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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Cultural Norm as Social Capital Indonesia's Democracy: A Case Study of Fufufafa Account

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**Abstract:** This study examines the phenomenon of the anonymous social media account *Fufufafa* as a distinctive case within Indonesian digital democracy. The controversy escalated rapidly because it was associated with the Vice President-Elect, marking the first instance in which an anonymous account targeted high-level political figures and triggered nationwide debate. Drone Emprit recorded over 112,000 interactions across platform X between 28 August and 18 September 2024. Using a qualitative approach supported by Social Media Network Analysis (SMNA), this study maps discourse networks, identifies influential actors, and analyzes dominant narratives. The findings show that civic participation was largely driven by anger and surprise, expressed through hashtags, retweets, and public commentary. These reflected moral dissatisfaction related to nepotism, ethical misconduct, and political integrity, demonstrating that cultural norms strongly shaped public reaction. Shared cultural norms regarding honesty, integrity, and accountability connected citizens, enabled collective moral judgments, and encouraged public scrutiny of political elites, thereby functioning as a form of digital social capital. While this norm-based participation expanded civic expression and decentralized political engagement, it also produced echo chambers that constrained inclusive deliberation. This study concludes that strengthening Indonesia's digital democracy requires not only regulatory and literacy efforts but also the cultivation of cultural norms and ethical digital cultures that ensure the online sphere remains a deliberative arena for substantive democracy.

### Keywords:

Social Media Network Analysis, Democracy, Civic Participation, Cultural Norms, Social Capital, Digital Culture.

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## 1. Introduction

The emergence of the anonymous account *fufufafa* in mid-2024 sparked one of the most intense and widespread political discussions in Indonesia's digital sphere. With over 60,800 posts recorded in less than a month (Fahmi, 2024), the account attracted attention through provocative statements directed at national figures such as Prabowo Subianto and by allegedly harassing female public figures. The controversy escalated further when the account was rumored to be linked to Gibran Rakabuming Raka, then Vice President-Elect, despite his public denial. This phenomenon demonstrates what found in his research: social media has become a central arena for political participation, where citizens actively monitor elites and voice political opinions. At the same time, it highlights the growing complexity of digital discourse in Indonesia, where expressions of civic anger, moral judgment, and skepticism toward authority converge. Consequently, the *Fufufafa* case is important not merely as a viral controversy but as a reflection of how democratic participation is culturally and emotionally mediated within digital environments.

Existing scholars have widely examined the relationship between social media and democracy, particularly in relation to polarization, misinformation, and political mobilization (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Jha & Kodila-Tedika, 2018; Kreiss, 2021). Research in the Indonesian context has similarly focused on Facebook and WhatsApp as the primary channels for the spread of political and religious hoaxes (Fensi, 2025; Putri Aisyiyah Rachma Dewi et al., 2023; Wendratama et al., 2023). Yet, while prior studies emphasize misinformation and disinformation, fewer studies explore how civic values and cultural norms shape how Indonesians respond to digital controversies. In this study, cultural norms refer to socially shared expectations concerning honesty, integrity, and anti-nepotism. These norms are deeply embedded in Indonesian social life and influence how citizens evaluate the legitimacy of political actors and public conduct.

Previous studies often treat online participation as either positive civic engagement or negative manipulation (Lee, 2022; Pyżalski, 2023). However, these studies tend to frame digital participation primarily through the dichotomy of democratic empowerment versus manipulation. As a result, limited attention has been given to how civic norms and cultural values shape citizens' responses to digital political controversies. In particular, previous research has not sufficiently explained how emotions such as anger, shame, and moral dissatisfaction are socially constructed through local cultural expectations regarding honesty, decency, and accountability. This gap is significant because digital political participation in Indonesia cannot be fully understood solely through technological or informational perspectives, but must also be examined as a culturally embedded practice.

This study argues that civic norms function as a form of social capital that shapes emotional participation in digital public spheres. Theoretically, this argument integrates three interconnected perspectives. First, political participation theory (Verba et al., 1995; Verba & Nie, 1972) explains how citizens attempt to influence political processes beyond formal electoral mechanisms, including through digital expression. Second, the concept of deliberative democracy Habermas (1996) explains how public opinion is understood as the people's sovereignty in a procedural sense. Thus, the more discursive the process is, that is, the more rational and open it is to public scrutiny, the more legitimate the result becomes (Hardiman, 2009). This theory is embedded in digital culture and public sphere theory (Habermas, 1989; Miller, 2020), which explains how cultural values and moral expectations are reproduced within online discourse. And third, the concept of social capital (Putnam, 2000), which is described as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Rather than treating emotion, civic norms, and digital participation as separate variables, this study positions them as interconnected processes: cultural norms shape emotional reactions, emotional reactions drive digital participation, and digital participation influences the quality of democratic discourse.

The empirical findings suggest that the *Fufufafa* controversy primarily generated bonding social capital, as evidenced by the formation of a dominant cluster, the prevalence of one-sided narratives, and the limited

presence of counter-discourse. Although these shared moral sentiments strengthened collective accountability and civic mobilization, they simultaneously fostered echo chambers that constrained deliberative exchange. Through this framework, the article seeks to explain how social media becomes not only a technological platform, but also a moral arena where citizens negotiate democratic legitimacy and reproduce forms of digital social capital that may either strengthen or limit deliberative democracy.

