in-depth interview approach allowed the researcher to explore participants' lived experiences, interpretations, and communicative strategies related to adaptation and cultural identity negotiation. Open-ended questioning facilitated rich narrative accounts, enabling deeper insight into how cultural meanings, symbolic practices, and power relations are articulated and negotiated within everyday cultural interactions.

5. Result

5.1. Historical of Jaranan Thik Ponorogo

Ponorogo is widely recognized for its iconic traditional performance, Reyog Ponorogo, which has become the dominant cultural symbol of the region. Historical records indicate that horse dance performances were already present in Ponorogo in the early twentieth century, although they functioned as an integral component of Reyog rather than as an independent art form. In his 1938 documentation, Pigeaud described the structure of *Réjog Panaraga* (Dutch spelling) as consisting of three principal elements: "*De reog van Panaraga bestaat altijd uit drie hoofdbestanddelen: een barongan (singabarong), een kedhokan (demonische maskerfiguur), en een aantal paarddansers (djaranan)*" (Pigeaud, 1938). This statement indicates that Reyog Ponorogo consistently comprises three main components: the barongan or singabarong as the central figure, the kedhokan or masked character as the counterpart, and a group of horse dancers (djaranan) who support and complement the performance.

This structural composition demonstrates that Jaranan historically functioned as an integral yet subordinate element within the Reyog performance framework. Although not positioned as the central figure, the presence of the horse dancers was essential to the overall narrative and aesthetic structure of Reyog. The historical embedding of Jaranan within Reyog thus reflects an early hierarchical cultural arrangement in which Jaranan operated under the symbolic dominance of the Singabarong figure. This historical relationship provides important context for understanding contemporary dynamics of cultural positioning, adaptation, and identity negotiation between Jaranan Thik and Reyog Ponorogo within Ponoragan society.

In *Jaranan: The Horse Dance and Trance in East Java*, Clara van Groenendael traces the mythological origins of Jaranan to the legend of Dèwi Sanggalangit, the princess of Kediri. According to this narrative, the princess announced a competition declaring that whoever could present a new and extraordinary performance in Kediri would be granted her hand in marriage (Groenendael, 2012). Responding to this challenge, the King of Bantarangin identified in historical accounts as Toh Bagus and in Ponorogo folklore as Klanasewandono together with his minister Pujangganong, assembled a Jaranan troupe consisting of horse dancers, gamelan musicians, and a barongan figure. Their rivals were the King of Lodoyo, Singabarong, and his minister Singakumbang, both endowed with the supernatural ability to transform into fierce animals such as lions and wild boars.

Van Groenendael notes: "*Hence in this legend, popular in Kediri and environs, the horse dance is connected with the complications surrounding the marriage of the princess of Kediri, Dèwi Sanggalangit... When the king of Ponorogo, King Toh Bagus, hears this announcement... They form a jaranan ké pang group comprising four horses, a mask for Pujangganom, and a group of musicians*" (Groenendael, 2012). This myth situates Jaranan not merely as a performative spectacle but as a cultural expression rooted in royal competition, symbolic power, and heroic narrative. The legend also illustrates how horse dance performances were historically intertwined with

themes of authority, legitimacy, and rivalry elements that continue to shape the symbolic relationship between Jaranan and Reyog within the broader cultural imagination of Ponorogo.

The origins of Jaranan can be understood through two broad historical layers: oral tradition and documented historical adaptation. Oral narratives frequently associate Jaranan with prehistoric ritual practices, suggesting that the dance predates the arrival of major religious and political systems in Java (Mauricio, 2002). In interviews with artists in Malang, Jaranan was linked to early communal hunting rituals in which communities imitated the movements of wild animals, such as boars, tigers, also horses prior to embarking on hunts. These mimetic performances were believed to invoke the spirits of animals, with trance states interpreted as manifestations of spiritual possession or ancestral power.

From a historical perspective, Mauricio argues that Jaranan evolved through successive cultural phases, adapting from the Hindu-Buddhist period to the Islamic era while retaining core performative elements. The trance component, in particular, is understood as a remnant of earlier animistic cosmologies that persisted through later religious transformations. In this view, the roots of Jaranan are considered older than the introduction of Hinduism to Java and may even be associated with early stages of horse domestication prior to the fifth century BCE. This layered historical understanding positions Jaranan as a deeply embedded cultural practice whose continuity reflects long-term processes of adaptation, syncretism, and symbolic resilience across shifting civilizational contexts.



Figure 1: Evolution of Jaranan Thik Ponoragan.

The journal article *Mapping Morphonosemantic Categories in Javanese Onomatopoeia* provides a linguistic explanation for the origin of the term *Jaranan Thik/Thek* through the framework of Javanese onomatopoeia (Fitriana & Suparno, 2025). The word “*thik*” is categorized as an onomatopoeic form that imitates a light striking or tapping sound. Phonologically, the high-front vowel /i/ systematically conveys meanings associated with smallness, lightness, and sharpness. Within morphonosemantic analysis, sounds such as *thik* are classified under low-scale augmentation, referring to sounds characterized by low intensity and minimal impact force. This categorization illustrates how phonological structure encodes perceptual qualities within Javanese sound symbolism.

In the context of Jaranan performance, the sound *thik* is commonly associated with the distinctive auditory effect produced by the collision of performance properties, particularly the striking or snapping sound generated by the mouth of the *barongan*. Over time, this recurring auditory cue became recognized by the community as a defining acoustic marker of the performance style. The naming of *Jaranan Thik* thus reflects a non-arbitrary linguistic process grounded in sound iconicity, whereby phonological form directly corresponds to sensory experience. As (Fitriana & Suparno, 2025) argue, such morphonosemantic patterns demonstrate that lexical formation in Javanese often emerges from perceptual associations between sound and embodied experience. In this sense, the term *Thik* not only denotes a performance variation but also encapsulates a culturally embedded auditory identity.

One of the oldest Jaranan groups identified during the interviews is Nogo Baru Klinthing, originating from Galak, Slahung, Ponorogo. The name “Baru Klinthing” is derived from a local myth associated with Telaga Ngebel, which tells the story of a child who transformed into a dragon-like serpent encircling Mount Wilis. According to

the legend, when the serpent extended its tongue in an attempt to reach its tail, the tongue was severed and subsequently transformed into a whip, an object symbolically associated with Jaranan performances. Historically, the group was established in the 1950s by Mbah Do and is currently led by Mbah Slamet as the cultural successor. The group experienced a period of inactivity during the political turmoil of 1965 and resumed its activities around 1972–1973. Its peak popularity occurred between the 1980s and the early 2000s, when performances attracted large audiences across the region in south Ponorogo.

In terms of stylistic lineage, Nogo Baru Klinthing originally adopted the Banyuwangi performance style known as Jaranan Buto, characterized by intense and sometimes aggressive trance expressions. Over time, however, the group underwent a significant transformation toward the Jaranan Senterewe style from Tulungagung or Kediri, which is considered more socially acceptable within Ponorogo society. This shift reflected a conscious adaptation strategy, reducing elements perceived as excessively brutal (frightening or disturbing) during trance sequences. The stylistic transition illustrates how traditional art communities negotiate between preserving inherited forms and adjusting performance practices to align with changing social expectations and cultural norms.

An intriguing aspect of the Nogo Baru Klinthing group is their use of the term “Reyog Pegon” to describe their performance tradition. The designation is significant because the term *Reyog* is culturally distinctive and strongly associated with Ponorogo’s regional identity. Within local discourse, “Reyog Pegon,” also referred to by some community members as Jaranan Pegon, is regarded as one of the earliest forms that later evolved into what is now recognized as Jaranan Thik in Ponorogo. This nomenclature reflects both historical continuity and symbolic affiliation with the broader Reyog cultural sphere.

Jaranan Pegon is characterized by a relatively simple performance structure and a strong adherence to traditional Javanese aesthetics, with minimal incorporation of contemporary innovations or creative modifications. The performance maintains classical patterns, including traditional gamelan accompaniment and standardized choreographic movements, emphasizing fidelity to established *pakem* (canonical conventions) rather than stylistic experimentation. Due to its simplicity and adherence to tradition, Jaranan Pegon is widely perceived as representing an early or foundational stage in the development of Jaranan in Ponorogo, prior to its subsequent transformations in response to changing social tastes and cultural dynamics. This continuity underscores the role of tradition not merely as preservation but as a reference point in the ongoing adaptation and negotiation of cultural identity.



Figure 2: The form of the jaranan pegon performance from Nogo Baru Klinthing in 2019 which is believed to be the beginning of the evolution of the jaranan thik creation in Ponorogo.

The term *Jaranan Thik* (or *Thek*) began to gain wider recognition around 1998, marking a significant phase in the development of Jaranan in Ponorogo. During this period, important innovations emerged through the initiative of Bapak Tarom, widely known as Mak Rom, and Bapak Sabar, known as Mak Bleng, two local artists who introduced a creative form of Jaranan in Mojomati Village, Sambit District, Ponorogo Regency. Through the

establishment of the Turonggo Wengker group, they not only introduced new performative elements but also initiated a new phase in the naming and identity formation of local Jaranan traditions.

The emergence of Turonggo Wengker signified a shift in which group names and performance styles functioned as recognizable cultural markers within the community. This development contributed to the broader circulation of the term *Jaranan Thik* as a locally grounded designation shaped by artistic creativity, contextual adaptation, and distinctive auditory and performative features. As a result, the naming of Jaranan in Ponorogo increasingly reflected the agency of artists in defining cultural identity, illustrating how traditional performing arts continue to evolve through innovation while remaining embedded within local social and cultural dynamics.



Figure 3: Today's Jaranan Thik performance form in Sawoo, Ponorogo.

The transformation from *Jaranan Pegon* to what is now widely recognized as *Jaranan Kreasi*, or more popularly known as Jaranan Thik, reflects a significant phase in the stylistic and structural evolution of Jaranan in Ponorogo. This transition marks a movement from a relatively classical and canon-oriented performance model toward a more innovative and artist-driven format that incorporates new choreographic patterns, musical arrangements, and performative expressions. While Jaranan Pegon emphasizes adherence to traditional *pakem*, Jaranan Thik represents a creative reinterpretation shaped by contemporary audience expectations and local artistic experimentation.

Today, several prominent groups exemplify this development. Among them are Nogo Pertolo from Sambit, Putro Purbo Legowo from Kemuning Village (Sambit District), Brandal Loka Jaya, the only Jaranan group based in the urban center of Ponorogo, and Prawiro Gati Taruno, recognized as the sole Jaranan group representing the western part of Ponorogo. The geographical distribution and stylistic diversity of these groups illustrate how Jaranan Thik has expanded beyond its earlier rural bases, adapting to different local contexts while maintaining a shared cultural identity. This evolution underscores the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation in the ongoing negotiation of Jaranan's place within Ponorogo's cultural landscape.

5.2. Adaptation and negotiation cultural identity in Jaranan Thek Performance

5.2.1. Symbolic Repositioning through the Term "Reyog Pegon"

One of the most significant findings concerns the use of the term "*Reyog Pegon*" by the Nogo Baru Klinthing group in Slahung, the oldest Jaranan group in Ponorogo since 1955 and still active for today. This designation represents a deliberate symbolic strategy aimed at aligning Jaranan with the dominant cultural identity of Ponorogo, which is institutionally and publicly anchored in Reyog. Rather than presenting themselves solely as a separate Jaranan tradition, the group adopts the culturally authoritative term *Reyog*, thereby situating their performance within the broader symbolic framework recognized as the region's official heritage. This naming

practice reflects a calculated repositioning within the local cultural hierarchy, where symbolic association functions as a pathway to legitimacy.

