Virtual Communication War in Protests Against the 2024 Election Law in Indonesia: A Netnographic Study on X Hashtags

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes virtual communication related to opinion wars on social media concerning the rejection of the revision of the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law in 2024 in Indonesia. A qualitative approach using a netnography method is employed to examine the contestation of two hashtags on X social media: #KawalPutusanMK and #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja. The hashtag #KawalPutusanMK is used by the public as a form of protest against the revision of the 2024 Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law, which is perceived as lacking transparency and threatening democracy. In contrast, the hashtag #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja emerged as a counter-hashtag supporting political stability and government policies. The results show that interactions on the #KawalPutusanMK hashtag are significantly higher than those on #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja, which tends to be viewed as a propaganda tool by social media users. Furthermore, the #KawalPutusanMK hashtag successfully mobilized public opinion through a strong narrative that was considered authentic, while the #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja hashtag faced many negative accusations. This research reveals how social media serves as an important arena for shaping public opinion and how perceptions of authenticity influence the effectiveness of a movement.

1. Introduction

Indonesia's political dynamics heated up after the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia immediately revised Law Number 10/2016 on Local Government Election (Pilkada). This was done a day after the Constitutional Court (MK) changed the Local Government Election (Pilkada) nomination requirements through decisions number 60/PUU-XXII/2024 and number 70/PPU-XXII/2024. The Constitutional Court's decision related to a lawsuit from the President of the Labor Party and the Chairman of the Gelora Party as well as Constitutional Law Student of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta A Fahrur Rozi and Podomoro University Student Anthony Lee was considered to provide new hope for the return of democracy after its final and binding decision to change the nomination threshold by political parties in the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law by 20 percent of DPRD seats or 25 percent of valid votes. In its decision, the Constitutional Court provided a new threshold based on population. Through this decision, the Constitutional Court stated that a party or a coalition of political parties participating in the election can nominate candidates for regional heads even though they do not have DPRD seats https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/. The Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law also regulates the lowest age limit for gubernatorial candidates is 30 years old and regent/mayor candidates is 25 years old. The Constitutional Court's

decision number 70/PPU-XXII/2024 emphasizes that the minimum age limit for gubernatorial candidates remains 30 years old and mayor / regent candidates remains 25 years old, when they are determined by the General Election Commission (KPU) as a candidate pair, not when they are inaugurated.

However, on August 21, 2024, the Legislative Body of the House of Representatives proposed a revision of the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law that contradicted the Constitutional Court's decision, still including a nomination threshold of 20 percent of seats or 25 percent of valid votes for political parties to propose candidates in the regional elections. In addition, the issue of the age requirement for gubernatorial candidates was subject to a different interpretation by the Legislative Body, which decided that it would be calculated at the swearing-in of elected candidates. The House of Representatives held a Legislative Body meeting on Wednesday (21/8/2024) at 10:00 a.m. The Legislative Body immediately formed a Working Committee on the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Bill. The committee then discussed the Problem Inventory List (DIM) of the Pilkada Bill, which lasted only about an hour. The meeting then continued with the presentation of each faction's opinions, starting at 3:30 p.m. WIB. The Legislative Body meeting leader, Achmad Baidowi, concluded that the revision of the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law was approved by the majority of parties. The decision was made at 4:55 p.m. WIB, meaning the revision of this law took only seven hours to be agreed upon at the Legislative Body level. The Legislative Body also annulled two crucial Constitutional Court rulings in the draft content of the revised Pilkada Law. In response to the DPR's political actions, the public immediately reacted strongly, protesting the DPR's decision.

People from all walks of life staged protests and demonstrations against the efforts of the DPR and the Government to revise the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law after the Constitutional Court's decision, which is considered final and binding. Public outrage began with netizen movements on Twitter (X), Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, spread widely in various WhatsApp groups, and other social media platforms. There were strong reactions online and calls for large demonstrations in front of the DPR/MPR Building. This means that political participation related to greater expressions of anger is found online on these digital platforms, as not everyone can take to the streets. Social media has become an easier, more affordable and freer means of expression. Social media is also able to mobilize the masses, share information, and create solidarity (Diamond & Plattner, 2012). It is not surprising that when this polemic occurred, social media was still filled with trending that reflected "anger" towards the destruction of democracy, politicians who were considered subservient to dynasties and oligarchies, and the actions of the authorities that were considered excessive. Political space in the era of digitalization is not limited to physical space, according to Castells (2010), the development of information technology has made political space wider in scope and unlimited (Castells, 2011).