Based on this framework, the study addresses three main questions: How do Indonesian citizens engage in political participation through the discourse around the *Fufufafa* controversy? In what ways do civic norms such as honesty and accountability influence emotional responses to unverified digital narratives? And to what extent do these dynamics reinforce or erode the democratic public sphere? Using a qualitative case study approach supported by Social Media Network Analysis (SMNA), and online news analysis, this study investigates how digital culture and civic participation interact within contemporary Indonesian democracy. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by expanding discussions of digital participation beyond the binary of empowerment and manipulation, and methodologically by integrating emotional discourse, civic norms, and networked participation into a unified analytical framework. Practically, this study offers insights for policymakers, media institutions, and civic educators regarding the importance of digital literacy, ethical communication, and inclusive deliberative practices in strengthening democratic life in digital spaces.

## 2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach supported by Social Media Network Analysis (SMNA) as a complementary analytical tool. Although SMNA generates quantitative indicators—such as interaction frequency, engagement intensity, and sentiment distribution—the primary objective of this research is interpretive rather than statistical. The computational data were not treated as standalone findings, but as empirical entry points for qualitative interpretation regarding civic participation, political emotions, and cultural norms in Indonesia’s digital public sphere. In this sense, SMNA serves as a mapping instrument to identify discursive patterns, influential actors, and dominant narratives, while qualitative content analysis is employed to interpret the social and political meanings embedded in those patterns. The research was conducted over seven months, from May to December 2025, with the primary data collection focused on the peak period of the controversy, from 28 August to 18 September 2024. The extended analysis period allowed the researchers to examine how a viral controversy evolved into a broader socio-political discourse worthy of academic investigation.

The scope of the study centers on digital conversations surrounding the anonymous account “fufufafa” on the platform X (formerly Twitter) and across major Indonesian online news portals. Data collection did not rely solely on the hashtag #fufufafa, but also incorporated related keywords and hashtags that emerged organically within the discourse, including #Gibran, #GibranRakabuming, #Prabowo, #JejakDigital, and #TangkapJokowi. The hashtag #fufufafa nevertheless served as the primary entry point, consistently functioning as the central discursive marker that connected conversations across platforms. The inclusion of multiple related keywords was intended to reduce the risk of narrowing the discourse and to capture the broader political and cultural context surrounding the controversy. Social media data were collected using Drone Emprit, which enabled the identification of interaction networks, engagement patterns, and emotional tendencies through mentions, replies, retweets, and hashtag relations. In parallel, online news articles discussing the controversy were purposively selected to examine how institutional media framed the issue and reproduced public narratives.

Data analysis was conducted in three stages. First, SMNA was used to map digital interaction networks and identify key actors, clusters, and dominant hashtags within the conversation. Second, qualitative content analysis was applied to social media posts and news coverage to interpret recurring themes, emotional expressions, and representations of civic norms such as honesty, accountability, and moral judgment. Emotional classifications, including anger and surprise, were not interpreted merely as computational

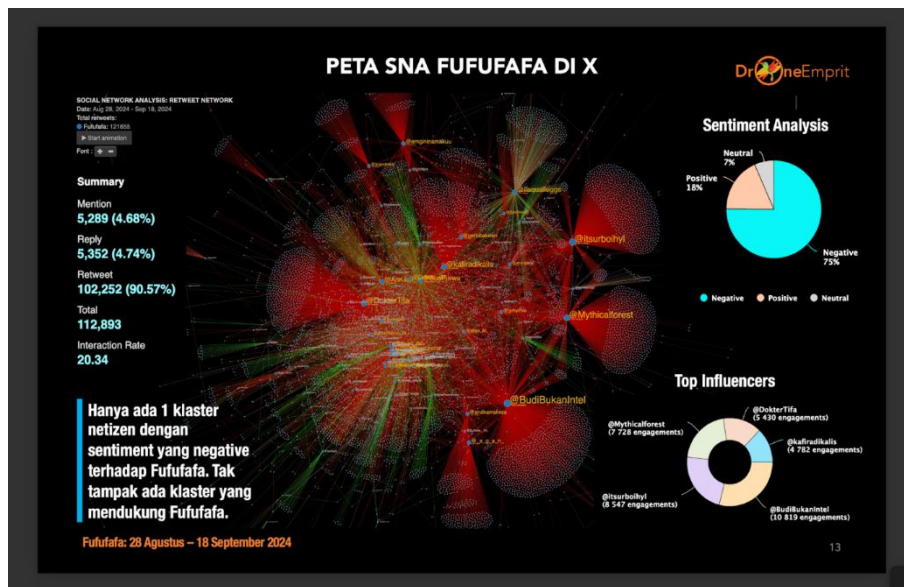
sentiment categories, but were contextualized through narrative interpretation and supported by textual evidence from user comments and media reports. Third, source triangulation was operationalized by systematically comparing social media narratives with mainstream news framing to identify consistencies, contradictions, and patterns of amplification between citizen-driven discourse and institutional reporting. The findings were then interpreted inductively through theoretical perspectives on political participation (Verba & Nie, 1972), democratic deliberative (Habermas, 1996), and social capital (2000). This methodological design enabled the study to explain not only how digital participation occurred, but also why cultural norms and political emotions became central in shaping civic engagement within Indonesia's digital democracy.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### Forms of the Phenomenon

