



TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

Vol. 79/2026
A New Decade for Social Changes



PLUS
COMMUNICATION P



International
Communication & PR

Fear Mongering 2.0: Dialogic Disruption and Interpersonal Trust Crisis in Post-Protest Social Media Discourse Following the August 23, 2025 Demonstrations in Indonesia

Julia Magdalena Wuysang¹, Ira Patriani², Rahmawati³, Feibe Engeline Pijoh⁴

^{1,2} Universitas Tanjungpura Pontianak, Indonesia, ³ Universitas Syiah Kuala Banda Aceh, Indonesia, ⁴ Universitas Negeri Manado, Indonesia

Julia.magdalena@fisip.untan.ac.id

Abstract. The phenomenon of "Fear Mongering 2.0" reveals a critical rupture in dialogic reciprocity and a deepening interpersonal trust crisis within post-protest social media discourse following the mass demonstrations on September 23, 2025, in Indonesia. Triggered by widespread public outrage over parliamentary tax privileges and allowances, social media platforms transformed into contested spaces not merely for political expression but for the algorithmic proliferation of fear-driven narratives. These emotionally charged discourses, amplified by platform logics, generated moral panic, intensified group polarization, and eroded the affective conditions necessary for meaningful interpersonal communication. Employing a critical qualitative research approach, this study uncovers three key findings: (1) social media algorithms function not as neutral infrastructures but as affective agents of power that reshape interpersonal communication into an arena governed by emotional visibility rather than deliberative meaning-making (cf. Zuboff, 2019; Papacharissi, 2015); (2) algorithmically induced fear mongering disrupts the continuity of interpersonal relationships through the production of emotional dissonance and affective misalignment among individuals previously bonded by emotional proximity and mutual trust (cf. Ahmed, 2014; Gillespie & Dietz, 2009); and (3) dialogic breakdown in the post-protest context cannot be reduced to spontaneous social tensions but must be understood as the outcome of structured interventions via algorithmic silencing and emotional engineering deployed by digital platforms (cf. Noble, 2018; DeVito, 2017). This study thus positions post-protest social media as a site of symbolic struggle that undermines the ethics of interpersonal dialogue in the digital age.

Keywords. Fear Mongering 2.0, Dialogic Disruption, Interpersonal Trust Crisis, Algorithmic Politics, Post-Protest Social Media Discourse

A. Introduction

Following the mass protest on September 23, 2025, in Indonesia—sparked by public outrage over parliamentary tax benefits and allowances—social media platforms rapidly transformed into contested arenas, not only for political expression but also for the proliferation of fear-driven narratives. As digital users mobilized hashtags and online campaigns, the intensification of fear mongering discourse (Ahmed, 2014; Wodak, 2015) began to shape a new affective climate, significantly disrupting norms of dialogic engagement and interpersonal trust

in online interactions. The phenomenon of "Fear Mongering 2.0" refers to the circulation of emotionally charged content that is algorithmically amplified, producing moral panic, deepening group polarization, and weakening the preconditions for meaningful interpersonal communication (Sunstein, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). This algorithmic reconfiguration of fear is not merely a by-product of political tension, but a strategic communicative act embedded in the very architecture of platform governance (Deibert, 2020). Rather than fostering deliberative dialogue, this digital ecosystem incentivizes performative outrage, binary oppositions, and symbolic violence (Papacharissi, 2015)—all of which corrode the Habermasian notion of dialogic ethics (Habermas, 1984).

In this context, interpersonal communication—as a relational co-construction of meaning (Trenholm & Jensen, 2019)—faces unprecedented challenges. Trust, a foundational element in interpersonal dynamics (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009), becomes increasingly fragile within digital spaces saturated by manipulative rhetoric, viralized fear, and affective contamination (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). The shift from reason-based dialogue to emotionally manipulated discourse raises urgent questions about the erosion of dialogic trust, especially amid hyper-polarized sociopolitical moments (Boler & Davis, 2018). This study critically examines how fear mongering practices on Indonesian social media in the aftermath of the 2025 protests have restructured the landscape of interpersonal communication. Drawing from the framework of critical interpersonal communication (Fassett & Warren, 2007), the analysis traces the entanglement of power, affective labor, and communicative fractures that constitute this digital fear regime. In particular, this research explores how trust is constructed, betrayed, or evaded within online interactions marked by uncertainty, suspicion, and symbolic aggression. In doing so, the paper contributes to broader scholarly conversations on affective politics, digital ethics, and communication justice (Couldry et al., 2018), asserting that fear mongering in the post-protest era is not merely a media spectacle but a relational crisis that redefines how individuals connect, contest, and imagine collective futures.