Social media platforms offer a variety of communication tools such as videos, texts and photos that facilitate the spread of communication messages, particularly through platforms such as Twitter (X). Twitter (X) is widely recognized for its influential role in spreading political messages, not only in Indonesia but also in several other countries, including the United States. During the 44th US presidential election campaign circa 2008, which resulted in Barack Obama's victory, hashtags became a significant communication tool. In particular, the hashtag #Obama was used for various purposes, including information dissemination and search, becoming a trending topic on Twitter (X) at the time. The hashtag was accompanied by text that conveyed a specific communication message (Puspitasari & Anggoro, 2024). In this case, social media is treated as a means of "communication war". The content of social media is like a war from its users. They usually use certain hashtags in the "communication war" to dominate the conversation on social media. The meaning of hashtags goes beyond the organization or dissemination of content and represents an integral element of contemporary communication through social media (Rauschnabel et al., 2019). In addition, hashtags can serve as a suggestive element in the digital realm (Damanik, 2018). and often convey emotional imagery, narratives, and clear frames in digital discourse (Eriyanto, 2020). The hashtags (#) that we often see on social media serve to organize ideas, feelings, and comments from users. Initially, hashtags were created to facilitate searches, but now they have a broader meaning and give rise to

interesting thoughts on how they can affect change in various fields (Watson, 2020). In the polemics over the revision of Law Number 10/2016 on Local Government Election (Pilkada), people also voiced their movements and aspirations through the hashtag #KawalPutusanMK on social media Twitter (X). The hashtag #KawalPutusanMK, for example, was pinned on the @KontraS account uploading a photo that read "Indonesia Will Not Be Golden If It Continues to Be Led by Jokowi's Family and Crooked Politicians!". writer and actor, Raditya Dika also suddenly drifted and participated in voicing #KawalPutusanMK on his social media.A short time later, a counter-hashtag emerged with the #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja movement. This hashtag focuses more on and supports political stability and government policies. Inviting the public not to panic too much and consider the polemic regarding the revision of Law Number 10/2016 on Local Government Election (Pilkada) as something that is not serious. The hashtag #KawalPutusanMK emerged as a form of digital protest against the revision of the 2024 Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law. This hashtag has become a platform for netizens to voice their dissatisfaction with the legislative process, which is considered non-transparent and threatens democracy in Indonesia. On the other hand, the hashtag #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja is used by groups that support the revision or believe that concerns about the impact of the revision are exaggerated. Both hashtags reflect the polarization of opinions in society captured in virtual communication.

Hashtag wars are often used to mobilize public support and influence public opinion. By using hashtags, each group seeks to attract attention, garner support, and shape a narrative that supports their position. A "hashtag war", where two narratives supported by opposing groups are tweeted repeatedly through different hashtags. As such, political hashtag wars are based on different and opposing narratives (Soares & Recuero, 2021). This study aims to determine how Virtual Communication in the hashtags #KawalPutusanMK and #IndonesiaBaikBaikSaja on social media X at the time of the polemic regarding the revision of Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning Local Government Election (Pilkada) occurred in Indonesia. Virtual communication is a relationship between two or more people regarding the process of sending and receiving messages on cyberspace facilities in an appropriate way so that messages can be understood. The virtual communication process uses technology, especially the internet, as a means or medium for communication. Social Network refers to connections formed in social relationships between individuals, groups, and various other collective forms. (Nugraha et al., 2024). In addition, this research also uses agenda setting theory to analyze how media and social media users influence and shape public perceptions of related issues. Agenda setting creates public awareness by emphasizing issues that are considered the most significant to be noticed, heard, read, and believed through mass media (Kurniawan & Irwansyah, 2021).