The phenomenon of *Fufufafa* reveals the intensity of political digitalization in Indonesia, as demonstrated through the Social Network Analysis (SNA) conducted by Drone Emprit. Data collected between 28 August and 18 September 2024 recorded a total of 112,893 interactions, comprising 5,289 mentions (4.68%), 5,352 replies (4.74%), and a dominant 102,252 retweets (90.57%). The predominance of retweets indicates that the controversy did not develop primarily through dialogic exchanges, but rather through rapid amplification and circulation of political narratives. In this context, political participation on platform X tended to occur through replication and emotional endorsement rather than deliberative interaction. The dominance of retweet activity demonstrates how visibility and virality became central mechanisms of engagement, allowing users to collectively amplify political criticism without necessarily engaging in reciprocal debate. In Habermasian terms, this exemplifies the transformation of social media into a public sphere (Habermas, 1989), though one where interactions tend to be reactive rather than deliberative.

Picture 1: The Map of Social Network Analysis



Source. Drone Emprit

However, retweets should not be understood solely as indicators of virality. In the context of the *Fufufafa* controversy, retweeting functioned as a mechanism of symbolic amplification through which shared moral judgments concerning honesty, propriety, and political accountability were circulated, repeated, and collectively recognized. By redistributing narratives condemning perceived ethical violations, users engaged in collective meaning-making that transformed individual sentiments into publicly shared evaluations. In this

sense, retweets represented more than technical interactions; they served as expressions of normative endorsement and civic positioning. From the perspective of social capital theory (Putnam, 2000), these repeated acts of symbolic amplification contributed to the formation of norm-based digital social capital. Shared moral expectations connected dispersed individuals into networks of collective judgment, facilitating public scrutiny of political elites and reinforcing a common sense of civic responsibility. Yet, because these interactions were concentrated within a dominant cluster and lacked meaningful counter-discourse, the resulting social capital was predominantly bonding rather than bridging. Consequently, retweets simultaneously strengthened collective accountability and intensified echo chambers, illustrating the ambivalent relationship between digital social capital and deliberative democracy.

Sentiment analysis underscores the strongly negative orientation of public responses. Of the total conversations, 75% were negative, 18% positive, and only 7% neutral. The overwhelming negativity suggests collective disapproval of the account's activity and content, which were widely perceived as offensive, unethical, and politically provocative. The SNA network further illustrates that the discourse clustered around a single dominant node that rejected the account and its associated narratives, with virtually no counter-clusters in support. This absence of significant counter-discourse suggests that the controversy produced a temporary moral consensus among digital citizens. Rather than facilitating pluralistic debate, the platform served as a space for emotional synchronization, in which users reinforced one another's reactions through the repetitive circulation of similar narratives. Consequently, the discourse reflected not only political criticism but also the emergence of digitally mediated collective judgment rooted in shared perceptions of ethical violation.

The analysis also identified several top influencers who played pivotal roles in amplifying the discourse. Among these, accounts such as @BudiBukanIntel (10,819 engagements), @itsurboihyl (8,547 engagements), and @Mythicalforest (7,728 engagements) acted as central nodes within the network. These actors were not formally connected to political parties, state institutions, or identifiable elite actors. Rather, they operated as pseudonymous accounts that consistently positioned themselves as critics of the government. This finding indicates that the circulation of narratives surrounding the Fufufafa controversy was driven predominantly by decentralized and citizen-based actors rather than by organized elite mobilization. Their activity highlights the enduring relevance of two-step flow model in the digital age, where opinion leaders mediate and amplify political messages. By shaping the tone and focus of engagement, these actors significantly influenced how the wider public perceived and responded to the controversy.