Table 1. Research Landscape Overview

Research Focus	Indonesia	Global
Public sentiment on deepfake	Sentiment analysis of deepfake videos	–
Media/journalistic credibility	Impacts on media trustworthiness	Ethics and disinformation
Cybersecurity and regulation	National stability, legal frameworks	–
Government trust and perception	–	Deepfakes in Asian democratic contexts
Experimental trust frameworks	–	Deepfakes, public infrastructure, and trust
Media literacy	–	Media literacy as resistance strategy

Source: Author's Data, 2025

This study departs from the recognition that Indonesia's post-protest digital landscape—particularly following the mass mobilization of September 23, 2025—has been profoundly reshaped by the circulation of fear-based narratives that operate through algorithmic amplification and affective polarization. While existing scholarship, both locally and globally, has extensively examined issues such as media credibility, disinformation ethics, platform regulation, and public opinion dynamics, there remains a notable absence of research that centers interpersonal communication as a critical site of analysis within these phenomena. Specifically, studies in the Indonesian context have yet to systematically interrogate how fear

mongering practices disrupt dialogic norms, erode trust, and fracture relational meaning-making in everyday online interactions after moments of political crisis.

This gap is particularly significant given that fear mongering in digital environments does not merely function at the level of information distortion, but operates as a relational force that reorganizes affective orientations, moral boundaries, and communicative expectations between individuals. The absence of an interpersonal communication perspective has resulted in an under-theorization of how trust is negotiated, withdrawn, or strategically withheld in social media spaces saturated by suspicion, symbolic aggression, and performative outrage. Consequently, the relational consequences of algorithmically mediated fear—especially in post-protest contexts marked by heightened uncertainty—remain insufficiently understood.

By situating fear mongering within the framework of critical interpersonal communication, this study addresses this theoretical and empirical gap. It reframes fear not simply as a media effect or political tactic, but as a communicative regime that restructures interpersonal relations and challenges the ethical foundations of dialogic engagement. In doing so, the research offers an original contribution to communication studies in Indonesia, advancing discussions on affective politics, digital ethics, and communication justice. Ultimately, this inquiry positions fear mongering in the post-protest era as a relational crisis—one that reshapes how individuals trust, contest, and imagine collective life within digitally mediated publics.

Grounded in the above theoretical and empirical concerns, this study is guided by the following research questions: 1) How do fear mongering narratives circulating on Indonesian social media after the 2025 protests disrupt dialogic norms and interpersonal communication practices in digital interactions? 2) In what ways does algorithmic amplification of fear reshape the construction, erosion, and negotiation of trust within post-protest online interpersonal relationships? 3) How can a critical interpersonal communication perspective illuminate the power relations, affective labor, and symbolic ruptures that characterize Indonesia's post-protest digital communication landscape?

B. Method

This study employs a critical qualitative approach to examine fear mongering as a relational and affective practice that reshapes interpersonal communication on social media in the aftermath of the September 23, 2025 protests in Indonesia. Grounded in an interpretive-critical paradigm, the research conceptualizes digital fear not merely as misleading content, but as a communicative regime embedded in power relations, algorithmic governance, and affective polarization. This approach enables an in-depth analysis of how fear-based discourse is produced, circulated, and negotiated, as well as how it intervenes in the construction and erosion of interpersonal trust within digitally mediated interactions.

Data are collected through critical netnography and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Netnography is conducted on major Indonesian social media platforms—Twitter (X), TikTok, and Instagram—during the period spanning one week before to one month after the protest. This method allows the researcher to observe public interactions, identify recurring patterns of fear mongering, and trace moments of dialogic engagement, resistance, or breakdown. CDA is then applied to selected posts, comments, videos, hashtags, and viral narratives to deconstruct the linguistic, visual, and semiotic strategies through which fear is articulated, including emotional rhetoric, othering, and claims of legitimacy, as well as the role of algorithmic amplification in intensifying polarization.

The units of analysis consist of three interconnected elements: digital content that mobilizes fear in post-protest discourse, interpersonal interactions among users such as debates, trolling, and expressions of solidarity, and viral narratives that generate moral panic and collective anxiety. Analytically, the study operates across micro, meso, and macro levels by examining interpersonal communication styles and trust negotiation, broader discourse structures and affective dynamics, and the underlying power relations shaping digital communication environments. This multilevel reading enables fear mongering to be understood simultaneously as an interpersonal, discursive, and structural phenomenon.

The analysis is guided by a critical interpersonal communication perspective, complemented by affective publics theory and dialogic communication theory. Together, these frameworks illuminate how power, affect, and symbolic violence intersect in post-protest digital interactions, while also providing an ethical lens for evaluating the erosion of dialogic norms and trust. Research credibility is strengthened through methodological triangulation and sustained reflexivity regarding researcher positionality. The study is limited to publicly accessible content on major social media platforms and does not include private digital communication due to ethical considerations.

