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Netizens, Narratives, and Political Fantasies: A Netnography of the “Fufufafa” Discourse on YouTube

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the construction of digital political discourse surrounding the “Fufufafa” phenomenon on YouTube, focusing on how collective meanings are formed through user interactions and how Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) can be applied to large-scale, platform-based political discourse in the Indonesian context. Employing a netnographic approach, this study analyses 1,642 user comments collected from a high-engagement political discussion video on YouTube, covering the period between September 2024 and February 2025. The data were examined using theory-driven thematic analysis based on SCT, focusing on the identification of symbolic cues, fantasy themes, fantasy chains, and rhetorical visions. Digital political discourse on YouTube operates through symbolic convergence processes in which users collectively construct shared narratives, negotiate political mediated environments. Three dominant fantasy themes emerged: (1) the construction of the “Fufufafa” account as a politically charged controversy, (2) collective aspirations for transparent and accountable governance, and (3) the symbolic positioning of public figures as either heroic or controversial actors. These themes develop into fantasy chains through repetitive and interactive comment patterns, ultimately forming a broader rhetorical vision that combines political scepticism, humour, and satire. This study extends the application of SCT to large-scale, platform-based digital discourse, demonstrating how collective meaning-making operates within participatory communication environments shaped by platform logic. The findings offer insights into contemporary political narratives in non-Western digital contexts and highlight the value of integrating netnography and SCT to analyse digitally mediated political discourse.

Keywords: political fantasy, netnographic analysis, digital political discourse, *Fufufafa*, YouTube.

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1.0 Introduction

Digital media are essential to modern society. It serves not only as a means of communication and information but also as a means of constructing reality. Digital media can present social reality in a specific way, enabling audiences to understand it in a specific manner. With the arrival of digital media, online public spheres are not only an instrument of information exchange but also an arena for elaborate social and political constructions. Netnography has demonstrated how online communities construct

collective stories based on interactively validated symbols, narratives, and fantasies (Cheah, 2025; Kozinets, 2015). Previous studies have determined that digital language is not only informative but also performative in which emotion, humour, and satire are utilised to establish social and political solidarity (Collins, 2024, 2025).

The phenomenon of Fufufafa narratives surfacing in political arguments on YouTube follows the way the public constructs both “political fantasies” and “comedic fantasies” from political situations that are perceived as uncertain. This narrative aligns with findings from netnographic research across various other online platforms, where group fantasies are employed to solidify group identity and enhance a sense of belonging in addressing public issues (Dametto & Bonet-Mart, 2024; Fenton et al., 2021; Herlambang, 2022). In Indonesian politics, this shared fantasy can be observed in how netizens relate the accounts of Fufufafa to particular political leaders, creating a cycle of fantasies through supportive comments that strengthen each other (Juditha et al., 2022; Saqib et al., 2023).

Moreover, previous studies have shown that social media is a platform that brings together aspirations for justice, resistance, and hope for more transparent political change (Morapeli & Kazembe, 2024; Sykes, 2024). Public fantasies are most commonly based on the opposition between “justice vs corrupt” or “right vs wrong” and are the foundation of the rhetorical vision of an online community (Shahbazi & Bunker, 2024; Srivastav & Rai, 2022). For the majority, these fantasies are not only satire or mere entertainment but also social commentary and political engagement by citizens (Fitriyah & Nurhaeni, 2021; Huu, 2022).

This study begins with the understanding that the phenomenon of Fufufafa on YouTube is not simply viral political content but rather part of a symbolic convergence process in which digital communities collectively construct narratives, strengthen solidarity, and negotiate their political identities (Bîră et al., 2020; Perreault & Ferrucci, 2019). This demonstrates the relevance and importance of a netnographic approach in examining the dynamics of meaningful online political conversations, in terms of political and comedic fantasy.

This study contributes to the literature in three main ways. First, it bridges SCT with contemporary netnographic approaches, offering a framework for analysing digitally mediated political discourse by integrating symbolic processes with digital ethnographic methods (Abidin, 2020; Kozinets, 2015; Perreault & Ferrucci, 2019). Second, it extends the concept of fantasy themes into the context of participatory culture and algorithmically shaped communication environments, where affective engagement, visibility, and interaction are structured by dynamics (Bucher, 2018; Couldry & Mejias, 2020; Papacharissi, 2019). Third, it provides empirical insights from the Indonesian context, contributing to the diversification of global scholarship on online political discourse, which has been predominantly Western-centric (Couldry & Mejias, 2020; Pink et al., 2016).

2.0 Literature Review

This study is novel in relation to political fantasy and netizen comments on digital media, especially the discussion between Refly Harun and Roy Suryo regarding the Fufufafa phenomenon on YouTube. The novelty of this study lies in the conceptual framework used, namely how symbols, narratives, and collective fantasies are formed through netizen interactions in digital public spaces.