From the perspective of Cultural Identity Theory, this strategy can be interpreted as an effort to bridge the gap between *avowal* and *ascription*. Internally, Jaranan Thik communities avow their identity as a distinct performance tradition with its own historical roots and aesthetic structure. Externally, however, dominant cultural discourse tends to ascribe symbolic centrality to Reyog as the primary cultural representation of Ponorogo. By adopting the label *Reyog Pegon*, Nogo Baru Klinthing narrows the dissonance between self, definition and external categorization, recalibrating identity salience in ways that foreground shared symbolic ground while preserving internal distinctiveness.

Importantly, this symbolic assimilation does not imply the dissolution of Jaranan's identity. Instead, it demonstrates how marginalized cultural groups strategically manage identity presentation within hierarchical systems. The use of *Reyog Pegon* enables the group to claim cultural proximity without surrendering performative autonomy, illustrating how identity negotiation operates through selective alignment rather than complete absorption.

5.2.2. Reproduction of the Klanasewandono - Dewi Sanggalangit Myth as Shared Symbolic Repertoire

Another significant finding concerns the incorporation of the Klanasewandono–Dewi Sanggalangit narrative within certain Jaranan Thik performances. This myth, which forms the foundational storyline of Reyog Ponorogo, is reproduced in Jaranan contexts as a means of situating the performance within a culturally familiar narrative framework. In particular, the episode depicting the cavalry troops of Prabu Klanasewandono being ambushed in the forest by *Celeng Srenggi*, the wild boar manifestation associated with Prabu Singobarong, is frequently referenced. The attack occurs amid rivalry over Dewi Sanggalangit, reinforcing themes of competition, heroism, and supernatural confrontation. By drawing upon this shared mythological episode, Jaranan Thik establishes symbolic continuity with Reyog's narrative universe while embedding its own performative identity within that framework.

This narrative reproduction reflects a strategic recalibration of identity salience. Rather than emphasizing differentiation from Reyog, Jaranan Thik foregrounds common mythic ancestry, shifting identity perception from "distinct" to "culturally kin" (*serumpun*) within Ponorogo's broader cultural imagination. This sense of kinship is further reinforced by geographical and cultural proximity, as both traditions are rooted in communities located around the foothills of Mount Wilis and within the broader Mataraman cultural sphere. Such spatial and cultural continuity strengthens the perception that Jaranan and Reyog share a common cultural ecosystem. Through this alignment, the gap between avowed identity and dominant ascription is reduced, allowing Jaranan Thik to be interpreted not as an outsider tradition but as part of the same regional cultural lineage.

The incorporation of this myth does not dissolve Jaranan's unique stylistic and ritual elements. Instead, it repositions the tradition within a shared cultural genealogy, enabling Jaranan Thik to negotiate legitimacy through narrative affiliation rather than direct competition. This finding illustrates how mythological alignment operates as a communicative strategy for redefining identity boundaries within a hierarchical cultural landscape, transforming potential marginality into relational proximity.

5.2.3. Controlled Trance to Culturally Legitimate Performance

A central theme emerging from the findings concerns the reframing and moderation of trance practices within Jaranan Thik. Historically, certain forms of possession and particularly extreme acts such as consuming broken glass or raw meat, were perceived by segments of Ponorogo society as "*nggilani*" (disturbing or frightening). In response to such negative social ascriptions, several groups shifted their stylistic orientation from the more aggressive Jaranan Buto style toward the Senterewe style, which is considered more socially acceptable within the local cultural context. This transition reflects not the abandonment of trance, but its recalibration within evolving moral and aesthetic expectations.

Importantly, performers emphasize that trance (*kesurupan*) remains an integral and sacred component of the tradition. According to Mbah Tarom of Pustoko Pamedhar Jati, Ali of Nogo Pertolo, and Mbah Slamet of Nogo Baru Klinthing, trance is not merely theatrical fabrication but a phenomenon that can genuinely occur during performance. However, they assert that the manifestation of trance is controlled and regulated by the *bopo* (spiritual handler or leader) in each performance. This controlled structure ensures that trance does not escalate into uncontrolled extremity, thereby maintaining ritual authenticity while preventing social disruption. In this sense, trance becomes both sacred and staged ritually meaningful yet performatively managed.

From the perspective of Cultural Identity Theory, this moderation represents a negotiation between identity maintenance and relational orientation. Internally, trance is avowed as a core marker of Jaranan identity and spiritual legitimacy. Externally, dominant audiences may ascribe negative meanings to intense possession practices. By reframing trance as a culturally refined and controlled performance, Jaranan Thik shifts identity salience from being perceived as “wild” to being recognized as “berbudaya” (cultured) as a peak of each performance. This finding illustrates how Jaranan Thik strategically manages negative social ascriptions without relinquishing its ritual foundations, thereby transforming a potentially marginalizing element into a source of renewed cultural legitimacy.

5.2.4. Religious Symbolic Alignment through “Brandal Loka Jaya”

Another significant finding concerns the use of Islamic symbolic affiliation by the urban-based Jaranan Thik group, Brandal Loka Jaya, which is chaired by Nur Salam. The name *Brandal Loka Jaya* is locally associated with the early name of Sunan Kalijaga, one of the revered *Wali Songo* who played a central role in the Islamization of Java. By invoking a figure deeply embedded in Javanese-Islamic cultural memory, the group situates its artistic identity within a respected religious-historical lineage. This symbolic association is further reinforced by the group’s structural affiliation with the local branch (*Pimpinan Anak Cabang*) of Gerakan Pemuda Ansor (GP Ansor) in Ponorogo.

According to Muhibbudin, Chairman of GP Ansor Ponorogo, Brandal Loka Jaya is not merely a form of folk entertainment but serves as a strategic instrument of cultural da’wah, particularly in engaging youth and grassroots communities. He emphasized that Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has historically embraced culture as a medium of religious expression rather than opposing it. In his words, “*NU sejak awal berdiri tidak pernah memusuhi budaya. Justru budaya dirawat, diarahkan, dan diisi nilai. Brandal Loka Jaya adalah wajah dakwah Ansor yang ramah, membumi, dan tetap berakidah Aswaja.*” This statement underscores how the group is positioned not only as an artistic collective but also as a culturally grounded religious platform aligned with the Aswaja (Ahlussunnah wal Jama’ah) theological orientation.

While Jaranan Thik has historically been associated with trance and ritual elements that may be contested within certain Islamic discourses, Brandal Loka Jaya foregrounds Islamic symbolism and institutional affiliation to narrow the gap between avowed cultural identity and external religious ascription. This strategy illustrates how religious assimilation functions as a mechanism of moral and social legitimation, enabling Jaranan Thik to sustain cultural continuity while aligning itself with dominant religious values in the urban context of Ponorogo.

5.3. Aesthetic Integration and the Negotiation of Identity Salience

Another important finding concerns the aesthetic integration of Reyog and Jaranan within a single performance stage. This fusion does not merely represent artistic experimentation but reflects a strategic negotiation of identity salience within Ponorogo’s hierarchical cultural landscape. By presenting Reyog and Jaranan together, performers reconfigure the perception of difference, positioning Jaranan not as a peripheral or competing tradition but as an interconnected component of a shared cultural narrative.

This aesthetic negotiation is evident in the practices of groups such as Nogo Baru Klinthing and Putro Purbo Legowo, both of which utilize the *kendang Reyog* as the primary accompanying instrument in their performances.

The adoption of this instrument strongly associated with Reyog, creates auditory familiarity for audiences and symbolically situates Jaranan within the broader sonic framework of Ponorogo's dominant art form. A more explicit integration is found in the performance model of Prawiro Gati Taruno, whose leader, Imam, describes the staged combination of Reyog and Jaranan as a representation of the "true story" in which the cavalry troops of Klana Sewandono are intercepted by the forces of Prabu Singobarong, as narrated in the Bantarangin version of the Reyog legend. By dramatizing this encounter within a single performative space, the group collapses symbolic boundaries between the two traditions and repositions Jaranan as an organic extension of Reyog's mythic universe. This integrative staging demonstrates how identity negotiation operates through aesthetic convergence: rather than asserting separation, Jaranan Thik negotiates legitimacy by embedding itself within a shared mythological and performative continuum.



Figure 4: Adoption of the Reyog instrument in the Jaranan Thik performance in Ponorogo "Kendang" and dancer costumes performed by Nogo Baru Klinting in 2019.

5.3.1. Modern Stage Modification and Generational Repositioning

Another significant finding concerns the modernization of stage production in Jaranan Thik performances. Many groups now broadcast their performances through live streaming platforms such as YouTube, extending their reach beyond local audiences and repositioning Jaranan within digital cultural spaces. The use of digital sound systems has become central to this transformation, particularly in enhancing the clarity and resonance of *gending* (musical compositions), making them more aesthetically appealing to contemporary listeners. In addition, the incorporation of multicolored stage lighting and modern lighting effects has altered the visual atmosphere of performances, creating a more immersive and spectacle-oriented experience.

These performances increasingly adopt structured stage layouts with safety barriers and standardized stage equipment, reflecting alignment with contemporary event management norms. Night-time staging has become more prevalent, not only following local entertainment patterns but also maximizing the visual impact of lighting technology. Some groups have further experimented with integrating modern musical elements, including DJ-based arrangements, to attract broader and younger audiences. As a result, Jaranan Thik performances have become more appealing to youth demographics, who are accustomed to digitally mediated and visually dynamic entertainment formats.

This modifications reflect a strategic shift in identity salience toward modernity and adaptability. While the ritual and choreographic foundations remain intact, the aesthetic framing is recalibrated to resonate with contemporary cultural sensibilities. Rather than signaling a rupture with tradition, this modernization demonstrates how identity is co-constructed in response to generational expectations and media environments. Through technological integration and aesthetic innovation, Jaranan Thik negotiates its relevance in a changing cultural landscape while sustaining its core cultural identity.

5.3.2. Discursive, Institutional, and Governmental Recognition

A further major finding concerns the increasing institutionalization and governmental recognition of Jaranan Thik within Ponorogo's official cultural framework. In 2017, Jaranan Thik was featured as the opening performance of the 24th National Reyog Festival, an event traditionally centered on Reyog as the region's primary cultural icon. The initiative was spearheaded by Yuli Rohmawati of the Putro Purbo Legowo group. The performance, which lasted approximately eight minutes and featured seven *barongan*, was supported by funding from the Department of Tourism (approximately IDR 700,000). Although limited in duration and budget, this inclusion symbolically repositioned Jaranan Thik from a peripheral folk art into a formally acknowledged component of Ponorogo's cultural agenda.

Subsequently, Jaranan Thik expanded its visibility beyond regional events by participating in the International Mask Dance Festival in 2019. This participation marked an important step in repositioning the tradition within broader national and international performance circuits. In parallel with this growing recognition, the *Ikatan Seni Jaranan Thik Ponorogo* (ISJTP) was formally established in 2017 and, by around 2019, had consolidated approximately 75 member groups across Ponorogo Regency. The formation of ISJTP institutionalized Jaranan Thik as an organized cultural entity capable of collective representation, coordination, and negotiation within governmental and cultural policy structures.