2. Method

Researchers use a qualitative approach in determining research methods. Creswell states that qualitative research is an approach or an inquiry aimed at exploring and understanding a central symptom or main phenomenon(Creswell, 2017). Thus, the researcher here plays a role in determining the focus of the research, selecting data sources, collecting data, assessing data quality, analyzing data, interpreting findings, and drawing conclusions related to how communication in the rejection of the 2024 Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law revision is portrayed through the hashtags #KawalPutusanMK and #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja on Social Media X. Virtual communication refers to the communication process carried out via cyberspace media (Arifah & Candrasari, 2022). Qualitative research methodology is conducted comprehensively, with researchers actively involved in the field for an extended period. The "field" in this context refers to a social media platform, specifically X, as this research applies the netnography method. Netnography (also known as internet ethnography) is an adaptation of ethnographic research methods in the virtual domain (Sahrasad et al., 2020). By using netnography, researchers can explore the beliefs, values, traditions, and behaviors of certain online communities or groups (Sri & Astuti, 2019). Kozinets (1998) states that netnography is an online research method aimed at understanding how social interaction occurs. Netnography also involves very specific steps that distinguish it from traditional real-life research. These steps include data collection, analysis, research ethics, and representation (Kozinets &

Handelman, 1998). Additionally, this research also employs agenda-setting theory to analyze how media and social media users influence and shape public perceptions of related issues (McCombs et al., 2018). The use of agenda-setting theory helps researchers formulate a framework for understanding how various groups (through hashtags) aim to direct public attention to certain issues and how this creates specific narratives or perceptions in the online public space.

3. Result and Discussion

In the digital age, social media has become the main arena for various groups of people to voice their opinions and mobilize support, especially in the context of contentious political issues. Social media has fostered new forms of political communication and participation (Kasmani, 2022). Social media has become a highly influential tool in global warfare, politics, and culture. Social media platforms, originally designed to connect people, have turned into battlegrounds used by states, organizations, and individuals to influence public opinion, organize political movements, and even run military and intelligence operations (Singer & Brooking, 2018). In this case, the concept of 'Like War' in Peter Singer's book "LikeWar: The weaponization of social media" also explains that social media is used as a powerful, cheap, and easy tool to win wars, by controlling the narrative, exploiting the dominance of opponents, spreading false information online that appears genuine (can deceive the truth), exaggerating success by denigrating opponents, thus inspiring wider fear and panic (Singer & Brooking, 2018).

Hashtags are often used to mobilize public support and influence public opinion. By using hashtags, each group seeks to attract attention, garner support, and shape a narrative that supports their position. According to (Page, 2012) hashtags are a modern adaptation of intertextuality that functions as punctuation of expression (Page, 2012). Hashtags are indirect speech in the political arena. indirect speech is not only a socio-political cue but also something that is monotonously produced to influence the audience's interpretation and decision (Pinker et al., 2008). The rejection of the revision of the 2024 Election Law on platform X (formerly Twitter) is a clear example of how virtual space is used as a forum for public discussion and debate. People also voiced their movements and aspirations through the hashtag #KawalPutusanMK on X social media. A short while later, a counter-hashtag emerged with the #IndonesiaBaikBaikSaja movement. Hashtag wars are often used to mobilize public support and influence public opinion. Through an analysis of the two opposing hashtags, #KawalPutusanMK and #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja, this research seeks to understand the communication that emerged, as well as how each group utilized the hashtags and social media platform X to influence public opinion.