C. Result and discussion

Research result

This section presents the empirical findings of the study by systematically tracing how fear mongering operates in Indonesia's post-protest digital environment and how it restructures interpersonal communication, affective engagement, and trust. Rather than treating fear-based discourse as episodic or accidental, the analysis demonstrates that fear mongering constitutes a patterned, temporally organized, and power-laden communicative regime. The results are organized in alignment with the three research questions, moving from discursive dynamics, to interactional and affective consequences, and finally to the reconfiguration of power relations and symbolic agency in post-protest digital interactions.

1. Fear mongering narratives circulating on Indonesian social media after the 2025 protests disrupt dialogic norms and interpersonal communication practices in digital interactions

The findings show that fear mongering narratives circulating on Indonesian social media after the 2025 protests systematically disrupted dialogic norms by reorienting interpersonal communication away from mutual understanding and toward affective alignment, moral judgment, and strategic withdrawal. Rather than functioning as contributions to public reasoning, fear narratives reshaped the very conditions under which digital interaction occurred, altering how users listened, responded, and recognized one another as communicative subjects.

In the pre-protest phase, fear narratives framed participation in the demonstration as an inherently dangerous and socially irresponsible act. Dominant discourses emphasized impending chaos, foreign provocation, and threats to national stability, circulating primarily through tweets, Instagram captions, and short-form videos. These narratives functioned anticipatorily, cultivating a communicative environment structured by risk perception rather than inquiry. Interpersonal exchanges during this period rarely centered on protest demands or policy critique; instead, interactions revolved around warnings, moral admonitions, and speculative threat assessments. From a dialogic perspective, this anticipatory fear framing undermined openness and reciprocity, as participants entered discussions with pre-formed assumptions about danger and illegitimacy.

The use of recontextualized visuals of past riots further intensified this disruption. Short videos circulated with high engagement despite weak contextual relevance, activating collective memory and emotional recall rather than facilitating argumentative engagement. In interpersonal terms, such content discouraged dialogic listening by foregrounding emotional resonance over factual specificity. Users responding to these posts tended to affirm fear-based interpretations rather than question their relevance, signaling an early shift from dialogic exchange to affective convergence.

On the day of the protest, dialogic disruption became more explicit and intensified. Live tweets, short clips, and rapidly evolving comment sections framed the demonstration as unsafe and uncontrollable, while simultaneously legitimizing the actions of security forces. Interpersonal communication during this phase was marked by heightened emotionality, rapid response cycles, and polarized exchanges. Comment sections attached to online news coverage frequently stigmatized and dehumanized demonstrators, framing them as irrational crowds rather than citizens articulating political claims. Such dehumanization represents a critical rupture in dialogic ethics: the other is no longer approached as a partner in meaning-making, but as a threat to be managed.

These interactional patterns reveal a breakdown of dialogic reciprocity. Replies increasingly took the form of affective assertions, sarcasm, or symbolic aggression rather than reasoned engagement. Turn-taking, clarification, and acknowledgment of opposing viewpoints—central practices of interpersonal dialogue—were replaced by performative positioning and moral boundary drawing. Dialogic norms of equality and openness were further undermined by algorithmic amplification, which rewarded emotionally charged content and accelerated its visibility, reinforcing affective escalation rather than reflective exchange.

In the immediate post-protest period, fear narratives shifted from real-time framing to retrospective interpretation. Long Twitter/X threads and selectively curated testimonial videos reframed the protest as a failure and emphasized fear experienced by bystanders rather than the protesters' original demands. This retrospective framing performed a dual dialogic function. First, it justified repressive measures by presenting fear as empirical evidence of necessity. Second, it displaced substantive political debate by redirecting interpersonal communication toward emotional aftermath rather than structural critique. Users attempting to reintroduce deliberative discussion frequently encountered dismissal, fatigue, or accusations of irresponsibility, signaling that the dialogic window for engagement had effectively closed.

In the extended post-protest phase, dialogic disruption took a more normalized and durable form. Memes, sarcasm, and dark humor became dominant modes of engagement, reframing political discussion as naïve or excessive. Humor functioned less as playful critique and more as a tool of social discipline, signaling that continued engagement was socially undesirable. Interpersonal communication practices shifted toward ironic detachment and minimal expression, reinforcing depoliticization and communicative withdrawal. At this stage, dialogic norms were not actively attacked but quietly abandoned, replaced by cynicism and fatigue.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that fear mongering disrupted dialogic norms through a cumulative process. Anticipatory fear constrained participation, real-time fear legitimized coercion, and retrospective fear stabilized depoliticization. Interpersonal communication practices shifted accordingly—from deliberative exchange to defensive positioning, from engagement to withdrawal, and from meaning-making to affect signaling. Table 2 documents these temporal dynamics, showing how fear narratives systematically reconfigured digital interaction across phases rather than emerging as isolated incidents.