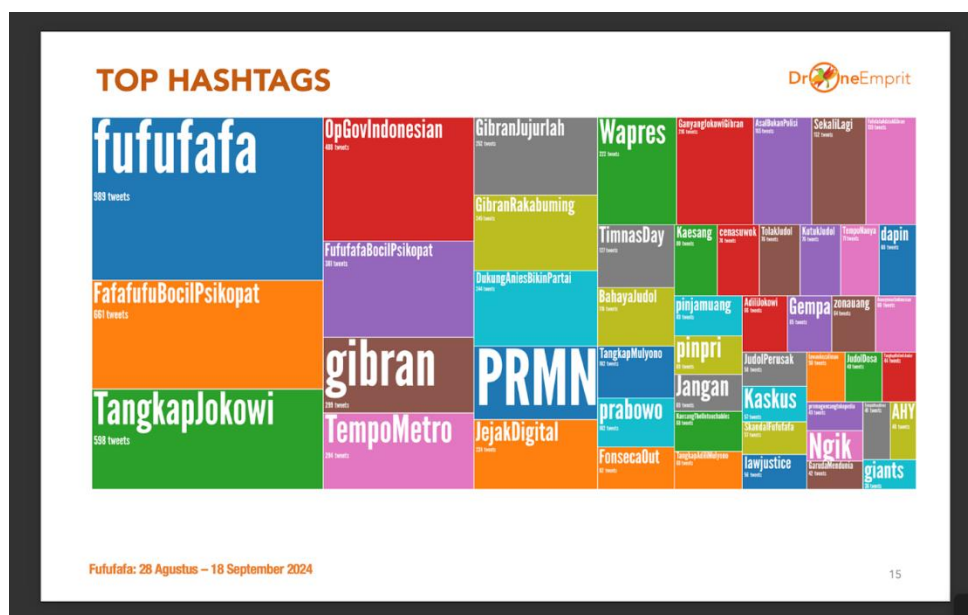
More importantly, these influencers contributed to the moralization of political discourse by repeatedly emphasizing themes such as ethical decline, public shame, and leadership integrity. Through repeated amplification, these narratives acquired symbolic legitimacy and encouraged wider participation from ordinary users. In this sense, influencers functioned not only as disseminators of information but also as cultural intermediaries who translated political controversy into collective civic concern. Their role demonstrates that digital participation is strongly influenced by actors capable of constructing emotional resonance and normative alignment within networked publics.

Hashtags serve as another important indicator of the forms this phenomenon took. Popular tags such as #fufufafa (989 tweets), #FafafufuBocilPsikopat (661 tweets), and #TangkapJokowi (598 tweets) functioned not merely as labels for conversation, but as emotionally charged symbolic markers through which citizens articulated anger, sarcasm, and political dissatisfaction. More importantly, these influencers contributed to the moralization of political discourse by repeatedly emphasizing themes such as ethical decline, public shame, and leadership integrity. Through repeated amplification, these narratives acquired symbolic legitimacy and encouraged wider participation from ordinary users. In this sense, influencers functioned not only as disseminators of information but also as cultural intermediaries who translated political controversy into collective civic concern. Their role demonstrates that digital participation is strongly

influenced by actors capable of constructing emotional resonance and normative alignment within networked publics.

At the same time, hashtags like #Gibran, #GibranRakabuming, and #Prabowo linked the controversy to broader elite politics and succession narratives. Beyond these personal criticisms, hashtags such as #JejakDigital and #TempoMetro illustrate public concern with the role of media institutions and digital traceability, signaling the overlap between journalistic logic and participatory discourse (Freelon et al., 2020). However, the dominance of one-directional hashtags also reveals the formation of echo chambers, where repeated exposure to similar perspectives reinforced emotional consensus while limiting deliberative engagement with opposing views. Finally, discourse expanded to encompass broader issues, such as #DukungAniesBikinPartai and #JudolPerusak, showing how digital publics connect different political and social debates. This aligns with Bruns and Burgess's (2011) concept of *ad hoc publics*, in which discursive communities form spontaneously around emergent topics and can evolve into broader political movements.

Picture 2: Top Hashtags in period of Fufufafa Case



Source: Drone Emprit Academy

## Cultural Norms as The Social Capital

The rise of the *Fufufafa* phenomenon was shaped by intertwined political, cultural, and technological factors. Politically, the controversy escalated because of its alleged link to Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the Vice President-Elect. Such a connection elevated what might otherwise have been a minor, anonymous account into a major political controversy. This personalization of politics is consistent with the character of Indonesian political discourse, which often revolves around elite figures rather than institutional structures. Prabowo Subianto's involvement in the discourse further heightened the stakes, as the account's provocative content directly attacked a presidential figure.

From a socio-cultural perspective, public responses were strongly reflected in Indonesia's cultural norms, which were deeply rooted in values of honesty, integrity, and anti-nepotism (Assyofa et al., 2024; Dwijatmoko, 2018; Latapapua & Handayani, 2019). These cultural norms acted as interpretive frameworks through which citizens assessed the account's activity. The intensity of negative sentiment reflects the violation of these norms, particularly when the controversy touched on issues of public office appointments and political morality. Nugroho et al. (2020) argue that Indonesian digital participation is often driven by such

normative concerns, which transform cultural values into civic mobilization. Even from a case study in Kazakhstan (Makulbayeva & Sharipova, 2024), social trust and cooperation norms have a positive impact on public councils' effectiveness. The *Fufufafa* case provides empirical confirmation of this pattern, showing how cultural expectations shape online discourse. The comments presented in Table 1 demonstrate that netizens consistently framed their criticism in moral and cultural terms, including *akhlaq* (morality), *adab* (decency), *hati nurani* (conscience), and *kerusakan moral* (moral decay). These expressions indicate that citizens did not evaluate the controversy solely through technical or legal considerations, but through shared ethical frameworks that define acceptable political behavior within Indonesian society. Consequently, the controversy evolved beyond a debate about an anonymous account and became a symbolic contestation over political morality and public legitimacy.