In the first hashtag, #KawalPutusanMK, the results of netnography analysis of conversations on social media X show that this hashtag managed to become the number 1 trending with more than 2.3 million tweets. This trend reflects the magnitude of public attention to the issue of revising the 2024 Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law, especially related to the Constitutional Court's decision. This hashtag is used as a means of mass mobilization and an invitation to oversee the ongoing legal process. Netray Media Monitoring also conducted monitoring During channel X monitoring, at least 1,293,682 posts containing the hashtag #KawalPutusanMK were found. The total impressions of netizen uploads were recorded at 7.7 million times in the form of replies, reposts, and favorites. Conversations on the topic could potentially reach 406.2 million Indonesian-speaking accounts. The hashtag #KawalPutusanMK began to be widely used on August 21. The hashtag was almost non-existent on August 20 and its intensity reached its highest level on August 22. After that, the quantity of netizen uploads per day began to gradually decrease until the end of the monitoring period on August 26, 2024.
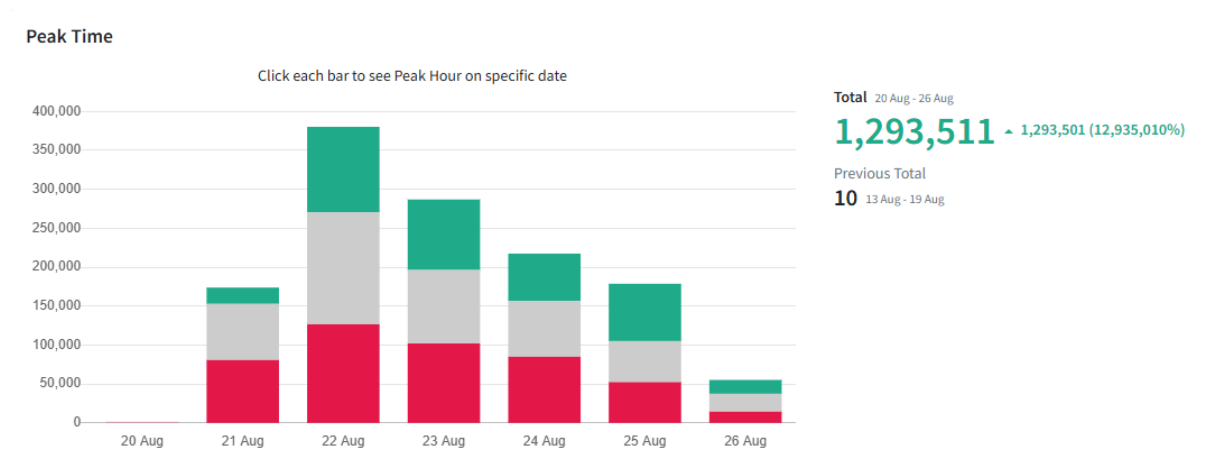
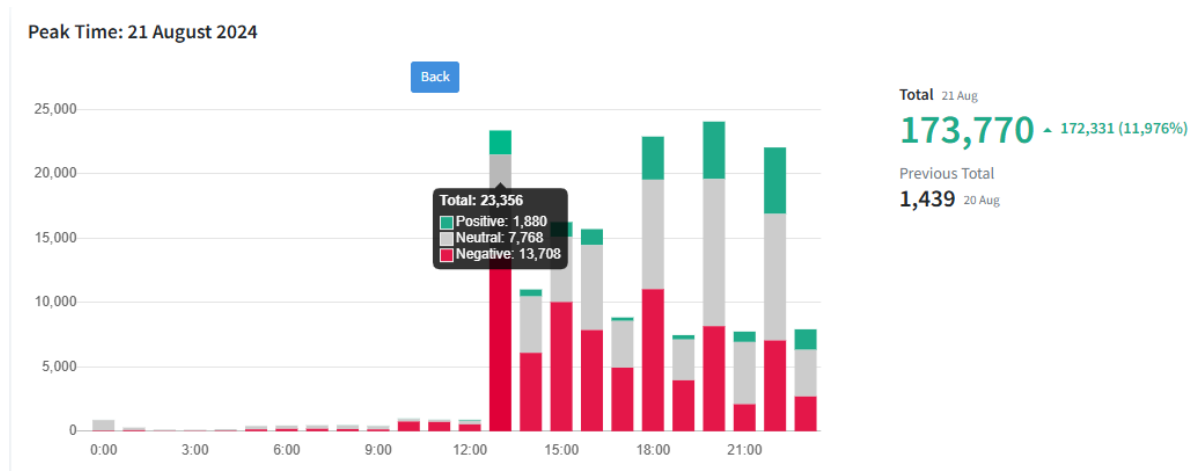Figure 1. Total uploads of #KawalputusanMK on August 20-26, 2024

(Source: https://analysis.netray.id/)

Figure 2. #KawalputusanMK post on August 21, 2024
(Source: https://analysis.netray.id/)

The graph shows the peak of activity in using the hashtag #KawalPutusanMK on August 21, 2024, with a total of 23,356 posts at 14:00 which were dominated by negative sentiments (13,708 posts), while neutral and positive sentiments were recorded at 7,768 and 1,880 posts respectively. The #KawalPutusanMK posts, which were dominated by negative sentiments, showed that people in general felt disappointed or angry regarding the decision to revise the 2024 Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law under discussion. With 13,708 posts with negative sentiments, this reflects widespread dissatisfaction among X social media users with the issues being raised, possibly related to the revision of the 2024 Election Law which is considered not in line with public expectations.