Institutional legitimacy was further strengthened in 2020 when Lisdyarita was formally designated as the *biyung* (symbolic patron) of Jaranan Thik Ponorogo. By 2026, she assumed the role of acting Regent of Ponorogo, reinforcing the symbolic proximity between Jaranan Thik and regional political authority. From the perspective of Cultural Identity Theory, these developments illustrate a transformation in external ascription: Jaranan Thik is increasingly categorized not as a marginal or subordinate tradition but as part of the officially recognized cultural repertoire of Ponorogo. This discursive and institutional alignment demonstrates how identity negotiation extends beyond performance aesthetics into the realm of policy, governance, and symbolic power, enabling Jaranan Thik to secure structural legitimacy within a historically Reyog-centered cultural hierarchy.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Jaranan Thik negotiates its position within Ponorogo's Reyog-centered cultural hierarchy through a patterned combination of symbolic alignment, structural recalibration, and institutional engagement. Rather than confronting the symbolic dominance of Reyog directly, Jaranan Thik communities strategically reposition themselves within the same cultural universe. The adoption of terms such as "Reyog Pegon," the reproduction of shared mythological narratives, and the integration of Reyog musical elements illustrate how identity salience is recalibrated from differentiation toward relational proximity. From the perspective of Cultural Identity Theory, these practices narrow the gap between avowal and ascription, allowing Jaranan Thik to maintain internal coherence while adjusting to externally imposed cultural hierarchies. Identity, therefore, emerges not as a fixed cultural essence but as a communicatively managed construct shaped by context and power relations.

At the performative level, the moderation of trance practices and the transition from Jaranan Buto to the more socially accepted Senterewe style reveal a negotiated balance between identity maintenance and relational orientation. While trance remains a core ritual marker, its expression is reframed as controlled and culturally refined rather than excessive or "wild." This controlled reframing reflects what Co-Cultural Communication Theory describes as strategic adaptation within unequal systems, where marginalized groups selectively adjust communicative practices to reduce risk and enhance legitimacy. Importantly, such adjustments do not indicate cultural dilution but rather demonstrate hybrid identity formation where assimilation and preservation coexist. Jaranan Thik exemplifies how traditional communities may engage in adaptive recalibration without relinquishing symbolic authenticity.

Institutionally, the inclusion of Jaranan Thik in official festivals, the establishment of the *Ikatan Seni Jaranan Thik Ponorogo*, and affiliations with religious and governmental structures further transform its external ascription from

marginal folk practice to recognized cultural entity. These developments suggest that identity negotiation extends beyond aesthetic modification into structural and policy domains. The study thus contributes to expanding Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory into the domain of localized cultural hierarchies, showing that identity negotiation occurs not only in migratory or organizational settings but also within intra-cultural power structures. Jaranan Thik illustrates that cultural sustainability in plural societies depends on communicative agency, where adaptation, alignment, and affirmation function as interrelated strategies for securing cultural legitimacy.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Jaranan Thik does not survive within Ponorogo's Reyog-centered cultural hierarchy through passive endurance, but through strategic communicative negotiation. By integrating Co-Cultural Communication Theory and Cultural Identity Theory, the findings reveal that Jaranan Thik communities actively manage the tension between avowal and ascription through symbolic alignment, controlled ritual reframing, aesthetic integration, religious affiliation, and institutional engagement. Rather than positioning themselves in direct opposition to Reyog, Jaranan Thik groups selectively recalibrate identity salience, foregrounding shared myths, instruments, and narratives while preserving distinctive ritual and performative elements.

The moderation of trance practices, the adoption of the term "Reyog Pegon," the integration of Reyog musical instruments, the incorporation of Islamic symbolic affiliation, and the increasing participation in governmental cultural events collectively illustrate a patterned strategy of negotiated legitimacy. These practices do not signify cultural dilution; instead, they represent hybrid identity formation in which relational orientation and identity maintenance operate simultaneously. Jaranan Thik demonstrates that assimilation and accommodation can function as communicative resources for sustaining cultural continuity without dissolving symbolic distinctiveness.

Ultimately, this study underscores that cultural marginality within localized hierarchies is not a fixed condition but a dynamic position shaped through communicative action. The case of Jaranan Thik extends the application of Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory into the domain of traditional performing arts, showing that identity negotiation occurs not only in migratory or organizational contexts but also within intra-cultural power structures. By foregrounding communicative agency, this research highlights how traditional art communities can strategically navigate dominance, secure institutional recognition, and sustain cultural legitimacy in plural societies.

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Empirical Investigation into the Effect of Sustainability Reporting on Customer Value Creation in Nigerian Construction Firms

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of sustainability reporting on customer value creation in construction firms listed in Nigeria. The study employed an ex-post facto research design using secondary data obtained from annual reports and financial statements of seven construction firms listed on the Nigerian Exchange Group over a fourteen-year period (2010-2023). Sustainability reporting was operationalised through three dimensions: environmental sustainability reporting (ENVS), social sustainability reporting (SOCS), and governance sustainability reporting (GOVS). Customer value creation was measured using growth in revenue as a proxy. Panel data regression analysis with random effects estimation and robust standard errors was employed following appropriate diagnostic tests. The findings revealed that while individual sustainability dimensions did not exhibit statistically significant effects on customer value creation (ENVS: $\beta = 0.196$, $p = 0.669$; SOCS: $\beta = 0.071$, $p = 0.881$; GOVS: $\beta = -0.087$, $p = 0.829$), the joint effect of sustainability reporting on customer value creation was statistically significant (Wald $\chi^2 = 179.38$, $p < 0.05$; $R^2 = 0.1886$). The study concluded that sustainability reporting, when considered collectively through its environmental, social, and governance dimensions, significantly affects customer value creation in Nigerian construction firms. The study recommends that management adopt an integrated approach to sustainability reporting rather than pursuing isolated ESG initiatives, recognising that the collective signalling effect creates greater customer value than individual dimensions pursued independently.

Keywords: Sustainability Reporting, Customer Value Creation, Construction Industry, ESG Disclosure, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Customer value creation constitutes a fundamental objective of organisational strategy and operations. In contemporary business practice, firms strive to deliver products and services that meet or exceed customer expectations, thereby generating satisfaction, loyalty, and sustainable revenue streams. Porter (2023) established that companies create customer value either through cost leadership, offering products at lower prices, or through differentiation, creating unique offerings that customers perceive as worth premium payments. The construction industry, characterised by complex project delivery, substantial investment requirements, and long-term client relationships, presents a compelling context for examining how organisational practices influence customer value creation.

The Nigerian construction sector has experienced persistent challenges in delivering customer value. Industry reports indicate that over 60 per cent of construction projects experience significant delays beyond contracted timelines, while cost overruns averaging 20 to 30 per cent above initial estimates erode customer value and diminish trust in contractor capabilities (Ogunde et al., 2023). Quality defects in completed structures necessitate costly remediation works and expose customers to safety risks. Adegbite et al. (2022) documented widespread customer dissatisfaction with construction service delivery, attributing these outcomes to inadequate project management practices and weak accountability mechanisms. These patterns indicate fundamental deficiencies in the sector's capacity to create value for the customers it serves.

Sustainability reporting has emerged as a potentially influential mechanism for enhancing customer value creation. Sustainability reporting refers to the systematic disclosure of a firm's environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance through standardised frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards. The GRI Standards, adopted by over 14,000 organisations across more than 100 countries, provide a comprehensive framework for reporting on economic, environmental, and social dimensions of corporate activity (Global Reporting Initiative, 2023). From a theoretical perspective, sustainability reporting may enhance customer value creation through multiple mechanisms, including improved organisational processes, enhanced reputation, and strengthened stakeholder relationships.

Despite the theoretical promise of sustainability reporting, empirical evidence regarding its effect on customer value creation, particularly in developing economy contexts, remains limited. Wahyuningrum et al. (2022) conducted a systematic literature review of sustainability reporting determinants in developing countries, identifying significant research gaps regarding the consequences of such reporting for stakeholder outcomes. Furthermore, research specifically addressing the Nigerian construction sector is scarce, notwithstanding the sector's economic significance and its pronounced customer value creation challenges.

This study, therefore, examined the effect of sustainability reporting on customer value creation in construction firms listed in Nigeria. The specific objective was to determine whether environmental, social, and governance sustainability reporting dimensions individually and collectively influence customer value creation. The study tested the null hypothesis that sustainability reporting has no significant effect on customer value creation of construction firms listed in Nigeria.

1.1. Objective of the Study

- i. examine the effect of sustainability reporting on customer value creation in construction firms listed in Nigeria.

1.2. Research Questions

- i. Does sustainability reporting have an effect on customer value creation in construction firms listed in Nigeria?

1.3. Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: Sustainability reporting has no significant effect on the customer value creation of construction firms listed in Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Customer value creation refers to the process through which businesses offer products or services that customers perceive as valuable, satisfying their needs or desires while providing them with a sense of benefit in exchange for the price they pay. Johnson et al. (2022) defined customer value creation as the ability of companies to provide

superior product quality, competitive pricing, and personalised service to enhance customer experience. Kim and Park (2021) extended this definition to encompass innovation, customer engagement, and service excellence as drivers of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In the construction context, customer value creation manifests through timely project delivery, quality workmanship, cost management, and responsive client service. Lee et al. (2023) argued that customer value arises when businesses exceed customer expectations through tailored solutions, convenience, and trust. The construction sector's project-based nature means that customer value creation has both transactional dimensions (individual project outcomes) and relational dimensions (long-term client partnerships and repeat business).

Sustainability reporting, as defined by the Global Reporting Initiative (2019), encompasses the practice of measuring, disclosing, and being accountable for organisational performance toward sustainable development goals. This includes environmental sustainability reporting (documenting environmental impact, energy usage, and emissions), social sustainability reporting (addressing labour practices, community engagement, and human rights), and governance sustainability reporting (covering board composition, executive compensation, and ethical conduct).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on stakeholder theory and signalling theory. Stakeholder theory, articulated by Freeman (1984) and subsequently developed by Freeman et al. (2010), posits that firms must create value for all stakeholders, not merely shareholders, to achieve sustainable success. From this perspective, customers represent a primary stakeholder group whose interests must be addressed through product quality, service excellence, and ethical business conduct. Sustainability reporting demonstrates organisational commitment to broader stakeholder welfare, which customers increasingly value in their purchasing and partnership decisions.

Signalling theory, proposed by Spence (1973), provides a complementary framework for understanding how sustainability reporting influences customer value creation. In conditions of information asymmetry, where customers cannot directly observe firm quality, sustainability disclosures serve as credible signals of organisational capabilities and values. Hummel and Schlick (2016) argued that high-quality sustainability reporting allows superior performers to differentiate themselves from competitors, attracting customers who value responsible business conduct. The construction industry, characterised by significant information asymmetry regarding contractor capabilities, presents an ideal context for examining signalling effects.

2.3 Empirical Review

Prior empirical studies provide mixed evidence regarding the relationship between sustainability reporting and customer value creation. Adeniyi and Fadipe (2018) presented empirical evidence showing that robust corporate social responsibility disclosures are linked with enhanced customer value creation in Nigerian listed companies. Their analysis revealed that firms which transparently report on their CSR initiatives tend to enjoy higher customer satisfaction and loyalty, as detailed sustainability disclosures help build a positive brand image.

Ahmed et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis that underscored the importance of comprehensive sustainability reporting in reducing information asymmetry between firms and their customers. Their findings indicate that when companies disclose detailed information regarding their ESG performance, customers are better informed about the firm's long-term commitments, enhancing customer trust and loyalty.

Akinola and Iredele (2014) provided empirical support for the notion that environmental disclosure directly contributes to customer value creation in Nigerian listed companies. Their study found that detailed reporting on environmental performance was associated with higher levels of customer loyalty, as customers perceive environmentally responsible firms as trustworthy and forward-thinking.