**Table 1: Comments from several netizens on the X platform**

Account	Narration	
	Indonesia	English
@msaid_didu	<i>Saya sedih karena ada teman saya yg dulu kami sama-sama sebagai Ketua Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia (ICMI)- Prof Jimly-minta melupakan tindakan AMORAL akun FUFUFABA dan juga blokir x saya.</i>	I am sad because a friend of mine, with whom I once served as Chairperson of the Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Association (ICMI) – Prof. Jimly – asked me to forget the AMORAL actions of the FUFUFABA account and also block me.
	<i>Selamat datang pemakluman kerusakan moral bersama Professor FUFUFABA.</i>	Welcome to the acknowledgment of moral decay alongside Professor FUFUFABA.
@peramal62	<i>Akun Fufufafa adalah gambaran personal yg tidak mempunyai Akhlaq dan Adab</i>	The Fufufafa account represents a personal character without Morals and Decency.
@makrete	<i>Dg terbongkarnya akun fufufafa yg ga trima rakyat. Rakyat ga mau punya wakil presiden kelasnya rendah. Ijazah ga jelas, julid, hobinya koleksi mainan bukannya buku bacaan berkelas. Kalau presidennya ga kbratan hinaan wakilnya artinya lemah.rkty brharap dua2 di anulir.</i>	With the exposure of Fufufafa's account that does not accept the people. The people do not want a vice president of low class. The diploma is unclear, gossipy, hobbies include collecting toys instead of sophisticated reading books. If the president is not burdened by the vice president's insults, it means weak. The people hope both will be annulled.
@_nrlch	<i>Pecah belah? Bukannya sdh dilakukan sejak munculnya sosok gorong2. Ditambah skrg muncul fufufafa, yg isinya menghina, ga hanya kpd lawan politik, bahkan Nabi &amp; Palestina dibencinya. Semua yg terjadi bkn kebetulan. Tuhan sdg memperlihatkan kualitas pemimpin yg layak utk negeri ini</i>	Divide and conquer? Hasn't it been happening since the emergence of the sewer figure. Now Fufufafa has appeared, which contains insults, not only towards political opponents but even the Prophet & Palestine are hated. Everything that happens is not a coincidence. God is showing the quality of leaders worthy of this country.
@sadewo77465388	<i>Masyaallah kalau benar Fufufafa itu Gibran betapa malunya rakyat Indonesia punya pemimpin yg ga punya hati nurani, bejat, amoral, sadis, songong, blo on</i>	Masya Allah, if Fufufafa is really Gibran, how embarrassing for the Indonesian people to have a leader who has no conscience, is depraved, amoral, sadistic, arrogant, and foolish.

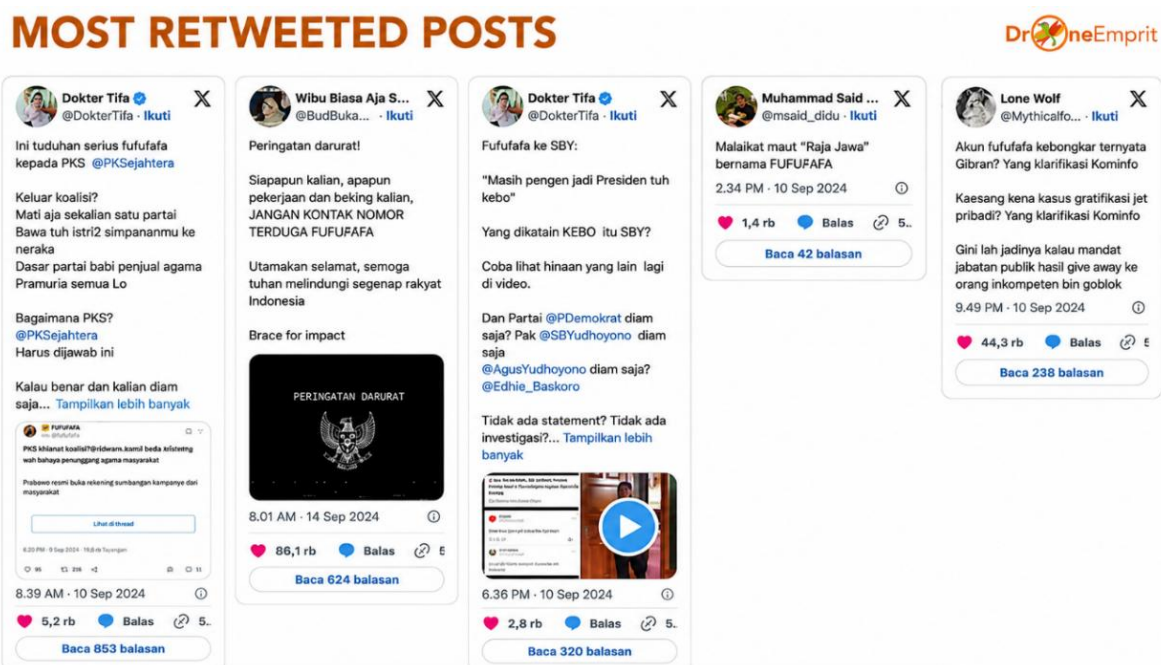
Source: Processed by the author, 2026

These recurring moral expressions should not be interpreted simply as isolated ethical reactions. References to morality, decency, conscience, and integrity become analytically significant as civic norms because they were repeatedly articulated by different users, collectively recognized across the discourse, and employed as shared criteria for evaluating the legitimacy of political leaders. In other words, moral language

acquired public significance not merely because it contained ethical vocabulary, but because it provided a common normative framework through which citizens interpreted the controversy and judged the conduct of political elites. Through repeated circulation and mutual reinforcement, these shared expectations became symbolic resources that enabled dispersed individuals to recognize common concerns and coordinate collective responses.