Table 2. Dynamics of Digital Fear Mongering Content Before and After the 23 August 2025 Demonstration Jakarta, Indonesia

Time Phase	Dominant Digital Content Types	Key Fear Mongering Narratives	Communicative Functions	Social Media Indicators
Pre-Demonstration (-7 to -1 days)	Tweets & Instagram captions	“Chaos will erupt,” “foreign provocation,” “threats to national stability”	Anticipatory–preventive: cultivating fear prior to participation	Spike in threat-related keywords; frequent use of terms such as “danger,” “riot,” and “out of control”
	Short videos (TikTok/Reels)	Recontextualized visuals of past riots	Emotional priming through collective memory	High engagement despite weak or irrelevant visual context
Day of Demonstration (23 August 2025)	Live tweets, short clips	“Unsafe situation,” “brutal crowds,” “security forces had no choice”	Real-time framing to manage public perception	Rapid retweets, emotionally charged replies, polarized comment sections
	Online media comment sections	Stigmatization of demonstrators	Dehumanization of protest actors	Predominantly negative sentiment
Immediate Post-Demonstration (+1 to +7 days)	Long Twitter/X threads	“Proof the protest failed,” “the majority was afraid,” “stability has returned”	Retrospective framing: justification of repressive measures	Narrative threads with one-sided causal claims
	Selective testimonial videos	Stories of fear victims (rather than protest demands)	Issue shifting from claims to fear	Algorithms privileging affective content
Extended Post-Demonstration (+7 days onward)	Memes & sarcastic comments	Normalization of fear and continued delegitimation	Depoliticization and public fatigue	Humor functioning as a tool of social discipline

Source: Author’s Data, 2025

2. Algorithmic amplification of fear reshapes the construction, erosion, and negotiation of trust within post-protest online interpersonal relationships

The second set of findings addresses how algorithmically amplified fear reshaped the construction, erosion, and negotiation of trust within post-protest online interpersonal relationships. The data indicates that trust did not simply decline uniformly; rather, it was reconfigured through affective alignment, strategic silence, and selective engagement, producing uneven and fragile trust relations across the digital public sphere.

Among active users who supported the protest, interpersonal communication was characterized by argumentative replies, clarification threads, and references to data or visual evidence. These users often adopted a defensive tone, reflecting an effort to sustain rational deliberation under conditions of hostility and suspicion. Trust within this group was constructed through shared commitments to evidence and argumentative norms, but this trust remained precarious due to the broader affective climate. Interactions with opposing users were approached cautiously, with an expectation of misinterpretation or attack rather than good-faith engagement.

In contrast, active users opposing the protest frequently engaged in trolling, mockery, and provocative replies. Fear within this group was displaced into cynicism and symbolic

aggression, allowing users to express hostility without engaging substantively with opposing arguments. Trust here was constructed not through relational credibility or dialogue, but through affective loyalty and moral alignment. Users trusted those who shared their emotional stance rather than those who offered reasoned critique. This affect-based trust reinforced in-group solidarity while deepening distrust toward perceived outsiders.

A significant finding concerns the erosion of trust among initially neutral users. These users often engaged briefly in debate or inquiry before withdrawing into silence. This pattern reflects deliberative fatigue rather than apathy. As fear-laden interactions intensified and aggressive communication became normalized, neutral users reassessed the risks of participation. Trust in the communicative environment eroded as users perceived digital spaces as unsafe for open expression. Consequently, interpersonal trust was not simply lost but recalibrated toward self-protection.

Silent users, or lurkers, emerged as a central but often overlooked group in the post-protest trust landscape. These users remained attentive and informed but refrained from visible participation. Their engagement took indirect forms such as passive consumption, saving content, taking screenshots, or discussing issues offline. Silence in this context functioned as a rational response to perceived risk, signaling distrust in the safety and integrity of public interaction. Semi-silent users, who expressed minimal reactions such as likes or emojis without commenting, further illustrate how trust was negotiated through low-risk signaling rather than open dialogue.

The data also reveal heightened self-censorship among vulnerable groups, including minorities and precarious workers. These users often deleted past posts or avoided political expression altogether, indicating that fear had penetrated into identity and security considerations. Trust erosion here extended beyond interpersonal relations to encompass institutional trust and expectations of protection. Communication became a site of risk management rather than connection.

At the same time, trust was selectively reconstructed within closed solidarity communities. Users migrated into private groups where supportive and empathetic interaction could occur away from public hostility. Within these enclaves, interpersonal trust was sustained through mutual validation and vigilance. However, this reconstruction of trust came at the cost of public fragmentation. As deliberative voices withdrew from open platforms, the visible digital public sphere became increasingly dominated by aggressive, cynical, or affectively aligned actors.