Jones et al. (2023) adopted a stakeholder-based perspective to demonstrate that proactive sustainability reporting is instrumental in enhancing customer value creation. Their research emphasises that firms which actively communicate their ESG initiatives tend to secure improved customer loyalty through enhanced stakeholder engagement and reduced uncertainty.

However, some studies present contradictory findings. Emeka-Nwokeji and Osisioma (2019) found that while environmental and governance disclosures had positive effects on market value, social sustainability disclosures had a negative and insignificant effect in Nigeria. Nnamani et al. (2017) reported a negative and insignificant impact of sustainability reporting on financial performance of Nigerian manufacturing firms. These inconsistencies justify the need for context-specific investigation in the Nigerian construction sector.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Data

This study adopted an ex-post facto research design, examining cause-and-effect relationships between sustainability reporting and customer value creation using existing data not subject to manipulation. The population comprised eight construction firms listed on the Nigerian Exchange Group. The sample consisted of seven firms that had complete financial records for the study period, excluding Ronchess Global Resources Plc which was listed in 2021. Data were obtained from audited annual reports and financial statements for the fourteen-year period spanning 2010 to 2023.

3.2 Variable Measurement

The dependent variable, customer value creation (CVC), was measured using growth in revenue as a proxy. Revenue growth reflects customers' continued patronage and willingness to engage with the firm, serving as an objective indicator of customer value perception. The independent variables comprised three sustainability reporting dimensions: Environmental Sustainability Reporting (ENVS), Social Sustainability Reporting (SOCS), and Governance Sustainability Reporting (GOVS). These were measured using content analysis based on the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) checklist, with disclosure scores calculated as the ratio of items disclosed to total applicable items.

3.3 Model Specification

The econometric model was specified as follows:

$$CVC_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ENVS_{it} + \beta_2 SOCS_{it} + \beta_3 GOVS_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

Where: CVC = Customer Value Creation; ENVS = Environmental Sustainability Reporting; SOCS = Social Sustainability Reporting; GOVS = Governance Sustainability Reporting; β_0 = Constant; β_1 - β_3 = Regression coefficients; ε = Error term; i = Firm; t = Time period.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded through three stages: pre-estimation (descriptive statistics, correlation analysis), estimation (panel data regression), and diagnostic testing. The Hausman test determined the appropriate estimator between fixed and random effects. The Breusch-Pagan Lagrangian Multiplier test assessed the appropriateness of random effects versus pooled OLS. Post-estimation tests included heteroskedasticity (Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg) and autocorrelation (Wooldridge) tests. Where violations were detected, Panel Corrected Standard Errors (PCSE) or Driscoll-Kraay standard errors were applied.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
cvc	98	11.635	67.611	-59.630	614.430
envs	98	29.082	32.929	0.000	100.000
socs	98	47.704	34.593	0.000	100.000
Govs	98	79.422	29.776	0.000	100.000

Source: Researcher's Computation (2025)

The descriptive analysis revealed that customer value creation (CVC) had a mean of 11.635 with a standard deviation of 67.611. The extremely high standard deviation relative to the mean indicates substantial disparity in CVC across firms and time periods. The minimum value of -59.630 is critical, suggesting that some firms in certain years experienced value destruction, possibly due to declining customer patronage, poor service delivery, or pricing challenges. The maximum value of 614.430 indicates that some firms excelled significantly in generating customer value.

Among the sustainability dimensions, governance sustainability reporting exhibited the highest mean score (79.422), followed by social sustainability (47.794) and environmental sustainability (29.082). This hierarchy indicates that listed construction firms prioritise governance disclosure, likely due to regulatory requirements, while environmental reporting remains the least developed dimension, presenting a major area for potential improvement.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

Variable	CVC	ENVS	SOCS	GOVS		
CVC	1.000					
ENVS	0.179	1.000			4.040	0.247
SOCS	0.134	0.864	1.000		5.890	0.170
GOVS	0.077	0.594	0.745	1.000	2.300	0.435
					4.080	

Source: Researcher's Computation (2025)

The correlation analysis revealed strong inter-relationships among the sustainability dimensions. Environmental and social sustainability showed strong positive correlation (0.864), while social and governance sustainability demonstrated moderate positive correlation (0.745). Environmental and governance sustainability exhibited moderate positive correlation (0.594). These patterns suggest that sustainability is typically pursued as an integrated corporate strategy rather than a set of isolated initiatives.

Regarding relationships with the dependent variable, CVC showed weak positive correlations with all three sustainability dimensions: ENVS (0.179), SOCS (0.134), and GOVS (0.077). These weak bivariate correlations suggest that, individually, none of the ESG dimensions has a strong linear relationship with customer value creation. However, bivariate correlations do not account for the combined effects of multiple predictors, justifying the need for multivariate analysis.

4.3 Diagnostic Tests and Model Selection

The Hausman test produced a Chi-square value of 4.99 with a probability value of 0.1725, exceeding the 5% significance level. This result indicated that the null hypothesis of no systematic difference between fixed and random effects estimators could not be rejected, suggesting that random effects estimation was more efficient for this model.

The Breusch-Pagan Lagrangian Multiplier test yielded a Chi-square statistic of 0.00 with a probability value of 1.0000, indicating that the panel-level variance component was not significant. This result suggested that pooled OLS estimation was preferred over random effects. However, further diagnostic testing revealed the presence of heteroskedasticity (Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg $\chi^2 = 139.48$, $p = 0.0000$) and autocorrelation (Wooldridge $F = 13.635$, $p = 0.0102$). Consequently, robust standard errors were applied to ensure valid inferences.

4.4 Regression Results

Table 3: Regression and Diagnostic Tests' Results for Hypothesis One

Variables	Coefficient	Std. Err.	Z	P>z
Envs	0.196	0.458	0.430	0.669
Socs	0.071	0.473	0.150	0.881
Govs	-0.087	0.401	-0.220	0.829
_cons	4.465	16.183	0.280	0.783
Model Statistics:				
R² = 0.1886				
Wald $\chi^2(3) = 179.38$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.0000$				
Diagnostic Tests:				
Hausman Test: $\chi^2(3) = 4.99$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.1725$				
LM Test: $\text{chibar}^2(01) = 0.00$, Prob > $\text{chibar}^2 = 1.0000$.				
Heteroskedasticity Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg Test $\chi^2(1) = 139.48$ Prob = 0.0000				
Wooldridge Test (Autocorrelation): $F(1,6) = 13.635$ Prob = 0.0102				

Dependent Variable: CVC

@5% significance level

Source: Researcher's Computation (2025)

The regression results presented in Table 1 reveal that the model explains approximately 18.9% of the variation in customer value creation ($R^2 = 0.1886$). While this explanatory power is moderate, it indicates that sustainability reporting dimensions collectively account for a meaningful portion of the variation in customer value outcomes. The individual coefficients for the three sustainability dimensions were all statistically insignificant at the 5% level. Environmental sustainability showed a positive but insignificant coefficient ($\beta = 0.196$, $p = 0.669$), suggesting a weak positive association that does not reach statistical significance. Social sustainability exhibited a positive but insignificant effect ($\beta = 0.071$, $p = 0.881$), while governance sustainability showed a negative but insignificant coefficient ($\beta = -0.087$, $p = 0.829$).

Despite the insignificance of individual coefficients, the Wald Chi-square statistic of 179.38 with a probability value of 0.000 strongly rejects the null hypothesis that the three coefficients are simultaneously equal to zero. This indicates that the sustainability dimensions, when considered jointly, have a statistically significant effect on customer value creation.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The finding that sustainability reporting has a significant collective effect on customer value creation, despite individually insignificant components, presents an important insight for both theory and practice. This pattern suggests that the value-creating effect of sustainability reporting operates through the integrated signalling of organisational commitment to ESG principles rather than through any single dimension in isolation.

The finding aligns with stakeholder theory's proposition that firms create sustainable value through comprehensive attention to multiple stakeholder interests. Customers may perceive firms with integrated sustainability practices as more trustworthy, forward-thinking, and reliable partners. In the construction industry, where project success depends on sustained client relationships and trust, this comprehensive signalling effect may be particularly important.

This result is consistent with prior studies that found significant collective effects of sustainability on firm outcomes. Emeka-Nwokeji and Osisioma (2019) found that overall sustainability disclosures had a significant positive effect on the market value of Nigerian non-financial firms. Aksan and Gantayowati (2020) demonstrated that sustainability disclosure positively influences firm value in Indonesia, while Al-Hawaj and Buallay (2022) highlighted in their global sectoral analysis that sustainability reporting significantly affects market performance, particularly in sectors with high environmental impact, such as construction.

The individually insignificant effects of the sustainability dimensions may reflect several factors specific to the Nigerian construction context. First, customer decisions in construction may be driven primarily by price, technical capability, and track record rather than explicit ESG performance. Second, the quality and depth of sustainability reporting in Nigerian construction firms may not yet have reached levels that meaningfully influence customer perceptions. Third, the relatively weak environmental reporting (mean = 29.082) may limit the ability to detect environmental effects, while the high correlation among ESG dimensions may create multicollinearity that obscures individual contributions.

The divergence from some prior studies that found significant individual effects (such as Akinola & Iredele, 2014, who found environmental disclosure associated with customer loyalty) may be attributed to sectoral differences. Construction customers may place different weights on ESG factors compared to customers in other industries. Additionally, the use of revenue growth as a proxy for customer value creation may not capture all dimensions of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the effect of sustainability reporting on customer value creation in construction firms listed in Nigeria. Based on the empirical findings, the study concludes that sustainability reporting, when considered collectively through its environmental, social, and governance dimensions, has a significant effect on customer value creation. However, individual sustainability dimensions do not independently exhibit statistically significant effects, suggesting that the value-creating mechanism operates through integrated signalling rather than through isolated ESG initiatives.

These findings provide several theoretical and practical insights. First, the study extends signalling theory to demonstrate that in the construction sector, the collective signal of comprehensive sustainability commitment may be more meaningful to customers than individual ESG metrics. Second, the findings highlight the importance of integrated sustainability strategies rather than piecemeal approaches to ESG disclosure. Third, the study contributes empirical evidence from an under-researched sector and geographic context, adding to the growing literature on sustainability-value relationships in emerging markets.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are offered:

For Management: Construction firm management should adopt an integrated approach to sustainability reporting, recognising that the collective effect of environmental, social, and governance disclosures creates greater customer value than individual sustainability initiatives pursued in isolation. This requires developing a coherent sustainability strategy that embeds ESG principles into the core business model. Management should also enhance the quality and depth of environmental sustainability disclosures, which currently lag behind governance and social dimensions.

For Regulators: Regulatory agencies should encourage integrated sustainability reporting frameworks that emphasise the interconnected nature of ESG dimensions rather than treating them as separate compliance requirements. The development of sector-specific guidelines for construction industry sustainability reporting could enhance the relevance and comparability of disclosures.

For Industry Bodies: Construction industry associations should develop capacity-building programmes to help member firms improve sustainability reporting practices, particularly in the environmental dimension, where

performance lags. Industry benchmarking initiatives could help establish best practices and raise overall reporting quality.

This study contributes to knowledge by providing original empirical evidence on the sustainability-customer value nexus in the Nigerian construction sector. The finding that collective rather than individual ESG effects drive customer value creation represents a nuanced contribution to the sustainability reporting literature. Future research could examine the moderating role of firm size, project type, and client characteristics on the sustainability-customer value relationship. Longitudinal studies examining how the relationship evolves as sustainability reporting matures in the Nigerian construction sector would also be valuable.