Scholarship in communication and media studies has increasingly focused on how digital platforms shape political narratives through algorithmic amplification, participatory engagement, and networked interaction. Studies have highlighted that online political discourse is driven by user-generated content and structured by platform logics that prioritize visibility, virality, and emotional engagement (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2021; Napoli, 2023). Simultaneously, research on affective publics and participatory culture demonstrates how individuals collectively construct and circulate meanings through shared narratives, memes, and discursive practices in digital environments (Abidin, 2020; Papacharissi, 2019; Pink et al., 2016).

2.1 Symbolic Convergence Theory and Fantasy Theme

Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) framework and Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA) from Bormann (1985) provide tools to read this process. Fantasy themes refer to shared message content that is often dramatised through elements such as jokes, analogies, wordplay, and narratives that trigger a fantasy chain within a group. These dramatised messages enable a process of symbolic sharing among community members, wherein meanings are reinforced and circulated through interactions. This process may culminate in the formation of a rhetorical vision, defined as a collectively shared understanding of “how the world works” within a given discourse context (Ba & Zhao, 2021; Ledbetter, 2024). In the context of Fufufafa on YouTube, dramatisation appears in two dominant poles: political fantasy, for example propaganda narratives, justice, corruption, and fantasy comedy or satire (humour, memes, sarcasm) that together bind participants into a collective meaning scheme.

Humour, memes, and parodies serve as catalysts for fantasy chains, which strengthen cohesion and open channels for criticism (Collins, 2024, 2025; Dametto & Bonet-Mart, 2024; Matich, 2022). In the case of politics, fantasy themes often rest on moral opposition, such as fair vs. corrupt, the people vs. the elite, or transparency vs. manipulation, a theme that has been proven across contexts (Fenton et al., 2021; Saqib et al., 2023; Shahbazi & Bunker, 2024; Srivastav & Rai, 2022; Sykes et al., 2024). In an Indonesian study of disinformation, shared suspicion and collective fear trigger reinforcement fantasy chains while hardening rhetorical vision in online communities (Juditha et al., 2022).

Recent studies have extended SCT to digital communication environments, particularly in the analysis of social media discourse, memes, and online communities. For instance, Perreault and Ferrucci (2019) applied fantasy theme analysis to examine how Internet memes during the Deflategate controversy constructed shared narratives and reinforced collective interpretations among online users. Similarly, studies on digital fandom and online communities have demonstrated how fantasy themes and rhetorical visions emerge through repeated interactions, humour, and symbolic expressions in participatory environments (Fitriyah & Nurhaeni, 2021; Herlambang, 2022).

In political communication contexts, SCT has been used to explore how narratives of leadership, morality, and collective identity are constructed and circulated through social media interactions (Saqib et al., 2023; Srivastav & Rai, 2022). These studies highlight that digital platforms facilitate the rapid formation of fantasy chains through comment threads, hashtags, and user-generated content, thereby enabling users to co-construct meanings in real time. However, while these studies demonstrate the relevance of SCT in online environments, they often focus on specific platforms or issues and have yet to fully explore the intersection between political and comedic fantasies within dynamic, large-scale comment spaces such as YouTube.

2.2 Digital Media, Affective Public, and Identity Convergence

Digital media operate within platform logics that shape visibility and engagement through algorithmic systems (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2021). Digital media is more than a means of information dissemination; it operates as a socio-technical infrastructure shaped by algorithmic systems, platform governance, and data-driven logic that influence visibility, participation, and narrative formation (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2021; Napoli, 2023). Platform logics, algorithms, comment/like/share affordances, and broadcast rhythms are involved in organising message flow, amplifying the visibility of specific discourses, and enabling the construction of collective narratives.

Cross-domain netnographic research shows three main characteristics of digital media related to the formation of political narratives: 1) Affective and performative: The digital public is public affective; emotions (anger, hope, cynicism) regulate the spread of discourse and fuel participation (Collins, 2025; Fenton et al., 2021). Humour or memes strengthen bonds and make criticism more acceptable (Collins, 2024; Dametto & Bonet-Mart, 2024); 2) Identity cohesion: Symbolic practices (hashtags, jargon, icons) unite diverse individuals into communities with shared identities (Bîră et al., 2020; Fitriyah & Nurhaeni, 2021; Herlambang, 2022; Huu, 2022); 3) Politicisation and contestation. Social media has become an arena for articulating aspirations for justice and resistance (Lintelo et al., 2024; Morapeli & Kazembe, 2024; Sykes et al., 2024), but also for disinformation, which fosters collective suspicion (Juditha et al.,

2022). In South Asia, and in the context of Indonesia, political narratives often hinge on moral opposition and nationalism (Saqib et al., 2023; Shahbazi & Bunker, 2024; Srivastav & Rai, 2022).