The analysis also saw strong reactions from users. The use of the hashtag was dominated by uploading photos and videos of demonstrations in various cities in Indonesia.

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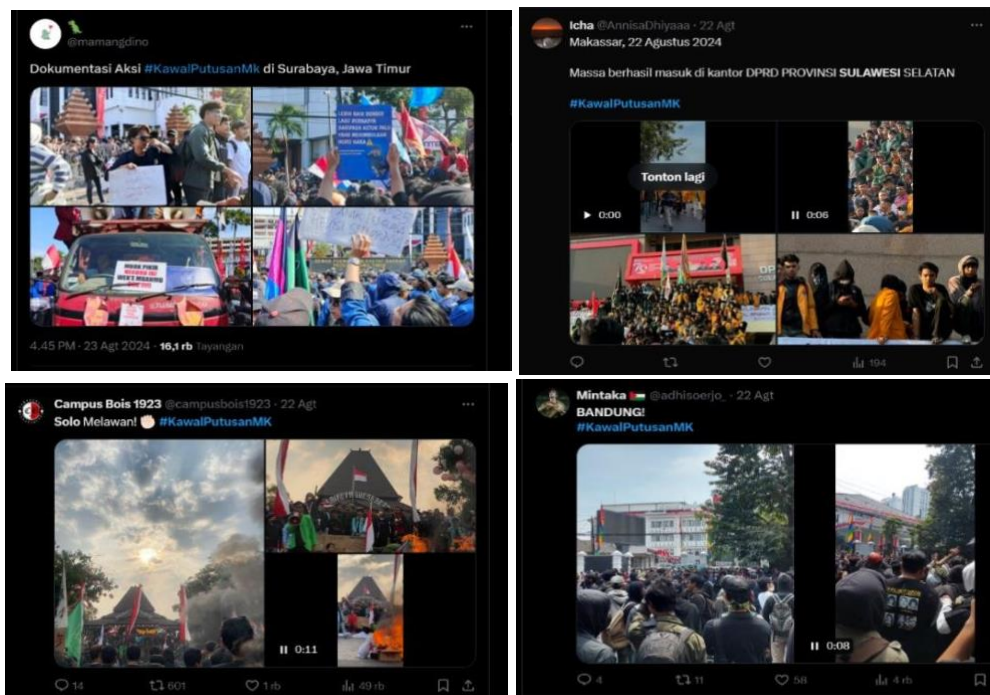
Figure 3. Demonstrations in various cities in Indonesia under the hashtag #KawalPutusanMK
(Source: social media X.com)

The hashtag #KawalPutusanMK not only functions as a tool for information dissemination, but also as a means of mass mobilization. This is reflected in the dominance of uploads in the form of photos and videos of demonstrations in various major cities in Indonesia. These posts show that resistance to the revision of the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law is not limited to cyberspace, but is also followed by real action in the field. The success of social media as a movement strategy cannot be separated from the key characteristics of social media. The first character is form. Each form of social media is able to mobilize support if used appropriately according to its character and main function (Della Porta, 2013).

Content analysis also shows that the hashtag #KawalPutusanMK is often accompanied by narratives such as "Because they want to please one family, one country is bothered." These posts are filled with various reactions, ranging from anger, ridicule, criticism, to blasphemy. With the dominance of photos and videos of demonstrations in major cities, social media not only disseminated information, but also influenced public attention to the issue of revising the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law. The hashtag creates a framework or agenda that pushes the issue to the forefront and makes it the public's main concern. The accompanying narratives, such as "Gara-gara wants to please one family, one country is bothered," strengthen the public focus on certain actors who are considered responsible, while leading public opinion towards a more critical and emotional resistance.