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Urbanisation and Landslide: A Sociological Overview of Anthropogenic Impact in Sechü-Zubza, Nagaland

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Abstract

The people of Nagaland living in the hilly terrain have been facing Landslides every monsoon with incessant rainfall. A prominent disaster affecting Sechü-Zubza, a mountainous area with active developmental activities on National Highway 29 under the central scheme. The road extension projects have been frequently hampered due to mud sinking, a widespread disaster threatening the commuters and the inhabitants. However, the calamity can be associated with anthropogenic activity due to broader developmental aims in the study area. The central theme of the study is the adverse effects of landslides triggered by anthropogenic activities, evident from the losses incurred by the affected victims in terms of their physical, social, and economic aspects. The paper seeks to give a paradigm shift in understanding natural calamities like landslides as not solely the result of natural disasters but also ill-managed and ill-planned human activities. Data were collected through primary and secondary sources, and personal interviews were conducted directly with the affected victims. The study will enable an understanding of human nature's destructive capabilities and actions.

Keywords: Landslide, Anthropogenic Activities, Development, Social Impact, Displacement

1. Introduction

The draft report by the scientists of ISRO states that Nagaland is in the third position with 47% of the land at risk of degradation, after Uttar Pradesh with 53% and Rajasthan with 52%. Kohima and Wokha districts are two vulnerable, with 62.42% and 36.59% of their land getting degraded (M, A.M., et al., 2022). Socio-economic losses due to slope failures are great and are growing as the built environment expands into unstable hillside areas under the pressure of expanding populations. Human activities disturb large volumes of earth materials in the construction of buildings, transportation routes, dams and reservoirs, canals, and communication systems and thus have been a major factor in increasing damages due to slope failures (Schuster & Highland, 2001).

Landslides continue to be one of the major geo-hazards, with 9% of global natural disasters. These events continue to persist worldwide despite the advancement in science and technology, leading to losses in the economy, humans and environment (Chalkias, 2014).

Disasters do not occur solely from a natural hazard; instead, they arise from a combination of a natural hazard event and exposure to highly vulnerable assets to that hazard. Disasters should be viewed as reflections of underlying development issues rather than as external, unforeseen events impacting a society (UNDRR, 2013). Over time, Nagaland has experienced swift urban growth and expanded land utilisation. Urbanisation, an intrinsic element of human progress, significantly impacts human societies and the natural surroundings. This ongoing advancement, shaped by various factors, underscores the pivotal importance of road connectivity. Improved connectivity leads to enhanced amenities and initiates the creation of new urban centers and the expansion of existing ones (Saikia & Kar, 2023). Rapid urbanisation and population density growth in cities can pose risks, especially when inadequate planning and poverty are widespread. The road system serves as the cornerstone for the economic advancement of a region, holding profound importance for both social and economic progress (Ye, 2019). High concentrations of people and economic activities often coincide with areas prone to high-risk exposures (UNDRR, 2013). Risks are the probability of physical harm due to technological or other processes (Beck, 1992).

As the population grows, land scarcity rises, leading to settlements in hazardous zones. Poorly regulated construction in landslide-prone areas, particularly seismic regions, poses a significant threat to human lives (Yadav et al., 2023). According to the IndiaSpend report, the leading factor behind landslides in the country is human intervention, revealing that India accounts for 18% of global casualties resulting from human-induced landslides (Murti, 2020). Landslides jeopardise lives and infrastructure, influenced by human-induced changes in land development (Rohan et al., 2023). Over time, significant infrastructure growth has occurred in the pursuit of urban amenities, with particular emphasis on constructing four-lane roads in the elevated areas of Nagaland. The primary aim is to enhance the linkage between the capital city and vital commercial hubs within the state and expedite the transportation of people and goods, fostering growth and prosperity (CW Team, 2023).

Following the establishment of the four-lane road, landslide incidents in the state have notably increased. Similarly, the examination utilising interview data obtained from impacted families indicates that the land's stability has been compromised after the implementation of the four-lane construction. This destabilization has initiated landslides, which directly or indirectly affecting numerous households. It continues to imperil many residences, with the potential for further landslide occurrences. This research attempts to understand how anthropogenic developmental activities, such as the four-lane construction, have caused landslides and evicted force-displacement, short-term unemployment, abandonment of land and properties, destroyed properties, and have taken a toll on the mental health of the affected families and their daily day-to-day activities. The landowners are being compensated for their land and properties, but some families expressed dissatisfaction with the amount. The land, which is not part of the compensation, is also impacted by the developmental work, with cracks and debris flow visible.

This paper addresses how anthropogenic activities have contributed to landslide occurrences through the narratives of the lived experiences of the landslide-affected victims in a sociological approach.

2. Theoretical Framework

Ulrich Beck (1992) has extensively contributed towards a sociological understanding of risk. Ulrich Beck's work has been foremost among the studies on risk. In his book, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1992), he opines that modern society has become a wealth and risk production society. He argues that modernization claims to pave the way for hidden sources of social wealth with the keys of techno-scientific development. However, modernisation is becoming reflexive with the potential risk of advanced technologies bringing forth a potentially irreversible threat to the lives of plants, animals, and humans. The growth of risks is unequally distributed, and some people are affected by the consequences of modernised development compared to other strata of society. The history of risk distribution shows that poverty attracts an unfortunate abundance of risks. Unlike economically disadvantaged individuals, wealthy individuals can purchase safety and freedom from risk.

Risk does not differentiate between the rich and the poor. The ones producing or gaining the profits are not safe from the risk either; sooner or later, the boomerang effect of risk impacts them. The risks and consequences

of modernisation are irreversible; it threatens the lives of plants, animals, and humans. It is not just the health problems for nature and humanity, but the significant impact on social, economic, and political consequences.

Beck further delves deeper into how risks are unequally distributed in society. Some people are more affected than others by the distribution and growth of risks. The risk of modernisation sooner or later also strikes those who produce or profit from them; risk does not discriminate. It contains a boomerang effect where the rich and powerful are neither safe from them.

Landslides are caused partially by ill planning, changing developmental activities, and the actions and results of modernised activities. The latent risk, once invisible, is active in modern society, affecting all sections of society irrespective of wealth and power.

3. Method

The study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews and direct observation to gather data from the affected victims of Sechü-Zubza, under the Kohima district of Nagaland. Using snowball sampling, landslide-affected victims were identified, and face-to-face interviews were executed to capture personal narratives of displacement, property loss, and the social dynamics of living in disaster-prone areas. Field notes were also taken to record the environmental changes triggered by landslides and road construction. Furthermore, governmental records, official documents, books, articles, and other relevant materials were referred to for secondary data. Before each interview, the respondents were made aware of the objectives of the interview, and consent was obtained for conducting the interview. The interviews were carried out in *Tenyidie*, the local language of the study area, and later translated into English. The protection and anonymity of all sources were given utmost priority.

4. Results and Discussion

The study's findings are presented under various subheadings below for a more systematic presentation and analysis.

4.1 Anthropogenic factor: The widespread expansion of roads in the hilly region is causing slope instability, irreversible harm to the ecosystem, and an elevated risk of landslides (Sangeeta & Singh, 2023). A similar situation is evident in the current study area, where anthropogenic activity such as the four-lane construction has triggered disasters like landslides. An affected male respondent emphasized:

Despite willingly surrendering part of my land for future development, the company failed to construct the retaining walls securely, regardless of our requests. I have been given only a pitiful two lakhs, which is not even close to the value of my land. The project is part of our shared future and not merely to fulfil their benefits alone.

It is evident that surrendering his land was not an issue for him, regardless of not receiving adequate compensation for his expectations, but the contestation arose when the construction company failed to comply with proper safety measures, although numerous complaints were made to make up for their irresponsible acts.

Another female eluded by highlighting the environmental impact of development:

I have lived in Sechü-Zubza for over 20 years; our area was not prone to landslides until the four-lane construction project. The extensive slope cutting and the lack of appropriate measures have resulted in an anthropogenically induced landslide.

Here she underlines the absence of landslides around her residence, having lived for 20 years in the neighborhood, and blames the road construction and cutting of the sloping mountains as the main cause that triggered the landslide.

4.2 Displacement: Sociologists and anthropologists have done extensive research on forced displacement. The disasters intensified by climate change are increasing with unsustainable and irresponsible development practices,

leading to the initiation of displacement (Mosneaga, 2022). Globally, the outcome of displacement is acutely felt among economically and socially vulnerable groups and politically marginalised and indigenous communities (Kaushal, n.d.). The displacement observed in the current study can be classified into two categories: a) *Displacement induced by development activities* and b) *Displacement triggered by a landslide resulting from developmental endeavours*. The former is evident in instances such as the acquisition and clearance of land for expanding four-lane roads, resulting in the forced displacement of families residing adjacent to the road.

One female respondent expressed:

Our Thevo ki (Pigsty) was damaged first, and we had to relocate our domesticated pigs. Later, we felt the need to shift our properties to a safer location. The days passed by, and soon, with the incessant rainfall, part of our land sank and collapsed.

The narrator highlights the significance of early hazard identification and proactively prioritizing the well-being of both humans and animals. The eviction of the domesticated pigs symbolizes the disruption of livelihood and traditional practices, which are deeply intertwined with the land.

4.3 Physical impact: Landslides have a devastating impact on the infrastructure by destroying buildings and arable land, changing the land pattern (Skrzypczak et al., 2017). Landslides shape and reshape the topography of the land. The high rainfall events transport the soil down-slope through landslides (Walker et al., 2013). Though the record of lives lost is rare, the damage is done heavily to settlements, infrastructure, and road development activities (Belho et al., 2023). According to a newspaper statement, the National Highway 29 road was covered with mud and debris, and a truck was partially buried while crossing the road (Eastern Mirror, 2019). None of the respondents narrated any human casualties or injuries caused by landslides. However, the study reveals a substantial effect on the infrastructural properties of individuals and public properties such as Highway 29. In most instances, landslide signs and symptoms were indicated, enabling the victims to move the movable properties to safer locations before the condition deteriorated.

River bed dynamics and morphological alterations due to a landslide were observed during the field study. One of the mid-aged males emphasized:

This area was a footpath, but after the landslide, it has turned into a small river bed/drainage. The breath of the affected area has been increasing with every incessant rainfall. Another landslide is expected since the road construction is ongoing and if the retaining walls below are not constructed well.

His response emphasizes how the footpath of his colony has turned into a river/drainage and with the incessant rainfall, there is persistent instilled fear of recurrent landslides with the ongoing developmental activities and is expected for more changes in the topography of the already affected area, if measures are not taken up. The narration further delivers insights into the complex interplay between the environment and human activities. It projects how human interventions of altering the natural environment impact the courses and dynamics, placing both the residents and the environment at risk of hazard.

An old aged male expressed:

All the savings that I invested in my house went in vain. It was not long after the construction that the landslide occurred and destroyed our building, and as I was retired, I had to rely on my Children to construct the present house.

This narrative propounds the environmental risk, of disrupting the stability and security of an individual. It also highlights the intergenerational exchange of support between the ageing parents and the children, displaying poignant family bonds and solidarity among the generations.