In this sense, cultural norms operated not merely as private moral evaluations but as forms of civic glue that connected citizens through common understandings of political propriety, public accountability, and leadership ethics. Consistent with Putnam's conception of social capital (Makulbayeva & Sharipova, 2024), these collectively recognized norms facilitated cooperation and collective scrutiny by generating normative trust among participants. Rather than emerging from formal organizations, this form of digital social capital was produced through shared moral expectations that encouraged citizens to monitor political actors and participate in public judgment. However, the absence of substantial counter-discourse indicates that this social capital predominantly assumed the form of bonding social capital, strengthening solidarity among like-minded users while simultaneously limiting exposure to alternative perspectives.

Picture 3: Narration from key opinion leader



Source: Drone Emprit Academy

Moreover, many users expressed disappointment not only toward the alleged account owner but also toward elite figures perceived as defending or normalizing unethical behavior, as reflected in the criticism directed at Prof. Jimly. This suggests that public anger extended beyond a single actor and became a broader evaluation of the political elite ecosystem, revealing latent distrust toward institutional authorities. Some comments further linked the controversy to the declining moral quality of national leadership and portrayed political elites as increasingly disconnected from public expectations. These reactions indicate that digital controversies function not merely as emotional outlets but as arenas in which citizens collectively negotiate standards of legitimacy and accountability. Consequently, the Fufufafa controversy demonstrates how cultural norms can be transformed into norm-based digital social capital that enables citizens to exercise collective scrutiny over political authority, even though such participation remains vulnerable to exclusivity and echo-chamber dynamics. Furthermore, the technological affordances of social media also played a central role.

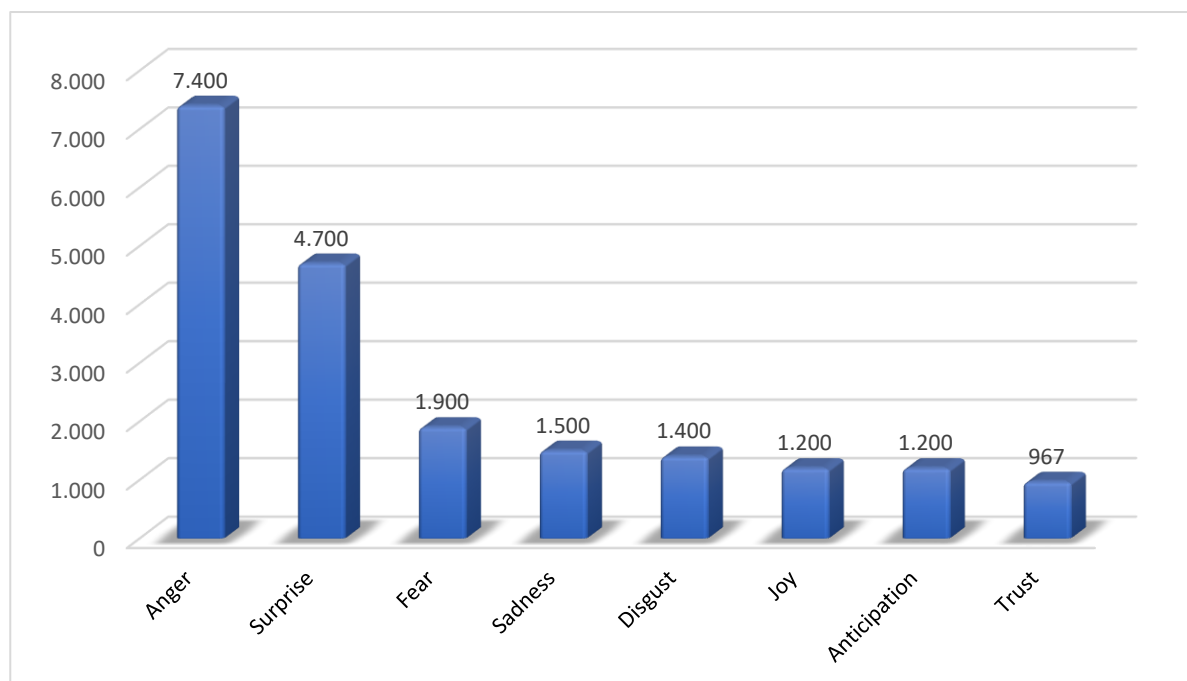
The use of hashtags enabled decentralized coordination of discourse, functioning as connective markers that guided public attention and organized conversations.