Social media is not only a platform for discussion but also a space for collective identity construction. Bîră et al.'s (2020), and Huu's (2022) point out that collective identity is, in most instances, constituted by fantasies common among communities that affirm belonging. Similar to political netnography, collective fantasies unite individuals from different backgrounds under one narrative and construct a collectively reinforcing "fantasy chain" (Demant & Moretti, 2024; Dametto & Bonet-Mart, 2024). Moura et al. (2022) argue that collective symbols and stories can create strong group identities.

Aside from political fantasies for serious purposes, netnographic studies also indicate the popularity of satirical and comedic fantasy. Satire, memes, and parodies are widely used to ridicule political leaders and policies (Collins, 2024, 2025). Dametto and Bonet-Mart (2024) and Mathic (2022) pointed out that the humour exchanged between individuals is not for amusement but to build solidarity in experience. Political arguments, for example, employ joking fantasy to defuse tension and leave space for less tense social criticism. Juditha et al. (2022) observed that fantasies based on common suspicions of disinformation are typically laced with humour to establish ties among members of online communities.

3.0 Methods

This study employed a netnographic approach to analyse online discourse on YouTube. The dataset was derived from a YouTube video titled "LIVE! RH VS ROY SURYO: LET'S LIGHT UP JEPRI 7 FUFUFABA!!", which was selected because of its high engagement and relevance to the "Fufufafa" political discourse, consistent with netnographic practices that prioritise depth of interaction and richness of discourse over breadth of data sources (Kozinets, 2015). Data collection was conducted on September 21, 2025, capturing comments posted between the video publication and February 10, 2025. More than 3,000 comments were initially retrieved and filtered using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, resulting in a final dataset of 1,642 comments. The included comments contained relevant opinions, arguments, narratives, or symbolic expressions related to political discourse, while spam, promotional content, emoji-only comments, and non-Indonesian comments were excluded.

This study employed a purposive sampling strategy, commonly used in ethnographic research, to ensure that the data analysed were contextually relevant and meaningful (Kozinets, 2015). A criterion-based filtering process was used to identify comments relevant to the research focus based on their semantic and contextual relationship with the "Fufufafa" discourse. Comments containing opinions, narratives, symbolic expressions, or evaluative statements about political actors, issues, or public perceptions were manually selected. This approach enabled a more nuanced understanding of discourse dynamics while minimising potential bias from algorithmic or keyword-based filtering.

This study conducted manual coding on the Indonesian language corpus, following practices that have proven to be more reliable in local social media studies. In addition, participation patterns on social media tend to be dominated by small, networked accounts (nano) that reinforce each other (most of them have less than 1,000 followers), indicating the importance of reading the chain of reinforcement between users when tracing the fantasy chain (Saragih et al., 2024).

The analytical approach follows Reflective Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with open coding to map fantasy theme, type, chain, and rhetorical vision (Bormann, 1985; Kozinets, 2015). Thematic nodes were iteratively developed using word frequency, matrix coding query, and case or classification features in NVivo to link citations with actors or issues. Reliability was achieved first through coder calibration before full coding and through the resolution of discrepancies in discussion, with codebook revision (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019; Kozinets, 2015). Finally, the findings are analysed within the framework of SCT to emphasise how dramatisation triggers fantasy chains up to crystallisation as rhetorical vision, while considering the logics of YouTube as a platform, such as algorithms and affordances, which influence narrative circulation.

The analytical procedure was guided by SCT principles, particularly the concepts of fantasy themes, fantasy chains, and rhetorical visions. The unit of analysis in this study was individual user comments. The analysis followed a multistage coding process, combining thematic analysis with SCT-based

interpretation (Table 1). This step-by-step analytical procedure ensures that SCT is systematically operationalised, allowing for a rigorous and transparent interpretation of digital discourse.

Table 1

Analytical Stage

DATASET YouTube Comments (Unit of Analysis)		
Stage 1	Open Coding - Identify recurring patterns, keywords, expressions - Detect symbolic cues (Humor, Satire, Emotional tone, Political narratives)	Axial Coding - Group similar meanings - Cluster symbolic expressions - Form initial thematic categories
	Fantasy Themes - Interpret clusters as shared narratives - Identify repeated motifs, characterisations, evaluative language	
Stage 3	Fantasy Chains - Track interaction patterns (Replies, Agreement, Repetition, Humor amplification) - Observe narrative continuation across users	
Stage 4	Rhetorical Visions - Integrate multiple fantasy themes - Identify dominant narratives - Capture collective meaning	
FINAL OUTPUT Collective Political Meaning Construction in YouTube Discourse		

A netnography study was selected because this approach allows for the exploration of discursive practices and collective narratives that are organically formed in virtual spaces, specifically on YouTube (Kozinets, 2015). This study adheres to the established ethical guidelines for Internet-mediated research by utilizing publicly available YouTube comments that do not require private access or authentication. This study did not involve direct interactions with participants or the collection of personal or sensitive data. To ensure ethical integrity, all user identities were anonymised, and no identifiable information was disclosed. Comments were presented in a manner that prevented traceability. The data were used solely for academic purposes, with careful consideration of the original context of discourse. This approach aligns with ethical standards in digital and netnographic research, emphasising responsible data use, user privacy protection, and harm minimisation (Kozinets, 2015).