Table 3. Synthesis of Findings Fear Mongering, Media User Behavior, and Its Impact on Indonesia's Communication Ecology (Post-23 August 2025 Demonstration)

Analytical Dimension	Media & Algorithmic Patterns	User Behavior (Pro-Demo → Silent)	Impact on Communication Practices	Implications for Political Communication & the Political System
Digital Interpersonal Communication	Algorithmic amplification of affective content (fear, anger) driven by engagement metrics	Pro-demo: defensive and clarificatory; Contra: trolling; Silent: lurking and self-censorship	Erosion of dialogic reciprocity; reactive communication replaces ethical listening	Declining quality of civic deliberation; weakened public rationality (Habermas, 1984; Papacharissi, 2015)

Emotion–Trust Relations	Repetitive fear narratives leading to affective saturation	Interpersonal suspicion; asymmetric trust	Fragile interpersonal trust; message interpretation shaped by suspicion	Horizontal trust crisis undermines political legitimacy (O’Neill, 2002; Tyler, 2006)
Public Digital Communication	Affective hashtags, short videos, sarcastic memes	Pro-demo voices marginalized; contra-demo symbolically dominant	Shift from deliberation to affective monologue	Digital public sphere functions as a post-repression legitimation arena (Benkler et al., 2018)
Group Communication	Migration from public platforms to private groups	Enclosed solidarity; “safe” discussions	Public fragmentation; affective echo chambers	Latent polarization without open conflict; illusory stability
Silent Users	Low visibility yet numerically significant	Lurking, passive likes, deletion of digital traces	Silence as a rational strategy, not apathy	Spiral of silence reinforces dominant narratives (Noelle-Neumann, 1974)
Normalization of Fear	Memes and dark humor as social discipline	Cynicism and political fatigue	Depoliticization of substantive issues	Fear operates as a mechanism of power stabilization
Symbolic Power Structures	Media framing and coordinated commentary swarms	Moral delegitimation of protest actors	Othering and dehumanization	Ascendancy of order-oriented politics over participatory politics (Wodak, 2015)
Communication Ethics	Value-non-neutral algorithms	Emotion overrides dialogic responsibility	Ethical crisis in public communication	Serious challenges to digital deliberative democracy
Affective Publics	Emotional resonance outweighs ideational coherence	Publics formed through fear	Emotional mobilization without rational consensus	Affective politics displaces argumentative politics
Medium-Term Impact	Post-demo repetition of fear narratives	Active apathy and withdrawal	Low-intensity civic trauma	Procedurally stable yet communicatively fragile political system

Source: Author’s Data, 2025

Table 3 synthesizes these interactional and affective patterns, mapping user groups, dominant forms of interaction, affective states, and communicative expressions. The table illustrates that algorithmic amplification of fear did not simply polarize users; it reorganized trust by rewarding emotional intensity, normalizing suspicion, and incentivizing withdrawal. Trust shifted from being grounded in dialogic reciprocity to being contingent on affective convergence and perceived safety. This reconfiguration represents a profound transformation of interpersonal communication in post-protest digital contexts.

3. Critical interpersonal communication perspective illuminates the power relations, affective labor, and symbolic ruptures that characterize Indonesia’s post-protest digital communication landscape

The third set of findings demonstrates how a critical interpersonal communication perspective illuminates the power relations, affective labor, and symbolic ruptures that characterize Indonesia’s post-protest digital communication landscape. Interpersonal

communication in this context cannot be understood as neutral interaction; it is a site where power is exercised through visibility, affective control, and symbolic inclusion or exclusion.

Fear mongering contributed to a symbolic rupture in which certain experiences and voices became increasingly difficult or dangerous to articulate. Actors with greater symbolic capital—such as influencers, coordinated commentary networks, or users adept at exploiting platform logics—were better positioned to define dominant narratives. Their content benefited from algorithmic amplification, reinforcing their legitimacy and reach. In contrast, dissenting or critical voices often experienced delegitimation, harassment, or invisibilization, not through explicit censorship but through affective saturation and hostile interaction climates.

Affective labor emerged as a central feature of interpersonal communication in this environment. Pro-demonstration users engaged in continuous emotional regulation—defending positions, clarifying misinformation, and managing hostility—often at significant psychological cost. Neutral and vulnerable users engaged in affective labor through restraint, self-censorship, and withdrawal, carefully calibrating their emotional exposure to minimize risk. Even silence, in this sense, constitutes affective labor: a deliberate effort to manage fear, anxiety, and social consequences within unequal communicative structures.