As Jungherr (2015) emphasizes, hashtags in political communication serve as agenda-setting tools, enabling citizens to influence the salience of issues independently of traditional media. In this case, hashtags like #TangkapJokowi and #JejakDigital not only reflected public anger but also created momentum for collective framing. The predominance of retweets (over 90% of interactions) further highlights the viral logic of platforms like X, which prioritize replication over deliberation. This explains why the controversy sustained public attention for several weeks, a rare occurrence in Indonesia's fast-moving digital culture. The Picture 3 represents the mainstream opinion over the trend. Finally, the structure of the discourse itself reflected the influence of key opinion leaders. By shaping and amplifying narratives, central accounts acted as nodes through which broader publics engaged with the controversy. This dynamic reflects both the affordances of digital platforms and the persistence of hierarchical communication patterns within networked environments. In sum, the *Fufufafa* case was not simply the product of one anonymous account but the convergence of political personalization, normative expectations, and technological logics of virality.

### Transformative Implications

The implications of the *Fufufafa* phenomenon for Indonesian democracy are profound, illustrating both opportunities for enhanced civic engagement and risks of democratic erosion. Emotion analysis reveals that anger was the most dominant response, with 7,400 posts expressing outrage at perceived insults, misuse of state facilities, and nepotism. Public anger was largely directed toward issues perceived as violations of collective moral standards, including insults toward political figures, alleged abuse of power, misogynistic expressions, and suspicions of nepotism. This illustrates how political participation in the digital age has become increasingly effective, with moral dissatisfaction serving as a key driver of mobilization. Such affective participation aligns with Theocharis and van Deth's (2017) argument that contemporary participation has shifted from institutionalized forms toward emotionally driven, digitally mediated practices. In this context, emotions functioned as mechanisms of civic signaling, allowing citizens to collectively express dissatisfaction toward actions considered incompatible with social norms and democratic values.

Picture 4: The data of public emotion



Source: Drone Emprit Academy, modified by author.

Surprise, as the second most common emotion (4,700 posts), highlights another dimension of digital political engagement. Public surprise was triggered by the dissonance between expectations and official clarifications, particularly the Ministry of Communication and Information's statement denying Gibran's involvement. Additionally, the account's audacity in mocking elites and female celebrities fueled public astonishment. Within deliberative democracy theory, this reflects a form of epistemic shock (Habermas, 1996), where citizens are confronted with information that destabilizes collective perceptions of institutions and actors. Such shocks can erode institutional trust while simultaneously prompting demands for accountability and clarification (Muhid, 2024). While emotions like anger and surprise can catalyze civic mobilization, they also risk degenerating into mob opinion if not channeled constructively (Sunstein, 2018). The dominance of one-sided hashtags and the absence of counter-discourses reveal echo chambers, where repetition reinforces pre-existing views, leaving no space for dissent. This dynamic undermines the ideals of deliberative democracy, which depend on pluralism and rational debate. Instead, digital engagement in the *Fufufafa* case tended toward normative consensus expressed through emotional intensity, rather than balanced deliberation.

However, the significance of these emotional reactions lies not merely in their intensity but in how they became collectively organized through shared cultural narratives. Public expressions repeatedly invoked concepts such as morality, propriety, decency, conscience, and ethical leadership, demonstrating that Indonesian netizens interpreted the controversy through culturally embedded frameworks rather than purely legal or procedural considerations. These moral expressions did not automatically constitute civic norms; rather, they became civic norms because they operated as shared interpretive resources that connected dispersed individuals into a collective moral community. Through hashtags, retweets, and repeated narratives, citizens recognized common ethical concerns and coordinated public reactions around them. In this sense, cultural norms functioned as social capital by producing symbolic solidarity, collective trust, and shared expectations regarding political accountability. Similar to Putnam's conception of social capital, these shared normative values facilitated collective civic action by enabling individuals to participate in coordinated forms of digital criticism and public pressure. Thus, moral discourse became a mechanism through which emotional dissatisfaction was transformed into civic mobilization.

This phenomenon does not stand alone. In the history of Indonesia's digital politics, we have witnessed similar patterns in movements such as *#ReformasiDikorupsi* in 2019, *#TolakOmnibusLaw* in 2020, or the public resistance against the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE), which was often perceived as misused. In all these cases, social media served as a mobilizing structure (Tilly, 2019), connecting civil actors, amplifying messages, and creating political pressure. Habermas argues that society is composed of private actors who collectively construct discursive arenas or spaces of public discourse. In this way, citizens take part in the reproduction of the public sphere across different domains of society. What makes the *Fufufafa* case distinct, however, is its direct involvement of the Vice President-Elect, making public speculation more sensitive and reactive. This was further exacerbated by post-election polarization, which divided society into militant factions supporting different political contenders.