4.0 Results

The presentation of the findings of this study was guided by the SCT analytical framework. Specifically, the analysis focuses on identifying symbolic cues, fantasy themes, fantasy chains, and rhetorical visions as they emerge from user interactions in the comments section of YouTube videos. Each identified theme is interpreted as a thematic category and as part of a broader symbolic process through which collective meanings are constructed and shared within online discourse.

This study examines the netizen discussion based on 1,642 comments from a YouTube video titled “LIVE! RH VS ROY SURYO: KITA BUAT TERANG JEPRI & FUFUFAFA!!” downloaded September 21, 2024. The discussion between Refly Harun and Roy Suryo about the issue of Fufufafa and Jepri became the focus of public debate on social media.

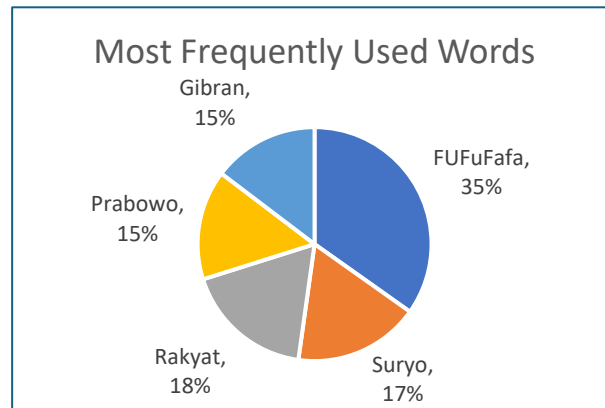
Figure 1

Word Cloud of the Most Frequently Occurring Words



Figure 2

Frequency of the Most Frequently Occurring Words



The word “Fufufafa” had the highest frequency, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, appearing in 35% of all conversations, while by the word “Rakyat” was mentioned by 18%, while “Gibran,” “Suryo,” and “Prabowo” each appeared by 15-17%. This indicates the importance of figures in netizens’ conversations. From the above words, here are some of the themes that transpired in the conversations of the netizens: 1. Fufufafa Controversy; 2. Aspirations for Political Change; 3. Political Figures as Symbols.

4.1 Fantasy Themes in Political Discourse

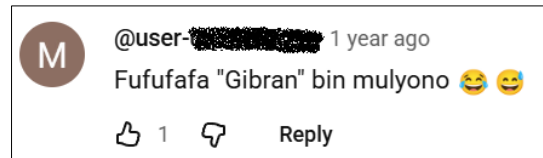
Fantasy Theme 1: Fufufafa Controversy

This theme reflects how online participants interpret and respond to issues through expressions of skepticism, criticism, and political commentary. For instance, the account mentioned Prabowo Subianto and stirred negative sentiments among citizens. User-218 proclaimed, “The analysis is very reasonable fufufafa clearly belongs to Gibran”. Legal action has been demanded by most netizens, with User-153 stating, “It's really strange, insults against the president-elect are allowed.”

However, not every netizen considered the matter at hand to be serious. Some viewed it as a political satire. User-1042 commented, “Gibran is so bored... I am unemployed and that bored, I only comment on politics and watch anime”. It is suspected that the account may be used as a political ploy to bring down a particular candidate. For example, User-148 said “It could be that the FUFUFAFA account belongs to those who hate Jokowi”.

Figure 3

Netizen's Comment (User-410)



Calls for government agencies, such as the State Intelligence Agency (BIN) and the National Civil Service Agency (BSSN), to investigate the “Fufufafa” account continue to grow, reflecting public concern that the account may disrupt digital social order and insult political figures. *User-168* called on the BSSN and BIN to immediately reveal the identity of the owner of the account as a preventive measure. Various remarks were not pleased with the report, with netizens like *User-410* and *User-709* inventing sarcastic nicknames such as “Gibran bin Mulyono,” as described in Figure 3. This example reflects two forms of dramatization: political fantasy (alleged propaganda) and comedic or satirical fantasy (humorous ridicule), which trigger fantasy chains through reinforcing interactions among users. This finding shows how netizens interpret the “Fufufafa” account as both a propaganda tool and an arena for satire.