4.4 Economic impact: Landslides impact everyone, regardless of an individual's wealth; all are subject to financial losses. According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR): "*Direct losses refer to human lives, buildings, infrastructure and natural resources. Indirect disaster losses are declines in output or revenue, as a consequence of direct losses or owing to impacts on a supply chain.*" (GAR, 2015). In the study area, both direct and indirect economic losses could be observed. The study unveils that the economically weaker section

with fewer assets was significantly impacted post-landslide. It also reveals that property values decreased abruptly after the landslide as the aesthetic value of the environment and the land was damaged, making it a challenge to find prospective buyers for resale. The past researchers show how a vacant property has a great deal by citing an example of a house where the next door is an abandoned house, which consequently has an impact on the entire property value of the neighbourhood (Klein, 2017).

The economically weaker sections were more vulnerable since their savings were exhausted while recovering and shifting to a safer location. Production loss for the farmers was seen since the agricultural fields were damaged. The direct economic loss was observed in the damage to fields, land, and houses. The indirect impacts are the disruption of economic and social activities. The respondents comprised government employees, entrepreneurs, farmers, and daily wagers. Amid renovation and resettlement, the affected victims could not attain their work, especially daily wage earners and entrepreneurs; there was a reduction in economic production after the landslide. In the case of some families, there was a permanent extinction of activities such as agriculture, farming, and gardening since the land could not be recovered. The local news reports stated the damages to farmhouses and nurseries (The Morung Express, 2019), which serve as a source of income for the owners, and the damages greatly impact the revenue generation of the affected victims.

4.5 Environmental risks: One common denominator of triggering landslides is removing vegetation by cutting large forest areas without planning (Nikolic, 2015). As mentioned earlier, the study area has been undergoing the extension of road construction, for which a vast majority of land and trees have been cut down, which impacts the environment. A study carried out in Coimbatore on the destruction of trees on highway roads and its impact on the environment displays the air temperature being significantly increased and the rainfall being decreased due to the cutting of trees in the pursuit of building roads and flyovers. During the field observation, the destruction of aesthetic values by altering the natural landscape was prominently observed. Past studies have shown several instances of soil erosion due to heavy rainfall in Sechu-Zubza (Pideno et al., 2023). The victims affected by the landslide and the Project Affected People (PAP) were seen moving to the isolated area, which further puts pressure on the local ecosystems as the land is being cleared for shelter, agriculture, or other needs, leading to deforestation in the area. The study unveils that properties away from the road construction area are gradually becoming more susceptible to landslides. Constructing roads is a construction risk. The interviewees mentioned several self-detected warning signs which immediately precede landslide events, such as the formation of cracks, difficulty in opening the windows or doors, and debris fall. All these signs promptly enabled the affected residents to move out early to safer locations. and reduced the possibility of injury, death, damage, and property loss of moveable items. The construction process has various uncertainties and potential dangers, which further escalate with the magnitude of the projects (Singh & Chugh, 2016). One of the physical risks triggered by road construction has been stated by one of the male residents, who conveyed:

The road construction beneath our building has placed our house in a precarious situation due to land excavation and landfills.

The narration highlights the environmental degradation and the unintended consequences of developmental activities in the area. While conducting field observations, visible cracks and signs of vulnerability were apparent, causing alarming tension among the residents and erupting contestations among the residents, the road construction company, and the government.

4.6 Unemployment: Past studies show empirical evidence about the increase in unemployment post-disasters. A study on the impact of hurricanes in the Caribbean indicates a significant increase in the number of unemployment (Barattieri et.al., 2023). Another study on the impact of the East Japan Earthquake on employment status indicates that 19.1% of the community became unemployed post-earthquake (Katayanagi et.al., 2020). Likewise, the narrations of the victims point out evident unemployment faced by the landslide-affected victims. Unemployed victims comprised daily wage earners and farmers. Both short-term and long-term unemployment were seen among the affected victims. The victims of daily wage earners experienced a temporary cessation of employment in the aftermath of the landslide as they were preoccupied with shifting their movable properties to secured locations and rebuilding their homes. Consequently, unable to attain any work and lacked any means of income. Farmers are dependent on natural resources and the ones who are solely dependent on agriculture become more

vulnerable to disasters (Chapagain & Raizada, 2017). Agriculture is crucial for ensuring a nourishing food supply and is one of the primary determinants of creating employment and the direct impact of disasters affects livelihoods. Thus, leading to unemployment for the farmers and a decline in income (FAO, 2023). Congruently, the present research disseminates landslides taking a toll on the farmers, creating unemployment as the agricultural fields are destroyed by the landslide. The news reports highlighted that a Village named Nerhema, under Kohima District faced multiple landslides, affecting the road, the houses, businesses, fields and disrupting the livelihood for the families, notably the ones dependent on terrace cultivation (The Morung Express, 2018).

One female participant recounted:

Neither we could go to the field nor we could go for earning our daily wage for some period as our foremost priority was to relocate and rebuild.

The above statement eludes the juxtaposition of two realities, on one hand, the victims attaining the urgency of rebuilding the wrecked damages and on the other, grappling to obtain work, facing the harsh reality of stagnating means of income. Some interviewees assert idleness as the fields were destroyed and no agricultural activities could be performed. It is significant to point that few farmers faced permanent cessation as farmlands were destroyed. Consequently, this indicates the long-term effect of landslides on the victims.

4.7 Abandonment of land and buildings: The UNEP 1992 Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED0 in Rio de Janeiro defined desertification as the “Land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities” (Shroder & Sivanpillai, 2016). The studies show that the development activities and landslides have resulted in land degradation and have made certain areas deserted, leading to the abandonment of properties and land. A female respondent articulated:

We have temporarily abandoned our land after dismantling the house since the land became vulnerable and uninhabitable for now but we hope to make use of it when the land becomes firmer for utilization.

Here the interviewee elucidated the reason for abandoning the land as a precautionary measure as the condition of the land becoming inhabitant, leading to the abandonment of their properties. Few respondents have shed light on how the self-detection of early evacuation has helped the respondents from facing deteriorating hazards and risking their lives. Although some properties are presently deemed unsuitable for use which were once dedicated to agriculture, farming, and gardening, the interview with the affected people revealed that they are hopeful for the land to stabilize, permitting eventual reuse in the future. During the site assessment, it was noted that certain colonies were deserted due to developmental projects and landslides triggered by anthropogenic activities. The natural vegetations are disturbed due to the presence of buildings, roads, human endeavours and so on. Simultaneously, once the abandoned land is left untouched the natural vegetation recovers (Gizzi, et al., 2019). The on-site observations display a similar scenario where the abandoned land and properties had more coverage of natural vegetation as the area was deserted after the landslide.

4.8 Relocation and adaptation: Studies show issues about resettling and adapting to a new environment, living in tents provided by various aid organizations and the government. Resettlement sites were described as bush and lacking proper basic amenities or opportunities for livelihood, away from the city (Jacobs & Almeida, 2021). Following the landslide, the impacted families primarily sought refuge with relatives and neighbours and rented accommodations. The study reveals victims relocated to desolate agricultural fields to rebuild new houses. A mid-middle-aged female respondent narrated:

To be honest, the previous neighbourhood was preferable. With our current neighbours, we exchange greetings when we encounter each other; otherwise, we do not visit each other's homes casually. In the old neighbourhood, regardless of age, we regularly visited each other's homes, building stronger bonds and enjoying each other's company.

This underscores the pain of the adaptation process in the new location, where the disintegration of social bonds and community networks was felt. It is observed that while some respondents were contented with settling in a safer place, some families felt isolated despite being surrounded by neighbours. In most disaster-affected cases, relocation and resettlement are taken care of by the government. In Taiwan, after Typhoon Morakot which caused

a landslide, the government pre-emptively relocated the villagers as a precautionary measure from future typhoons, although the landslide did not affect the villages which were designated as unsafe (Balkrishnan, 2022). On the contrary, the present study indicates the affected victims relocating to safer areas after self-detection of potential hazards and without relocation assistance from the government. However, few respondents received minimal monetary aid for the damaged properties.

4.9 Psychological distress: The aftermath of disasters and other traumatic events is often marked by emotional instability, stress reactions, anxiety, trauma, and assorted psychological symptoms. With the loss of social and economic, individuals and communities may experience mental instability, leading to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Makwana, 2019). The present study reveals that respondents experienced immediate stress and the pressure placed on them to decide what actions to take and where to relocate their movable assets. Commonly reported challenges encompassed shock and fear, enduring grief, disturbances in sleep patterns, and difficulties associated with maladjustment and dysfunctionality when they moved to a new location. A female respondent:

The damages caused to our properties have taken a toll on our family mentally. During the period of relocating and adapting, it has caused me a lot of stress and anxiousness. I still grieve for our old home and the properties being damaged.

The statement displays mourning about the attachments to the old house and properties, which signifies the disruption to the sense of security and stability, creating a burden to rebuild and restore the losses. When queried about their ongoing apprehensions regarding the possibility of another landslide, those who have relocated primarily expressed a sense of security, noting that they now feel secure in their new, safer environment. Conversely, individuals compelled to remain in high-risk areas cite the persistent existence of fear. Additionally, the delayed process of running after monetary help from the government has added additional stress and anxiety, which further underscores the coping challenges of post-landslide for the affected victims.

5. Conclusion

The study brings to light that disasters like landslides in Sechu-Zubza, Nagaland are not just natural disasters but are significantly influenced by human activities and developmental projects. The negative outcome of anthropogenic activities goes beyond the physical destruction, the socio-economic and psychological well-being are profoundly affected. Ulrich Beck's argument on modernization bringing about hidden risks in society is vividly unveiled in the study, where the hidden risks are the unforeseen and unintended consequences of road construction, triggering landslides. The findings underscore the inadequacies in the developmental policies and practices. The promise of better road connectivity has brought about setbacks in the absence of implementing proper measures. Further, it identifies the need to tailor the compensation packages to the affected families according to their needs. Additionally, there is a need for the government to take into account not only the short-term financial needs but rehabilitation and relocation of the affected victims. Additionally, it has been revealed that few families are actively seeking financial assistance to relocate to a safer area and for some to construct a new house in a secured location. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of addressing the economic disparities exacerbated by landslides. The economically weaker sections, particularly farmers and daily wage laborers, face prolonged challenges in recovery, revealing the need for targeted assistance and rehabilitation programs. In light of these findings, recommendations for future urban development in Nagaland should include robust geological and geotechnical studies, adherence to construction standards, comprehensive risk assessments, and proactive community engagement. The goal should be to balance economic development and environmental sustainability, ensuring the well-being of both present and future generations. Mitigating landslide risks requires a collaborative effort involving government bodies, development agencies, local communities, and other stakeholders. It is imperative to integrate comprehensive risk assessments, community consultations, and adherence to established standards in future developmental initiatives.

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Identity Negotiation and Resilience among Families with Stunted Children

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Abstract

Stunting in children is generally understood as a health problem related to malnutrition and socioeconomic conditions. However, for families experiencing it, stunting also has social consequences in the form of stigma that can affect how parents view themselves. This study aims to explore how families with stunted children negotiate their identities while building resilience through the process of communication within the family. This study uses a qualitative approach with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with 13 parents who have stunted children in Banjarnegara Regency, Indonesia. The analysis shows that a stunting diagnosis often becomes the starting point for parental identity disruption, characterized by feelings of guilt, shame, and social pressure through comments and labeling from the surrounding environment. In facing this situation, families developed various identity negotiation strategies, including building a defensive identity, reconstructing the meaning of experiences, strengthening spiritual identity, and forming a collective family identity through internal communication and spousal support. This communication process serves as an important mechanism in building family resilience. This study shows that resilience in the context of stunting is not only related to psychological adaptation, but also to the family's ability to reconstruct their identity communicatively. These findings expand the study of resilience communication by placing identity negotiation as a key element in the adaptation process of families facing social stigma related to stunting.