From the perspective of political participation, Verba and Nie (1972) define it as citizen activities aimed at influencing government, whether in the selection of public officials or in shaping the policies they adopt. Such participation does not necessarily take formal forms such as elections but can also emerge through political expressions on social media. Furthermore, in Habermas's view, the communicative rights of citizens are primarily exercised in informal, inclusive discourses that address all relevant themes. Ideally, these sensitive voices should then be processed and responded to within the political system (Hardiman, 2009). However, in the *Fufufafa* case, the reality shows that the government, as the executor of the formal political system, did not respond seriously to these sensitive voices reverberating across social media. The response came only through the Minister of Communication and Information, Budi Arie, who asserted that the account did not belong to Gibran Rakabuming Raka and admitted that an investigative team was still working on the case. On what grounds, then, did Budi Arie make such a claim:

*A team has conducted checks. We will announce it once we find out who owns the account. But for sure, it is not Gibran's. The investigation is ongoing, it is being traced.” (Muhid, 2024)*

Similarly, Gibran himself—who was at the center of this digital controversy and simultaneously serving as Vice President-Elect—responded with indifference and ambiguity: *“Well, ask the account owner.” (Trisetiawan, 2024)*. In this regard, when citizens perceive that their criticisms and demands are met with ambiguity or disregard, distrust toward political institutions is likely to intensify. Rather than functioning as a bridge between society and the state, the digital public sphere may become an arena of frustration, where emotions are amplified without meaningful institutional responses. Such conditions risk reinforcing reactive democracy (Gerbaudo, 2022), where political participation is increasingly driven by anger and moral outrage rather than by reciprocal communication between citizens and governing institutions. Consequently, the sustainability of democratic legitimacy depends not only on expanding opportunities for participation but also on ensuring that state institutions are capable of listening to, engaging with, and translating public concerns into accountable political processes.

This phenomenon demonstrates the potential of digital culture to mobilize civic norms for democratic purposes. By collectively rejecting the account's content, netizens employed cultural narratives to condemn the anonymous account's behavior, which was perceived as violating social norms. This indicates that Indonesia's digital culture remains shaped by traditional values, despite the modernity of its media platforms. This form of normative mobilization represents a kind of digital social capital that can strengthen democratic accountability when supported by digital literacy and institutional responsiveness. In this sense, the *Fufufafa* case embodies the dual role of social media as both a risk and a resource for democracy, depending on whether emotional participation is translated into constructive political outcomes.

A critical reflection on this case leads to two main conclusions. First, digital political participation in Indonesia is not merely reactive but also normative, deeply rooted in local cultural values. Second, without adequate digital literacy and healthy deliberation, such participation remains vulnerable to polarization and the mere mobilization of emotions. Therefore, it is essential for the government, civil society, and social media platforms to collaborate in ensuring that the digital sphere continues to function as an inclusive and constructive democratic arena.

Within the framework of deliberative democracy, social media should serve as a space where citizens exchange ideas on equal and rational grounds. This model emphasizes the importance of communicative procedures in securing legal legitimacy through a dynamic process of interaction between the political system and culturally mobilized public spheres (Hardiman, 2009). However, the empirical reality often aligns more closely with reactive democracy, which is driven largely by emotion. The challenge, therefore, is how to bridge the two: harnessing the energy of reactive participation to cultivate a healthier form of deliberative discourse.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This research demonstrates that the phenomenon of the anonymous social media account *Fufufafa* extends beyond a controversy surrounding digital ethics and anonymity, functioning instead as a significant arena for the production and negotiation of civic norms in Indonesia's digital public sphere. Through analysis of interaction networks, hashtags, and emotional expressions on the platform X, the study found that public participation was largely driven by anger and surprise, reflecting collective dissatisfaction with political elites, distrust of institutions, and sensitivity to perceived violations of morality and public decency. More importantly, these reactions were not merely spontaneous emotional outbursts, but forms of norm-based political participation through which citizens articulated expectations regarding honesty, accountability, and ethical leadership. In this sense, the *Fufufafa* controversy illustrates how digital participation can serve as a mechanism for constructing social capital, in which shared moral values create symbolic bonds among citizens and encourage collective scrutiny of political power. Therefore, the study confirms that social media operates

not only as a technological communication platform but also as a contested democratic arena in which political legitimacy and civic norms are continuously negotiated.

The study contributes conceptually to debates on digital democracy by demonstrating that civic participation in online spaces should not be understood solely through the empowerment-manipulation binary. Instead, the findings suggest that digital controversies can function as sites where emotional participation, cultural values, and democratic expectations converge to shape civic-oriented social capital. This expands discussions of deliberative democracy by showing that emotional expressions such as anger and surprise may operate as early indicators of democratic concern and public moral evaluation, particularly in contexts where institutional trust is fragile. At the methodological level, the integration of Social Media Network Analysis (SMNA), sentiment analysis, and media triangulation enabled the study to capture both the structural dimensions of online interaction and the affective dimensions of political engagement. The findings also reinforce the argument that Indonesia's digital culture remains strongly influenced by local moral frameworks, even within highly modernized and algorithmic communication environments.

Nevertheless, several limitations remain. The study focused primarily on discourse on platform X during a period of heightened controversy, limiting its ability to capture the longer-term evolution of narratives or the dynamics across other digital platforms. In addition, while the analysis identified dominant emotions and civic narratives, it did not fully explore how online participation translated into offline political behavior or sustained civic action. Future research could therefore adopt longitudinal and comparative approaches to examine how digital controversies evolve into broader political mobilization, as well as how civic norms are negotiated differently across platforms and social groups. Further studies may also investigate the role of platform governance, algorithmic amplification, and digital literacy in shaping whether emotional participation contributes to deliberative democracy or instead reinforces polarization and reactive forms of political engagement.

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