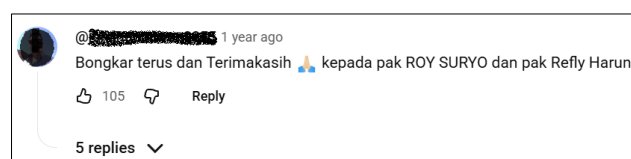
Fantasy Theme 2: Aspirations for Political Change

This theme represents a fantasy theme in which users collectively express aspirations for a more transparent, fair, and accountable political system. Many comments called for legal action against violators among public officials and actively created change by demanding it from the public. Netizens urge political awareness to avoid being trapped by narratives that tend to deceive them. Demands ranged from the public standing in solidarity against repressive regimes to standing with champions of truth, such as Roy Suryo and Refly Harun.

User-957 hoped for better leadership, whereas *User-941* called for fact-checking political issues. However, scepticism arose; for example, *User-946* wondered whether citizens could actually change, while *User-135* raised the challenge of collective consciousness. The word “bongkar” emerged to reveal the truth, and netizens such as *User-1123* and *User-45* hailed Roy Suryo and Refly Harun’s actions, as illustrated in Figure 4, “Keep reveal and thank you for Mr. ROY SURYO and Mr. Refly Harun”. However, criticism of the credibility of these individuals was also voiced, according to *User-1215*.

Figure 4

Netizen's Comment (User-1123)



Here, the keyword “bongkar” functions as a mobilising frame that guides the discussion from an investigative call to a fantasy chain of solidarity and demands accountability. This chain leads to a rhetorical vision of fair governance. This finding in Fantasy Theme 2 shows that the word “bongkar” is not just an invitation to investigate, but a sign of the formation of rhetorical vision about fair and transparent governance, a shared political imagination produced and reproduced through netizen interactions.

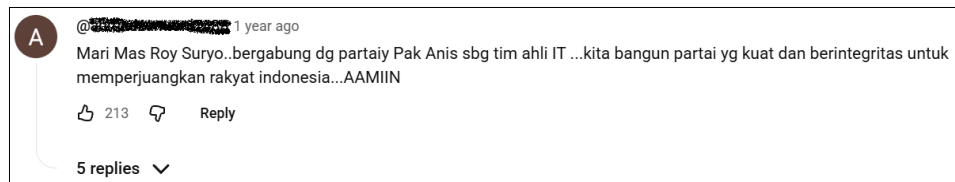
Fantasy Theme 3: Political Figures as Symbols

This pattern reflects a fantasy theme in which public figures such as Roy Suryo and Refly Harun are symbolically constructed as either heroic figures or controversial actors in political discourse. Netizens expressed their opinions about figures they considered to bring a breath of fresh air, one of whom was Roy Suryo. *User-1253* expressed confidence, stating, “I believe Mr. Roy Suryo’s explanation is true

based on his knowledge”. This statement reflects the public’s expectation of the expertise and credibility of figures in revealing the truth, as a foundation for more transparent political aspirations. Support for Roy Suryo continued to flow, as expressed by User-1143: “Come on, Mr. Roy Suryo, join Mr. Anis’ party as an IT expert team... let’s build a strong and integrity-based party to fight for the Indonesian people... AMEN”, as shown in Figure 5. This expression shows hope for a political revival with integrity, where experienced figures in the field of information technology are expected to be the main drivers of this revival.

Figure 5

Netizen’s Comment (User-1143)



On the other hand, Refly Harun also became the focus of this discussion. However, sharp criticism emerged from sceptical netizens. As User-1256, “REFLY HARUN IF YOU ARE A GREAT PERSON, A PERSON WHO IS GOOD AT LEGAL.. YOU SHOULD HAVE WONNED AT THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONSTITUTION WHEN YOU CALLED THE 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.. IN FACT YOU LOSE!!! IT MEANS YOU ARE NOT QUALIFIED”. This comment reflects scepticism about Refly’s credibility in a legal context.

Despite the criticism, many netizens stood up for them. User-1123 wrote, “Keep revealing and thank you to Mr. ROY SURYO and Mr. Refly Harun”, indicating that a segment of society is in their favour and appreciates their efforts to reveal the truth. Even certain netizens focused on Refly Harun’s demeanour and where he was from. For example, User-1153 noted, “Even though Mr. Refly is from Makassar, his dialogue doesn’t sound like someone from the East” highlighting the communication culture gap. Meanwhile, certain views, such as that written by User-1133, “REFLY HARUN. PERANG RUSAKK”, shows that not everyone shares the same positive view of them.

These comments function as symbolic cues that shape the collective interpretation of political figures through repeated interactions and shared narratives. The discourse reflects a struggle between technocratic authority and public scepticism, producing competing fantasy chains that construct Roy Suryo and Refly Harun simultaneously as “heroes” and “polemical symbols.” This dynamic illustrates how trust in expertise, integrity demands, and moral disappointment coexist in digital political discourse.