Keywords: Identity Negotiation, Resilience Communication, Stigma, Family Communication, Stunting

1. Introduction

Child stunting remains one of the most complex public health issues in many developing countries, including Indonesia. Medically, stunting refers to a condition of growth failure characterized by a child's height being below the standard for their age due to chronic malnutrition over a long period of time (Leroy and Frongillo, 2019). A report from the World Health Organization shows that stunting not only affects physical growth, but is also linked to delayed cognitive development, low educational attainment, and reduced productivity in adulthood. In other words, stunting is not just a child health issue, but also a challenge for future human resource development (World Health Organization, 2019). Despite various nutritional intervention programs, the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia remains relatively high in a number of rural areas due to unequal access to basic health and sanitation

services. Based on the Indonesian Nutrition Status Study (SSGI), although the national figure continues to decline, the disparity between urban and rural areas remains significant. (Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2025). In remote areas, determining factors such as lack of access to clean water, limited sanitation facilities, and low levels of parental education regarding parenting practices during the first 1,000 days of life (HPK) are major obstacles to the effectiveness of government programs (Fristiwi, Nugraheni and Kartini, 2023). This shows that the dominant approach has focused on nutrition and health aspects, and has not been able to fully explain the complexity of the problems faced by families with stunted children.

From 2021 to July 2024, Banjarnegara Regency was recorded as the region with the highest prevalence of stunting in Central Java Province (Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2025). The high rate of stunting is mainly found in a number of mountainous and rural areas with limited basic infrastructure. One of the factors contributing to this condition is limited access to clean water and proper sanitation. As a region with mountainous geographical characteristics, several villages in Banjarnegara still face difficulties in obtaining adequate clean water sources and waste management systems that meet health standards. In addition, the high rate of child marriage is also a serious challenge because it contributes to an increased risk of low birth weight babies who are prone to stunting (Dinas Komunikasi dan Informasi Kabupaten Banjarnegara, 2024). Geographical factors exacerbate the situation, as the relatively difficult terrain in several subdistricts means that nutritional intervention programs and health services cannot always reach all areas evenly. Recognizing the complexity of this issue, the Banjarnegara Regency Government has set a target of reducing the prevalence of stunting to 14% by 2024, in line with the national target in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). To achieve this target, the local government has initiated various programs, including the "Jo Kawin Bocah" movement, which aims to reduce the practice of early marriage, and the optimization of village funds to support supplementary feeding programs (PMT), particularly those based on animal protein for children at risk of stunting (Dinas Komunikasi dan Informasi Kabupaten Banjarnegara, 2023).

When viewed more broadly from a biological perspective, families with stunted children often face social consequences that are no less significant. Parents often encounter comments, judgments, and even accusations from their social environment that associate their child's condition with parenting failure (Lestari, Kristiana and Paramita, 2018). This situation creates psychological and social pressure that can affect how parents view themselves. Within the framework of Stigma Theory introduced by Erving Goffman (1963) (dalam Tyler & Slater, 2018), certain health conditions can be attributes that lower a person's social value in the eyes of society. Stigma not only attaches itself to individuals experiencing these conditions, but can also extend to family members who are considered responsible (Putri, Kartasurya and Musthofa, 2024). In the context of stunting, parents are often placed in a defensive position to explain or justify their parenting practices. Therefore, understanding stunting solely as a medical problem risks ignoring the social experiences of families living with this condition.

Previous studies have shown that stunting cannot be understood solely as a medical issue, but rather as a phenomenon shaped by complex interactions between social, economic, and cultural factors. Research by Li & Walker (2017) emphasizes that stunting is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by the interaction between poverty, parental education, access to health services, and parenting practices developed in specific social contexts. In this context, families are not only faced with biological issues concerning their children, but also with social pressures that influence how they interpret and respond to these conditions. In addition, the social dimension of stunting is often linked to the emergence of stigma against families with children who experience growth retardation. Research by Hatzenbuehler et al. (2013) shows that health stigma can exacerbate family vulnerability because they tend to withdraw from social interaction or are reluctant to access health services due to shame or fear of blame. This condition ultimately has the potential to reinforce the cycle of vulnerability, as families who need support become increasingly isolated from available sources of assistance. However, most research on stunting still focuses on nutritional determinants, sanitation, or economic factors (Anggraini *et al.*, 2024; Bahar *et al.*, 2024; Hanifah and Syahrizal, 2024). This approach is certainly very important, but in many cases, it is not yet fully capable of explaining how families socially and emotionally deal with the situation when their child is diagnosed with stunting. Therefore, studies that place family communication and the process of identity negotiation as part of the family's experience with stunted children are becoming increasingly relevant to develop.

In communication studies, identity is not understood as something static or inherent to individuals, but rather as a social construct that continues to evolve through interactions with others. This perspective places communication as the primary space where identity is formed, maintained, and negotiated. Stella Ting-Toomey explains that individual identity is always in a process of negotiation between how a person views themselves and how they are perceived by others (Ting-Toomey, 2015). In everyday life, these two dimensions are not always in harmony. A person may have a certain understanding of themselves, but their social environment may hold a different view. When there is a discrepancy between these two perceptions, individuals tend to employ various communication strategies to maintain, renegotiate, or even reconstruct their identity (Ting-Toomey, 2017). This process becomes even more complex when an individual's identity is vulnerable to social judgment, such as in the context of family health. In situations where families face stigma related to their child's health condition, the process of identity negotiation becomes even more important because their identity as "good parents" may be questioned by their social environment (Dorjee and Ting-Toomey, 2020).

On the other hand, studies on resilience in communication science provide a perspective that complements our understanding of how individuals and families respond to such social pressures. Resilience is no longer understood as the ability of individuals or families to survive in difficult situations, but as a social process that is formed through daily communication practices. Patrice M. Buzzanell argues that resilience is formed through daily communication practices that help individuals maintain their identity, build social support, and create new meaning from difficult experiences (Buzzanell, 2017). This approach opens up a broader perspective in understanding the experiences of families with stunted children. Instead of viewing families solely as parties affected by stigma, the perspective of communication resilience allows us to see how families actively construct meaning from these experiences (Wilson *et al.*, 2021).

Although Identity Negotiation Theory and Resilience Communication Theory have been widely used in interpersonal and family communication studies, the integration of these two perspectives in the context of families with stunted children is still rare. Most studies on family resilience focus on crisis situations such as chronic illness, disaster, or family conflict (Lillie, Venetis and Chernichky-Karcher, 2023; Gözen, Tuncay and Kandaş, 2025). Meanwhile, the context of stunting as a social experience fraught with stigma has not been widely explored from a communication perspective (Lestari, Kristiana and Paramita, 2018; Situmeang, Sudaryati and Jumirah, 2020; Simbolon and Sitompul, 2024). This gap highlights the need for research that can explain how families interpret their experiences, negotiate identity, and build resilience in the face of social pressures arising from stunting. Based on this background, this study aims to explore the communication experiences of families with stunted children, particularly in the process of identity negotiation and family resilience building. Specifically, this study poses two main questions: (1) how do parents with stunted children interpret their experiences in the context of social interaction and stigma; and (2) how does the communication process within the family help them negotiate identity and build resilience. These research questions are central because they are directly related to the objective of understanding the social processes that shape families' responses to stigma. In addition, this study also explores secondary questions regarding the communication strategies used by parents to maintain or reconstruct their identities in the face of their social environment.

To answer these questions, this study uses a qualitative approach with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method, which allows researchers to deeply explore participants' subjective experiences in interpreting the social realities they face (Tuffour, 2017). This approach was chosen because the focus of the study was not on measuring variables, but rather on understanding the meaning of the family's experience in dealing with stigma and social pressure. Through in-depth interviews with parents who have stunted children, this study sought to reveal how these experiences were understood, negotiated, and integrated into the family's identity (Bayer, 2024). Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich communication studies by showing that family resilience is not only related to the ability to adapt to difficulties, but also to the ability to reconstruct identity through communication. In practical terms, the findings of this study are expected to provide insights for health workers, policymakers, and community facilitators to design intervention approaches that are more sensitive to the social experiences of families. By understanding that stigma and identity are part of the family experience with stunted children, interventions designed should not only focus on medical aspects, but also on communication support and strengthening family identity.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method. This approach was chosen because the study aims to deeply understand the subjective experiences of parents in dealing with stunting in children and how they interpret these experiences in their daily lives. The IPA method emphasizes the exploration of the meaning of personal experiences and how individuals interpret these experiences in a broader social context (Tuffour, 2017). This approach was developed by Jonathan A. Smith et al. (2009) and is widely used in research focusing on complex and meaningful life experiences (Smith and Osborn, 2004; Bayer, 2024). In the context of this study, IPA allows researchers to explore in depth how parents interpret stunting diagnoses, deal with social pressure from their environment, and develop communication strategies to maintain their family identity (Smith and Osborn, 2004). This study is naturalistic in nature, meaning that the researcher did not manipulate conditions or intervene in any way with the participants. Data was obtained through direct interaction with participants in the form of in-depth interviews that allowed for comprehensive exploration of their experiences (Miller, Chan and Farmer, 2018).

2.2 Participants

Participants in this study were parents who had children with stunting. The inclusion criteria for participants were: (1) having a child who had been diagnosed with stunting by a health worker based on the World Health Organization's growth standards, (2) being the child's parent or primary caregiver, and (3) being willing to participate voluntarily in the study. There were no specific restrictions regarding education level, occupation, or socioeconomic status, as this study aimed to capture the diversity of family experiences. A total of 13 parents participated in this study. The number of participants was in line with the characteristics of IPA research, which generally uses small but in-depth samples to enable detailed analysis of experiences (Oluka, 2025). Most participants were mothers as the primary caregivers of their children, while some participants were fathers who were directly involved in childcare.

2.3 Sampling Procedures

The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, which is the deliberate selection of participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Participants were recruited with the help of village health cadres and posyandu (integrated health service post) officers in Banjarnegara Regency, Central Java, who helped identify families with stunted children. The researchers first explained the purpose of the study to prospective participants and ensured their willingness to participate voluntarily. All participants who were contacted were willing to participate in the study, so there were no refusals during the recruitment process. Interviews were conducted in an environment that was comfortable for the participants, generally in their homes or at village health facilities. This study has met the ethical standards for social research. All participants were given an explanation of the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of the data, and their right to withdraw from participation at any time. Participation consent was obtained through an informed consent process, and all participant identities were anonymized in the reporting of the research results.

2.4 Sample Size, Power, and Precision

The number of participants in this study was 13 parents. In the IPA approach, sample size is not determined by the need for statistical generalization, but rather by the depth of exploration of the participants' experiences. A relatively small sample allows researchers to conduct in-depth interpretive analysis of participants' narratives. The characteristics of the participants in this study reflect the family context in the rural area of Banjarnegara, most of whom have a lower-middle socioeconomic background and depend on the informal sector. Therefore, the interpretation of the results of this study focuses on understanding experiences in that context and is not intended to be statistically generalized to a wider population.

2.5 Measures and Data Collection

The main research data was collected through in-depth interviews. The interviews were semi-structured using interview guides designed to explore participants' experiences related to several main themes, namely: experiences of receiving a stunting diagnosis, emotional and social responses that arose, interactions with the social environment, and communication dynamics within the family. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent (Creswell, 2019). In addition to recording the interviews, researchers also took field notes documenting the context of the interview situation, participants' nonverbal expressions, and researchers' initial reflections on the narratives presented. To improve data quality, interviews were conducted in a dialogical manner so that participants had the space to freely recount their experiences (Oluka, 2025). The researchers also conducted limited member checking by reconfirming some initial interpretations with participants to ensure consistency of meaning.