Figure 4. Some of the angry tweets in the hashtag #KawalPutusanMK
(Source: social media X.com)

Figure 5. Some of the angry tweets in the hashtag #KawalPutusanMK
(Source: social media X.com)

Figure 4 also shows that posts on social media X with the hashtag #KawalPutusanMK express strong emotional reactions. The analysis also shows that the hashtag is an expression of X social media users against the government. The tweets reflected the notion that the government's decision favored the interests of a particular group over the public interest. This narrative reinforced the negative sentiments reflected in the images and videos of demonstrations that accompanied the posts. Greater expressions of anger are more prominent on online platforms. This is because not everyone has the opportunity or ability to take to the streets, so they choose to vent their anger on social media, which is much more accessible, cheaper, and allows more freedom of expression. Social media was filled with trending topics showing "outrage" at the destruction of democracy, outrage at politicians perceived as subservient to dynasties and oligarchs, and outrage at the actions of the authorities. However, amongst this outpouring of emotion, there were also funny lines and various forms of criticism circulating on social media, all directed at the government, especially at President Jokowi's family. These interactions reflect the diversity of public responses, ranging from strong protests to satire satirizing the current political conditions

Figure 6. Some of the tweets in the hashtag #KawalPutusanMK
(Source: social media X.com)

Figure 6 reflects broader social dynamics in society. An analysis of the use of phrases such as "Wibu Bersatu" and "Dari kawan kawan Gen-Z" can provide insight into how different groups of people positioned themselves and interpreted their participation in the protests. Hashtags and phrases like these help create a sense of community among social media users. By highlighting the participation of unconventional groups, such as Gen Z or wibu, these narratives broaden the spectrum of support for the protest movement and show that the resistance to the revision of the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law is an inclusive movement supported by various social identities. The use of these phrases also has an impact on public opinion. By featuring participation from diverse groups, including those that are usually apolitical, these hashtags can reinforce the perception that the revision of the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law is an important issue that requires serious attention from various levels of society. This can influence how the issue is understood and discussed in the public sphere. In the second hashtag #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja, it displays something different. This hashtag was created as a form of resistance to the #KawalPutusanMK hashtag regarding the polemics over the Revision of the Election Law in 2024 with a narrative that tends to calm and invite the public to remain calm. there is an effort to create an alternative narrative that emphasizes calm and stability in the midst of political polemics. This hashtag tends to be used by groups that support government policies or those who want the political situation not to escalate. Users the decision to the government and related institutions. of this hashtag often invite the public not to be provoked by controversial issues brought by rejection movement, such as in the #KawalPutusanMK hashtag, and prefer to entrust the decision to the government and related institutions.

Figure 7. Some tweets within the hashtag #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja
(Source: social media X.com)

Figure 8. hashtag #Indonesiabaikbaiksa and the emergence of the issue of asset forfeiture
(Source: social media X.com)

Based on netnography analysis, posts with the hashtag #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja are often accompanied by comparisons between other issues such as the Asset Forfeiture Bill. This comparison is often interpreted as a form of issue diversion, which aims to divert public attention from one important issue to another. This can be explained using agenda setting theory, which emphasizes that the media agenda - in this case social media - has a strong influence on what is considered important by the public and is widely discussed. When the hashtag #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja appears with a narrative that diverts public attention to other issues such as the Asset Forfeiture Bill, this indicates an attempt to modify the public agenda. In this way, public attention can potentially be diverted from the polemics over the revision of the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law to other issues that are also positioned as important, thus marginalizing the relevance of the student movement that rejects the policy. In the political context, this issue-shifting strategy is very relevant to agenda setting theory. If public attention shifts to other issues, then the initial issue, in this case the revision of the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law, can be considered less important or no longer a priority. As a result, the student movement and those fighting against the revision may lose momentum and public support. The public who are affected by this alternative narrative will focus more on new issues that are framed by #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja hashtag users as more urgent. This process can also show how power in social media is used to reorganize public focus on certain issues. When social media massively displays narratives that compare the revision of the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law with other issues, it creates the perception that what the students are fighting for (as in the hashtag #KawalPutusanMK) is not as crucial as they think, because there are other issues that are more important.