5.0 Discussion

This study applies SCT to examine netizen discourse surrounding the “Fufufafa” account and its association with Gibran and Prabowo. SCT explains how shared symbols, stories, and fantasies create group solidarity through fantasy themes, fantasy chains, and rhetorical visions. In this context, many netizens perceived the “Fufufafa” account as a propaganda tool used within political strategies involving these figures.

Netizens constructed two dominant fantasy types: Political Fantasy, which framed the “Fufufafa” account as part of a political strategy, and Comedy or Satire Fantasy, which treated the issue humorously as a form of political attention-seeking. Through repeated discussions about Gibran, Prabowo, and demands for legal action, these narratives developed into fantasy chains that amplified broader political discourse. The resulting rhetorical visions reflected divided public perceptions, with some netizens viewing the account as a threat to social order and others considering it merely a trivial or entertaining social media phenomenon.

At the practical level, humour, nicknaming, and memetic play, which saturate the digital community, become comedic fantasies that support group solidarity while simultaneously incising polarisation

(Collins, 2024; Dametto & Bonet-Mart, 2024; Mathic, 2022). This trend is not an exception; it is encouraged by platform logic and algorithmic visibility that encourage the circulation of emotions and narrative build-up (Brett et al., 2021; Hamzah et al., 2023), and a disinformation culture that nurtures collective scepticism toward figures and institutions (Juditha et al., 2022).

At the same time, symbols, rituals, and shared stories, from fandoms to consumer communities, demonstrate how collective identities can be strongly tied around figures who are seen as “representing” the hope for change (Bîră et al., 2020; Herlambang, 2022; Moura et al., 2022). For this study, the configuration of support-scepticism towards Roy Suryo and Refly Harun is strong evidence that netizens, narratives, and political fantasies are formed through repeated interactions that can be mapped netnographically, as shown in Table 2. The fantasy theme expresses a desire for justice, transparency, and accountability in government through netizens. Phrases such as “bongkar” symbolise the public’s desire to reveal the truth of inept leadership and stimulate activity to create change.

Table 2

The Analysis of the Theme “Fufufafa Account Controversy”

Elements of SCT	Description
Fantasy Theme	Speculation about the Fufufafa account as a political propaganda tool linked to Gibran and Prabowo.
Fantasy Type	1. Political Fantasy: Viewing the account as part of a political strategy. 2. Comedy/Satire Fantasy: Using humour and sarcasm to mock political attention-seeking.
Fantasy Chain	Speculation about “Fufufafa” was amplified through repeated netizen interactions, criticism, and calls for accountability.
Rhetorical Vision	The construction of collective perceptions of Indonesian politics, viewed either as a serious political threat or merely a trivial social media phenomenon.

These discussions reflect social fantasies in which netizens collectively imagine positive changes in politics. Comments such as “keep digging” and support for figures such as Roy Suryo and Refly Harun express hopes for greater justice, transparency, and responsible leadership. Through mutually reinforcing interactions, a fantasy chain emerges that strengthens solidarity while scepticism from some users creates space for debate, ultimately forming a rhetorical vision of accountable governance and high-morality leadership.

Empirically, the “bongkar” becomes a mobilizing frame that bridges justice-transparency-accountability hopes with political change imagination in such a way that the talk changes from an invitation to an inquiry fantasy chain that produces solidarity and participation (Fenton et al., 2021; Saqib et al., 2023; Srivastav & Rai, 2022). Social/comedic fantasies, such as humour, memes, and satirical buzzwords, solidify such cohesion, without weakening its moral drive making criticism acceptable (Collins, 2024, 2025; Dametto & Bonet-Mart, 2024).

Simultaneously, reciprocal distrust of misinformation allows for suspicion and argumentation, enriching the process of meaning negotiation toward a rhetorical vision of responsible leadership with integrity and a responsible state (Juditha et al., 2022; Shahbazi & Bunker, 2024; Sykes et al., 2024). Similar patterns are widely observed in other digital communities, where shared symbols, rituals, and stories bind collective identities and guide normative preferences (Bîră et al., 2020; Moura et al., 2022).

Table 3

Theme Analysis Regarding Netizens' Responses to the Current Political Situation

Elements of SCT	Description
Fantasy Theme	Collective aspirations for justice, transparency, and accountable governance, symbolised by the term “ <i>bongkar</i> ” (revealing).
Fantasy Type	Collective hopes for political change and truthful leadership.
Fantasy Chain	Interactions among comments reinforce shared narratives, creating solidarity and debate among netizens.
Rhetorical Vision	Shared aspirations for transparent, accountable, and ethical leadership.