Humor and cynicism functioned as additional instruments of power. Memes and sarcastic commentary stabilized post-protest narratives by rendering dissent socially undesirable or embarrassing. These practices did not eliminate alternative viewpoints but displaced them into less visible or less confrontational forms. From a critical interpersonal communication perspective, this represents a form of symbolic governance: power operates by shaping what can be said, how it can be said, and at what emotional cost.

Despite these constraints, the findings also reveal forms of symbolic resistance. Political memes, counter-narratives, and creative translanguaging allowed some users to contest dominant fear frames without direct confrontation. These practices enabled identity renegotiation and symbolic survival within hostile environments. While such resistance did not restore dialogic reciprocity at the public level, it demonstrates that agency persists even under conditions of affective and algorithmic domination.

Overall, the post-protest digital sphere functioned as a post-action arena in which political meaning, legitimacy, and memory were renegotiated. Fear mongering reshaped power relations not only by influencing opinions but by reorganizing the relational conditions of communication. Interpersonal trust, dialogic norms, and communicative agency were all restructured through affective and algorithmic mechanisms. A critical interpersonal communication perspective makes these dynamics visible, revealing fear mongering as a relational crisis rather than a mere discursive tactic.

Across the three research questions, the findings converge on a central conclusion: fear mongering in Indonesia's post-2025 protest digital environment operates as a structural and relational force. It disrupts dialogic norms by displacing deliberation with affect, reshapes trust by incentivizing suspicion and withdrawal, and reorganizes power relations through affective labor and symbolic rupture. Social media platforms serve not merely as channels for expression but as infrastructures that amplify fear and stabilize its relational consequences. The erosion observed is not abrupt but gradual, unfolding through everyday interpersonal practices that redefine how individuals communicate, trust, and imagine collective futures in digitally mediated publics.

Table 4. Synthesis of Critical Findings on Interpersonal Communication: From Meaning Negotiation to Symbolic Resistance after the 23 August 2025 Demonstration

Analytical Dimension	Key Findings	Critical Explanation (In-Depth Analysis)	Socio-Political Implications	Key Scholarly References (Q1)
Nature of Interpersonal Communication	Communication is not a neutral exchange of messages	Interpersonal communication operates as an arena of meaning negotiation saturated with power relations, symbolic interests, and unequal social positions. Each interaction reproduces or contests existing structures of domination.	Shifts the communication paradigm from technical–instrumental to political and cultural praxis	Fassett & Warren (2007)
Symbolic Power Relations	Meaning is controlled by actors with symbolic capital	Actors possessing cultural, social, and digital capital are better positioned to define reality, establish legitimate narratives, and constrain others' representation in interpersonal and digital interactions.	Normalization of representational inequality and voice legitimacy	Bourdieu (1991); Couldry (2012)
Symbolic Rupture	Experiences are unevenly articulated	Marginalized groups experience symbolic disarticulation: their experiences exist but are not discursively recognized because they do not align with dominant communicative logics.	Alienation, representational crisis, and erosion of interpersonal trust	Couldry & Mejias (2019)
Digital and Algorithmic Mediation	Interaction shaped by logics of visibility	Algorithms regulate who becomes visible and who is submerged, meaning interpersonal relations are no longer driven solely by communicative intent but by platform curation systems.	Production of new technology-based power asymmetries	Gillespie (2014); Bucher (2018)
Affective Politics	Emotions function as instruments of power	Affects such as fear, anger, and anxiety are mobilized to orient meaning and disrupt dialogic rationality	Social polarization and fragmentation of public dialogue	Ahmed (2004); Papacharissi (2015)

		within interpersonal communication.		
Erosion of Dialogic Ethics	Dialogue replaced by performativity	When communication is governed by affective and algorithmic logics, mutual listening, empathy, and communicative rationality are weakened.	Crisis of trust and declining social solidarity	Habermas (1984); Arnett & Arneson (1999)
Symbolic Resistance	Symbols as strategies of resistance	Memes, satire, irony, and counter-narratives become media through which marginalized actors contest symbolic domination and reclaim self-meaning.	Emergence of alternative spaces of meaning production	Foucault (1980); Butler (1997)
Redistribution of Agency	Agency reflexively reconstructed	Symbolic resistance allows marginalized actors to remain symbolically present despite limited access to formal structures of power.	Expansion of non-institutional forms of participation	Dailey & Vera (2021)
Renegotiation of Identity	Identity as fluid and performative	Social and political identities are not fixed but continuously renegotiated through communicative practices and symbolic resistance in post-protest digital spaces.	Transformation of collective and political identities	Butler (1997); Bourdieu (1991)
Post-Protest Meaning	Communication as a site of meaning contestation	In the post-protest phase, interpersonal and digital communication becomes the primary arena for struggles over meaning, legitimacy, and political memory.	Determination of political stability or delegitimation trajectories	Fassett & Warren (2007); Papacharissi (2015)

Source: Author's Data, 2025

Table 4. demonstrates that post-protest interpersonal communication cannot be understood as a micro-level practice detached from broader socio-political structures. Rather, it constitutes a strategic arena in which power, meaning, and identity are continuously negotiated. Symbolic resistance operates not merely as an expression of opposition, but as a mechanism for the redistribution of agency and the reconstruction of identity. Through this process, social actors are able to endure, adapt, and transform under conditions of structural inequality and heightened political tension in Indonesia.