Figure 9. Responses in #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja tweets
(Source: social media X.com)

Figure 9 shows that posts on social media X with the hashtag #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja often get negative responses from other users. The comment sections of these posts are often filled with accusations that the account owner is a buzzer or someone who may have been paid to run a hashtag war as a counterpoint to the #KawalPutusanMK hashtag. This phenomenon shows a clear polarization between the two groups supporting the hashtags, where each hashtag represents an opposing political position. Polarization on social media often leads to negative responses to those perceived as supporting the status quo. In the context of #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja, the hashtag is often perceived as a way to stifle criticism of the government, which in turn triggers the assumption that the narrative is not coming from ordinary citizens, but from organized groups, such as buzzers. This view is reinforced by the many campaigns that have involved buzzers in the past, making the public more sensitive to the possibility of opinion manipulation on social media.

In the journal titled "How Effective Is Online Outrage?", moral outrage on social media can indeed trigger or accelerate collective action. This happens because emotions like anger often motivate individuals to act and join social movements or protests. People feel compelled by moral issues they consider important, and social media makes it easier for them to express these feelings quickly and widely (Brady & Crockett, 2019). Although anger can drive action, the expression of anger online often makes such actions less effective in the long term. This is because, when people are angry, they tend to make rushed decisions without considering the long-term impact. They might focus more on expressing their emotions rather than strategizing to achieve long-term goals (Brady & Crockett, 2019). Anger on social media may succeed in mobilizing people to participate in protests, but since decisions are less strategic and more emotional, these actions may not yield the desired results, or even become counterproductive in the future. However, in the case of protests or hashtag wars on X using #KawalPutusanMK and #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja, these efforts are seen as fruitful. Deputy Speaker of the Indonesian House of Representatives, Sufmi Dasco Ahmad, stated that the revision of the Pilkada Bill was ultimately canceled.

In the use of the hashtag #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja, the interaction that occurs on social media X tends to be lower than the hashtag #KawalPutusanMK, which shows strong support for transparency in the decision process of the Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law. This pattern of minimal interaction indicates a lack of active participation from social media users in discussing the issues raised by the hashtag. In addition, the comments that appeared on the #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja hashtag were dominated by negative accusations, such as the assumption that this hashtag was created as a propaganda tool by certain parties. Many netizens believe that the hashtag was not born out of organic public unrest, but is a campaign supported by buzzers with the aim of shaping certain opinions, and has even been mentioned several times in connection with allegations of financial rewards for those who promote it. In contrast, the #KawalPutusanMK hashtag

is considered more authentic because it is considered a pure expression of public unrest against the policy being discussed. This reinforces the impression that #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja is not able to attract widespread public sympathy or trust, especially when compared to a more organized and focused movement like #KawalPutusanMK. This analysis shows how virtual communication in social spaces can be influenced by perceptions of authenticity and trust, and how hashtags that are perceived to be more "pure" in representing the public voice tend to get higher attention and participation.

4. Conclusion

This research shows that, in the context of the action against the revision of the 2024 Local Government Election (Pilkada) Law, virtual communication patterns through social media—especially through the use of hashtags—play an important role in mobilizing public opinion and strengthening different narratives. The hashtag #KawalPutusanMK succeeded in creating a space for social media users to voice their dissatisfaction and protest against policies that are perceived to threaten democracy. This hashtag has also become a tool for mass mobilization, both virtually and in the real world, as seen in uploads documenting demonstrations in various cities across Indonesia. In contrast, the more pro-government hashtag #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja did not receive as much attention or interaction as #KawalPutusanMK. Despite its aim to create an alternative narrative emphasizing stability, the hashtag faced significant backlash from other users who accused it of being a propaganda tool controlled by buzzers. This research underscores how perceptions of authenticity, trust, and public sentiment affect the effectiveness of a movement in virtual spaces. Hashtags perceived as more organic and authentic, like #KawalPutusanMK, tend to be more successful in mobilizing support, while hashtags perceived as "orders," such as #Indonesiabaikbaiksaja, are more often criticized and suspected of manipulation. These findings have important implications for understanding how community groups and political actors can utilize social media to shape public opinion and how perceptions of authenticity and the motivations behind an online campaign can determine its impact.

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