In the third theme, exemplified in Table 3, “Roy Suryo and Refly Harun: Heroes or Symbols of Polemics in Indonesian Political Change,” one fantasy theme that was repeated among netizens was the hope for a political revival with greater integrity and openness. Roy Suryo and Refly Harun were hailed by numerous netizens as figures who could bring about a positive transformation in Indonesian politics. This hope was met by supporting the two leaders in playing an active role in forming strong and united political parties.

The emerging social fantasies reflected public aspirations for competent and honest leadership. Through supportive interactions, netizens constructed collective narratives portraying Roy Suryo and Refly Harun as symbols of political hope, creating fantasy chains that strengthened solidarity and demands for political transformation. While some users questioned their credibility, the dominant rhetorical vision emphasised expectations of transparency, accountability, and leaders with integrity who could challenge political injustice, as shown in Table 4.

The configuration of support-rejection of Roy Suryo and Refly Harun emphasizes that the figures of “heroes” and “polemical symbols” operate simultaneously within public affective: claim expertise (technology or law) gives technocratic legitimacy to fantasy themes about “leadership with integrity”, while criticism of credibility has given rise to fantasy chains counter culture that tests the authority of political knowledge and motives (Demant & Moretti, 2024; Perreault & Ferrucci, 2019; Srivastav & Rai, 2022). The circulation of support is mediated by the practice of comedic fantasies, such as humour, memes, and nickname games, which simultaneously bind in-groups and sharpen polarisation (Collins, 2024, 2025; Dametto & Bonet-Mart, 2024; Mathic, 2022).

At the macro level, moral opposition to “justice vs corrupt” or “the people vs the elite” that underpins the imagination of “political awakening” resonates with a cross-case pattern in which aspirations for accountability are woven into rhetorical vision change (Fenton et al., 2021; Saqib et al., 2023; Shahbazi & Bunker, 2024; Srivastav & Rai, 2022; Sykes et al., 2024). The common identities built around characters, symbols, rituals, and shared stories are consistent with other digital communities’ dynamics that show how support is linked to mutual reinforcement and normalization of norm preferences (Bîră et al., 2020; Fitriyah & Nurhaeni, 2021; Herlambang, 2022; Moura et al., 2022).

Parallel to this, mutual suspicion of disinformation allows for doubt and encourages verification, so argumentation remains effective in ironing over the edges of rhetorical vision (Juditha et al., 2022). From the platform ecology perspective, the logic of visibility and comment affordance accelerates the intensification of fantasy chains and provides opportunities for the traceability of patterns of distribution and intensity of affect through AI-powered netnography (Brett et al., 2021; Cheah, 2025; Hamzah et al., 2023; Lintelo et al., 2024; Mathews et al., 2025).

Table 4

Analysis of Theme “Concerning Political Changes in Indonesia Related to Roy Suryo and Refly Harun”

Elements of SCT	Description
Fantasy Theme	Hopes for political reform through more transparent and integrity-based leadership, represented by support for Roy Suryo and Refly Harun.
Fantasy Type	1. Social Fantasy: Hope for competent and honest leadership represented by Roy Suryo and Refly Harun. 2. Collective Fantasy: Netizens construct a shared narrative of the two figures as symbols of political change.
Fantasy Chain	Supportive and sceptical comments reinforced collective debate and solidarity.
Rhetorical Vision	Hope for accountable leadership and political integrity through Roy Suryo and Refly Harun’s collaboration.

Figure 6 highlights the role of social media in shaping political awareness and public participation, where netizens collectively share opinions and aspirations regarding political issues through online interactions. Three major themes emerged from the discourse: speculation about the “Fufufafa” account as part of a political strategy, aspirations for justice and political reform, and public criticism toward political actors and the Indonesian government. Within this process, two forms of fantasy developed: political fantasies reflecting concerns over opinion manipulation and hidden political agendas, and comedic fantasies expressed through humor and satire, illustrating how netizens negotiate political skepticism and participation within digital discourse.

The communication between netizens forms a fantasy chain, creating a web of solidarity among them. Legal hearings and displeasure against the government become rallying points for constructive social criticism. Netizens demand justice and accountability as acts of mutual aid that strengthen bonds within the online community. Similarly, Saragih et al. (2024) found a highly conversational ecology of nano-influencers, with around 93.7% of accounts with less than 1,000 followers, meaning that, in general, small and mutually reinforcing users shape the construction of discourse.