Discussion

1. Fear mongering narratives circulating on Indonesian social media after the 2025 protests disrupt dialogic norms and interpersonal communication practices in digital interactions

Following the protests on August 25, 2025, triggered by controversies surrounding parliamentary allowances, Indonesia's digital communication landscape witnessed an intensified wave of fear mongering, a phenomenon not arising organically but rather facilitated by the algorithmic mechanisms of social media platforms. This marks a fundamental shift in how interpersonal trust is formed and maintained in digital spaces. Whereas trust was traditionally cultivated through direct interaction, emotional closeness, or the history of interpersonal relationships, it now increasingly hinges on ideological proximity—shared political stances and emotional responses to dominant, fear-inducing narratives. As Zuboff (2019) elucidates, algorithms within the framework of surveillance capitalism monetize emotions that are most prone to virality—namely fear, anger, and hatred—thereby amplifying the visibility of such content over empathetic or deliberative messages.

From a critical interpersonal communication perspective (Fassett & Warren, 2007), this process engenders new power relations that determine who gains legitimacy within digital conversations and who becomes marginalized. When fear narratives dominate, individuals or groups articulating nuance, complexity, or resistance to mainstream discourse are frequently dismissed as “irrelevant,” “unpatriotic,” or even “dangerous,” despite the epistemic value of their contributions. This underscores how algorithms do not merely filter information but also regulate which subjects are deemed worthy of being heard. In other words, algorithms reproduce gatekeeping in digital form, shifting interpersonal communication from a realm of meaning-making exchange to a highly politicized arena of visibility competition.

Papacharissi's (2015) concept of affective publics aptly captures how today's digital publics are propelled more by collective emotions than by rational deliberation. In the post-demonstration context, social media ceases to function as a space for consensus-building or dialogue and instead becomes a battleground of political affect that intensifies polarization and emotional dissonance. Consequently, affective engagement, which traditionally underpins interpersonal empathy, transforms into an emotional attachment founded on shared fear or anger toward constructed “enemies.” As Habermas (1984) emphasizes in his Theory of Communicative Action, genuine dialogue requires reciprocity—a willingness to listen, respond openly, and share meaning on equal footing. However, in this context, algorithms produce dialogic asymmetries that undermine these foundational conditions.

When fear dominates discourse and empathetic content is submerged, the result is not merely a communication crisis but a crisis of interpersonal relations. Thus, the phenomenon of fear mongering 2.0 in the post-demonstration period represents not only a technical or political discourse issue but a radical reconstruction of the architecture of trust and dialogic ethics in digital interpersonal communication.

2. Algorithmic amplification of fear reshapes the construction, erosion, and negotiation of trust within post-protest online interpersonal relationships

The aftermath of the August 25, 2025 demonstrations in Indonesia marked a pivotal moment in the shifting architecture of interpersonal trust and affect within digital spaces, as algorithmically reinforced fear mongering reshaped communication dynamics into relations saturated with emotional dissonance and dialogic asymmetry. Algorithmic amplification mechanisms selectively privilege fear-laden content, such as existential threats, moral panic,

and shared enemies, which not only bolster affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015) but also generate affective misalignment among individuals previously connected through positive affect and mutual trust (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009; Trenholm & Jensen, 2019). Within this context, algorithms act as non-neutral affective-political agents, intensifying emotional polarization that disrupts relational continuity, especially within connected urban communities like Jakarta, which now exhibit symptoms of trust fatigue and dialogic breakdown (Habermas, 1984; Zuboff, 2019). When trust ceases to be cultivated through direct interaction and is instead performed ideologically and emotionally resonated within algorithmic narratives, interpersonal communication shifts from a process of mutual understanding toward a symbolic exclusion arena where emotional allegiance outweighs reflective openness. This phenomenon reflects a profound relational crisis in the post-truth era, whereby digital engagement no longer reinforces social cohesion but accelerates trust fragmentation and erodes dialogic ethics.