2.6 Research Design and Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted following the stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Miller, Chan and Farmer, 2018). The analysis process was carried out in several main steps. First, the researcher read the interview transcripts repeatedly to understand the participants' overall narratives. Second, the researcher conducted initial coding by identifying important parts of the narrative related to identity experiences, stigma, and family communication dynamics. Third, these codes were then grouped into emergent themes that reflected patterns of meaning in the participants' experiences. The next stage was to conduct a cross-case analysis to find similarities and differences in patterns of experience among participants (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This process produced several main themes that describe how parents negotiate their identities in the face of stigma and how communication within the family plays a role in building resilience. Through this approach, the study not only describes the participants' experiences, but also interprets the deeper meaning of these experiences within the framework of communication and identity theory (Smith and Osborn, 2004; Oluka, 2025).

3. Results

This section presents the results of the analysis of interview data obtained from research participants. The findings focus on how parents interpret the experience of having a child with stunting, how they deal with the social pressures that arise, and how the communication process within the family helps them build resilience. The analysis was conducted thematically using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach developed by Jonathan A. Smith. Through this analysis process, this study identified several main themes that describe the dynamics of parental experiences, namely early identity disruption, identity pressure from the social environment, identity negotiation strategies, and the process of building family resilience.

3.1 Recruitment

The participant recruitment process was conducted between February and July 2025 in Wanayasa Subdistrict, Banjarnegara Regency, Central Java. Prospective participants were identified through collaboration with village health cadres and posyandu (integrated health service post) officers who had data on families with stunted children based on the growth standards used by the World Health Organization. A total of 13 parents agreed to participate in this study. All participants who were contacted expressed their willingness to participate in the interviews after receiving an explanation of the research objectives and assurances of data confidentiality. The interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participants' homes or at village health facilities, such as posyandu.

3.2 Statistics and Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through several main stages that characterize the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis method. The analysis process began with repeatedly rereading the interview transcripts to fully understand the context of the participants' experiences. After that, the researchers conducted initial coding by

identifying important parts of the participants' narratives related to experiences of stigma, identity as parents, and communication dynamics within the family. These initial codes are then grouped into identified themes, which reflect patterns of meaning that emerge in the participants' experiences. The next stage is to conduct a cross-case analysis to find similarities and differences in the experiences between participants. This process produces five main themes that describe the dynamics of parents' experiences in dealing with stunting in children.

The first theme is early identity disruption. For most participants, the diagnosis of stunting was a turning point that changed the way they viewed themselves as parents. Many participants expressed feelings of guilt and shame when they first learned of their child's condition. Some parents felt that this condition was proof of their failure to fulfill their role as caregivers. The second theme is external identity pressure. After the diagnosis of stunting became known to their social circle, a number of participants reported comments or judgments from neighbors and extended family members who linked the child's condition to the parents' parenting style. In some cases, these comments made parents feel directly or indirectly blamed.

The third theme is identity negotiation strategies. In facing these social pressures, parents develop various communication strategies to maintain or reconstruct their identities. Some parents choose to build a defensive identity by explaining other factors that influence their children's condition, such as medical history or genetic factors. Others try to reframe their experiences by emphasizing that stunting is a health problem that can be remedied through continuous care and attention. The fourth theme is identity anchoring through family communication. Many participants emphasized the importance of their spouse's support in facing social pressure. Open communication between husbands and wives helps them strengthen each other and reduce feelings of mutual blame. In some families, emotional support from spouses is an important factor that helps parents maintain confidence in their parenting roles. The fifth theme is identity transformation towards resilience (identity-based resilience). Over time, some participants showed a change in their perspective on their experiences. Instead of continuing to see themselves as failed parents, they began to view these experiences as a learning process that strengthened family relationships. This transformation in meaning was often influenced by social support, interactions with health workers, and spiritual beliefs that helped them accept their children's conditions.

3.3 Ancillary Analyses

Data analysis was conducted through several main stages that characterize the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis method. The analysis process began with repeatedly rereading the interview transcripts to fully understand the context of the participants' experiences. After that, the researchers conducted initial coding by identifying important parts of the participants' narratives related to experiences of stigma, identity as parents, and communication dynamics within the family. These initial codes are then grouped into identified themes, which reflect patterns of meaning that emerge in the participants' experiences. The next stage is to conduct a cross-case analysis to find similarities and differences in the experiences of the participants. This process produced five main themes that describe the dynamics of parents' experiences in dealing with stunting in children.

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3.4 Baseline Data

The basic characteristics of the participants show that the majority of participants are mothers who are the primary caregivers of their children. Most families live in rural areas with their main livelihoods in the informal sector, such as agriculture, small trade, or domestic work. The participants' education levels varied, ranging from elementary school to high school. Most of the children who were the focus of the participants' experiences were toddlers when they were first diagnosed with stunting. The diagnosis was generally obtained through routine checkups at health posts or local health facilities.

4. Discussion

This study aims to understand how families with stunted children negotiate their identities while building resilience through communication processes that occur in everyday family life. The findings of this study are in line with the family resilience framework proposed by Walsh (2016) which emphasizes that a family's ability to survive and adapt in difficult situations depends not only on individual strength, but also on how the family builds shared meaning, maintains open communication patterns, and develops emotional support among family members. The findings of this study show that the experience of having a child with stunting is not only related to health issues, but also gives rise to social and psychological dynamics that affect parental identity (Potts and Henderson, 2020). In general, the results of this study support the main hypothesis that identity negotiation is an important mechanism in the process of forming family resilience. Through interpersonal communication, parents attempt to reconstruct the meaning of their experiences so that they can maintain a positive identity as caregivers (Johansen and Varvin, 2020). This finding also reinforces the secondary hypothesis that social stigma against stunting triggers identity pressure that encourages families to develop adaptive communication strategies (Theiss, 2018).

One of the main findings of this study was the emergence of early identity disruption when parents first received a diagnosis of stunting in their children. Many participants revealed that this moment became a turning point that brought up various emotional feelings such as guilt, shame, and even doubts about their abilities as parents (Ligar, Kartasurya and Musthofa, 2024). This emotional reaction shows that a stunting diagnosis is not only understood as medical information, but also as a social experience that can influence how parents interpret their parenting roles. These findings are in line with research by Wulandari et al. (2025) which shows that children's health conditions are often linked to assessments of parents' abilities, particularly mothers, in carrying out their caregiving roles. In the literature on social stigma developed by Erving Goffman, stigma is understood as a process of social labeling that can damage an individual's identity (Tyler and Slater, 2018). In the context of stunting, social labeling of families often reinforces feelings of failure among parents, especially when society associates the child's condition with parenting patterns or the family's socioeconomic status (Putri, Kartasurya and Musthofa, 2024).

The findings of this study also show that identity pressure from the social environment plays an important role in shaping parents' experiences. Comments from neighbors, extended family members, and the surrounding community often reinforce the perception that parents are fully responsible for their children's condition. These findings are in line with research by Nabunya et al. (2020) which shows that families with members who have certain health conditions often face a form of stigma known as courtesy stigma, which is stigma experienced by individuals because of their association with others who are considered socially "problematic." In this context, parents become the target of social judgment that can affect the way they view themselves (Tekola *et al.*, 2020). However, this study also found that parents did not passively accept these negative labels. Instead, they developed various identity negotiation strategies to maintain or reconstruct their identities as responsible parents (Masten,

2018). Some participants built a defensive identity by explaining that stunting is not always caused by parenting mistakes, but is also influenced by health factors or environmental conditions. Another strategy that emerged was reframing, which is an attempt to reframe the experience of having a stunted child as a learning process that encourages parents to be more attentive to their child's health.

The process of negotiating identity occurs primarily through communication within the family. Many participants emphasized the importance of their spouse's support in dealing with social pressure from their environment. Open communication between husband and wife helps them reduce mutual blame and strengthen family solidarity. These findings are in line with the perspective of resilience communication developed by Some participants built a defensive identity by explaining that stunting is not always caused by parenting mistakes, but is also influenced by health factors or environmental conditions. Another strategy that emerged was reframing, which is an attempt to reframe the experience of having a stunted child as a learning process that encourages parents to be more attentive to their child's health.

The process of negotiating identity occurs primarily through communication within the family. Many participants emphasized the importance of their spouse's support in dealing with social pressure from their environment. Open communication between husband and wife helps them reduce mutual blame and strengthen family solidarity. These findings are in line with the perspective of resilience communication developed by Buzzanell (2017) which explains that resilience is not only an individual trait, but is also built through daily communication practices that enable individuals to negotiate the meaning of difficult experiences. Within the framework of resilience communication theory, processes such as crafting normalcy, affirming identity anchors, and maintaining communication networks become important mechanisms in building psychological and social resilience (Buzzanell and Houston, 2018). The results of this study show that families with stunted children actively engage in this process. For example, some parents try to recreate a sense of "normality" in family life by continuing to carry out daily activities as usual. At the same time, they strengthen their family identity through emotional support, religious values, and the belief that their child's condition can still be improved through joint efforts.

Another important finding is the transformation of identity towards resilience (Groeninck *et al.*, 2020). Over time, some parents began to change the way they interpreted the experience of having a child with stunting. While initially they felt ashamed and depressed, in the long term some participants actually saw the experience as a process that strengthened family relationships. This transformation in meaning shows that family resilience does not happen instantly, but develops through a process of communication that enables families to rebuild their identity in a positive way (Masten, 2018; Wilson *et al.*, 2021).

However, the results of this study need to be understood with consideration of several limitations. First, this study was conducted in a specific cultural and geographical context, namely families in rural areas of Banjarnegara Regency. The social, cultural, and economic conditions in this region may influence the experience of stigma and family communication strategies. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be directly generalized to different social contexts. Second, the number of participants in this study was relatively small because it followed the characteristics of qualitative research, which emphasizes in-depth analysis of experiences. Although this approach allows for in-depth exploration of experiences, the results of this study still need to be supplemented with other studies involving a more diverse range of participants. In addition, this study focused on the experiences of parents as the primary caregivers of children, so the perspectives of other family members, such as grandparents or siblings, were not explored in depth. Future research could broaden the focus of analysis by exploring broader family communication dynamics, including the role of community and social networks in shaping family resilience.

Despite these limitations, this study makes an important contribution to the development of health communication and family communication studies. Theoretically, the findings of this study broaden our understanding of resilience communication by showing that identity negotiation is a central mechanism in the adaptation process of families facing health stigma. In this context, resilience is not only related to the ability to survive difficulties, but also to the ability of families to reconstruct their identities through communication. Practically, the findings of this study also have implications for the development of public health intervention programs. Efforts to address

stunting have often focused on medical and nutritional aspects, while the social and family communication dimensions are often overlooked. The results of this study show that an approach that is more sensitive to the dynamics of identity and social stigma can help families deal with stunting in a more adaptive manner. Health workers and community empowerment programs can integrate communication strategies that support the strengthening of family identity and reduce stigma that develops in the community.

Overall, this study confirms that families' experiences with stunted children are not only related to health issues, but also to the dynamics of identity and communication within the family. Family resilience is formed through a process of identity negotiation that allows parents to transform the meaning of their experiences from a source of stigma to a source of strength. These findings emphasize the importance of viewing stunting not only as a nutritional problem, but also as a socio-communicative phenomenon that affects family life more broadly.

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