Figure 6

The Process of Building a Collective Narrative in Political Discourse on Social Media

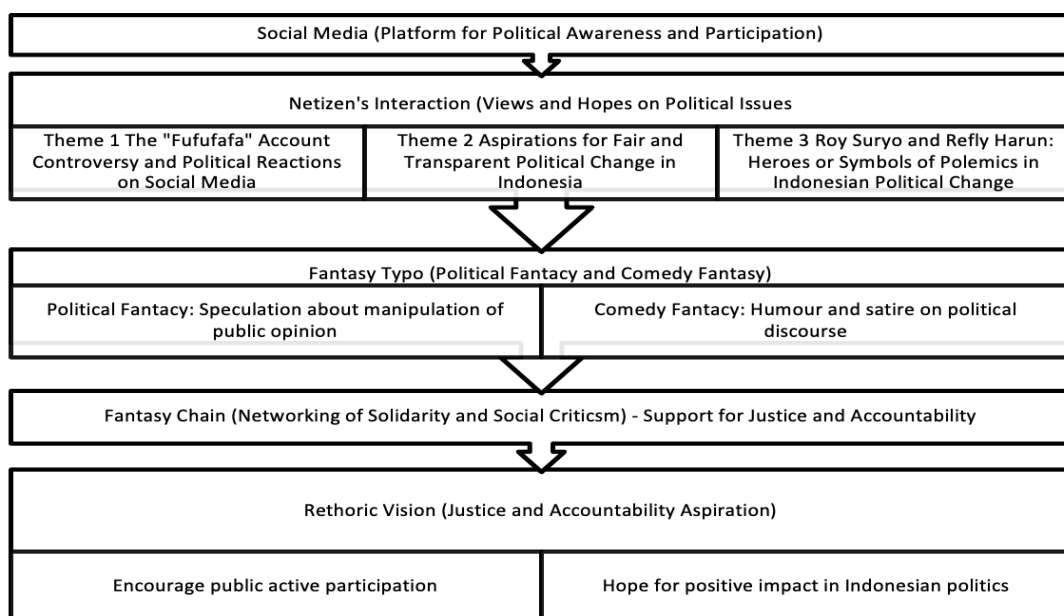


Figure 6 flows affirm the logic of symbolic convergence in platform space: fantasy themes dramatised by netizens, such as politics and comedy, build up through repeated interactions into fantasy chains, then crystallise as a rhetorical vision of justice, accountability, and ideal leadership, while maintaining a productive scepticism of elites and institutions (Fenton et al., 2021; Saqib et al., 2023; Srivastav & Rai, 2022). The public affective role is observed in the way emotions, such as anger, hope, and cynicism, drive participation, with humour, memes, and parodying as comedy fantasies that bind in-groups and mask criticism so that it may be passed on readily (Collins, 2024, 2025; Dametto & Bonet-Mart, 2024). Disinformation ecology fuels citizens and fact-checking behaviour enriches meaning negotiation along the fantasy chain (Juditha et al., 2022; Sykes et al., 2024). These are also mediated by platform logics, or algorithmic visibility and affordance for comment/like/reply, which govern the degree of story escalation rhythm and debate (Brett et al., 2021; Hamzah et al., 2023). This finding aligns with recent studies highlighting how algorithmic amplification and affective engagement shape the circulation of political discourse in digital environments (Napoli, 2023; Papacharissi, 2019).

6.0 Conclusion

The mapping of netizen discourses about the “Fufufafa” account and politicians such as Gibran and Prabowo on YouTube represents the richness of public discourse in Indonesian politics. The results show how symbols, stories, and shared fantasias combine to shape perceptions and mobilize political action in online communities. At the thematic level, netizen discourse contained rumours about speculation that the Fufufafa account was connected to a political strategy and the building of narratives concerning the use of the account as propaganda, a trend reflecting public unease and scepticism about the inscrutability of political practice. Two genres of fantasy at a generic level cropped up predominantly: political fantasy underlined accusations of opinion manipulation, and fantasy comedy or satire packaged scepticism through humour, memes, and sarcasm, so that criticism could spread more easily.

This research might be further expanded in the future by comparative studies across countries or election cycles, testing the consistency of the theme-chain-vision pattern and its impact on voter behaviour and political participation over time. Methodologically, the quality of results can be further improved through mixed-method design, procedural transparency, temporal mapping, conversation networks, and ethical audits in data gathering. Public media literacy must be developed to enable citizens to identify mis/disinformation, deconstruct political rhetoric, and cultivate a culture of civil debate. Finally, proportionate content policies need to be considered, action against hate speech, and disinformation without compromising freedom of expression, with transparent reporting, verification, platform accountability mechanisms, and digital footprint management according to privacy and ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors (s) have declared that no competing interests exist.

Author Contribution Statement

MM: Conceptualisation, Data Curation, Methodology, Validation, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, and Supervision; NS: Data Curation, Methodology, Validation. KP: Project Administration, Writing – Review & Editing; DA: Project Administration; HFA: Project Administration.

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Ethics Statement

This research did not require IRB approval because it used publicly available secondary data with no identifying personal information.

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