3. Critical interpersonal communication perspective illuminates the power relations, affective labor, and symbolic ruptures that characterize Indonesia's post-protest digital communication landscape

The phenomenon of “Fear Mongering 2.0” within post-protest social media discourse in Indonesia illustrates a profound dialogic rupture and interpersonal trust crisis, which can be critically analyzed through the lens of critical interpersonal communication emphasizing power dynamics and symbolic inequalities in digital spaces (Fassett & Warren, 2007). Fear mongering practices, as part of the politics of affect, exploit the algorithmic logic of platforms that prioritize emotional and controversial content to maximize engagement (Papacharissi, 2015; Tufekci, 2015), thereby intensifying polarization and generating emotional dissonance that undermines foundational dialogic elements such as empathy and openness (Ahmed, 2014; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). This condition results in the symbolic invisibilization of critical and marginalized voices through mechanisms of algorithmic silencing (Noble, 2018), where individual communicative agency is entrapped within hidden digital political infrastructures (Gillespie, 2014; DeVito, 2017). Furthermore, fear mongering weakens dialogic ethics by transforming interpersonal communication into an arena of symbolic power domination that prioritizes affective manipulation over rational discourse, triggering a crisis of trust with direct repercussions on post-protest social cohesion (Habermas, 1984; Fassett & Warren, 2007). In this context, the dialogic rupture not only reflects social polarization but also results from algorithmic interventions and emotional political strategies that erode the potential for interpersonal solidarity and constructive meaning negotiation within in.

D. Conclusion

Based on the results of this study and the discussion, it can be concluded that:

- 1) Fear narratives are virally disseminated through sensational content, rhetorical framing, and algorithmic pressures aimed at emotional engagement—resulting in the dominance of affect and the displacement of rational discourse into the realm of fear.
- 2) The collective amplification of fear leads to emotional polarization, symbolic exclusion, and fragmentation of trust, alongside affective performativity and symbolic resistance.
- 3) Interpersonal communication is not a simple exchange but rather a complex field of meaning negotiation fraught with dynamics of domination, resistance, and representation.

In the post-protest context, social media emerges as a battleground where actors endowed with symbolic authority—such as political buzzers, influencers, and digital elites—leverage cultural and technological capital to control narratives and stabilize hierarchies of meaning.

References

- [1] Ahmed, S. (2014). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh University Press.
- [2] Altheide, D. L. (2002). *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis*. Aldine de Gruyter.
- [3] Benkler, Y., Faris, R., & Roberts, H. (2018). *Network Propaganda*. Oxford University Press.
- [4] Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press.
- [5] Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. Routledge
- [6] Couldry, N. (2012). *Media, Society, World*. Polity.
- [7] Craig, R. T., & Tracy, K. (1995). "Grounded Practical Theory: The Case of Intellectual Discussion." *Communication Theory*, 5(3), 248–272.
- [8] Dailey, R. M., & Vera, E. M. (2021). Critical interpersonal agency: Negotiating identity and power in relational contexts. *Communication Theory*, 31(3), 289–310. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtz036>
- [9] Fassett, D. L., & Warren, J. T. (2007). *Critical Communication Pedagogy*. SAGE.
- [10] Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (C. Gordon, Ed.). Pantheon Books.
- [11] Freishtat, S., & Sandlin, J. A. (2010). From symbolic resistance to subversive performances: Analyzing youth media production as a means of critical cultural expression. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 2(2), 169–179.
- [12] Freelon, D., & Wells, C. (2020). Disinformation as Political Communication. *Political Communication*, 37(2).
- [13] Gillespie, N., & Dietz, G. (2009). Trust repair after an organization-level failure. *Academy of Management Review*, 34(1), 127–145.
- [14] Gillespie, T. (2018). *Custodians of the Internet*. Yale University Press.
- [15] Habermas, J. (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Beacon Press.
- [16] Miskimmon, A., O'Loughlin, B., & Roselle, L. (2013). *Strategic Narratives*. Routledge.
- [17] Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). The Spiral of Silence. *Journal of Communication*, 24(2).
- [18] Papacharissi, Z. (2015). *Affective Publics*. Oxford University Press.
- [19] Papacharissi (2015), *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*.
- [20] O'Neill, O. (2002). *A Question of Trust*. Cambridge University Press.
- [21] Sunstein, C. (2017). *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton University Press.
- [22] Tufekci, Z. (2015). Algorithmic harms beyond Facebook and Google: Emergent challenges of computational agency. *Colorado Technology Law Journal*, 13(203).
- [23] Tyler, T. (2006). *Why People Obey the Law*. Princeton.
- [24] Trenholm, S., & Jensen, A. (2019). *Interpersonal Communication*. Oxford University Press.
- [25] Zuboff, S. (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. PublicAffairs.
- [26] Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2019). *Emotions, Media and Politics*. Polity.
- [27] Warren, J. T., & Fassett, D. L. (2015). *The SAGE Handbook of Communication and Instruction*. Sage.
- [28] Wodak, R. (2015). *The Politics of Fear*. Sage.