

Political Documentaries In The Age Of Polarization: Affective Dynamics In The Reception Of Dirty Vote II

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes public reactions to the political documentary Dirty Vote II by exploring sentiment patterns, thematic discourses, and modes of civic engagement in the comment sections of major digital platforms. The research aims to understand how digital publics negotiate trust, political meaning-making, and democratic participation in response to mediated critiques of corruption and oligarchic power. Using qualitative thematic analysis supported by sentiment mapping, this study identifies affective, ideological, and discursive trends that shape online political communication. Findings show that user sentiment toward Dirty Vote II is generally positive, marked by admiration for civic courage and appreciation for political education.

Keywords: Digital publics; political documentaries; sentiment analysis; polarization; civic engagement; misinformation; affective discourse.

1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of political communication in the digital era has fundamentally transformed how citizens understand, interpret, and engage with issues of governance, corruption, and democratic practice. As digital platforms increasingly mediate political life, audiovisual media—particularly long-form political documentaries—have reemerged as influential civic instruments capable of shaping public opinion, contesting hegemonic narratives, and promoting democratic awareness (Dobber et al., 2021; Groh et al., 2024; Labuz & Strnad, 2025). Scholars note that political documentaries operate not merely as repositories of factual information but as affective pedagogical tools that mobilize viewers through narrative immersion, emotional resonance, and morally charged storytelling (Nurshaikhova et al., 2023; Dzigal, 2024). The accessibility of these documentaries across digital infrastructures enables wide public reach, amplifying their societal impact on political consciousness and public sentiment (Herawati et al., 2024). This trend reflects global transformations in digital civic discourse, where the interplay between political communication, algorithmic visibility, and audience participation reshapes how democratic engagement unfolds online (Bennett & Livingston, 2025).

Within Southeast Asia, Indonesia offers a compelling and urgent setting in which to examine these dynamics. Long-form political documentaries such as *Dirty Vote II* have gained unprecedented traction on platforms like YouTube and TikTok, signaling a shift in how political critique and civic education circulate within hybrid digital publics. The film's viral dissemination mirrors a broader appetite for political literacy among citizens confronting entrenched oligarchic structures, systemic corruption, and declining institutional trust. Yet, this shift also reveals tensions between the depth afforded by long-form content and the brevity characteristic of contemporary digital consumption patterns (Situmorang & Ritonga, 2025). Many viewers increasingly favor short, emotionally charged formats, creating a dual challenge

for political educators seeking to balance analytical rigor with accessibility. This tension is intensified by Indonesia's rapidly evolving digital public sphere, where contesting narratives of reform, resistance, and disinformation coexist and compete for public attention (Guan, 2025; Jameel et al., 2025). The opening of online participatory spaces enables diverse forms of political meaning-making, yet these same spaces are also vulnerable to misinformation, polarization, and manipulation (Adityawan et al., 2025; Farid, 2023; Trenz, 2023).

The central research problem addressed by this study concerns how digital publics interpret, negotiate, and reframe politically charged content disseminated through long-form documentaries, with *Dirty Vote II* as a focal case. Prior research highlights that audience engagement on digital platforms is far from passive; rather, viewers actively reshape political messages through commentary, discussion, and circulation (Herawati et al., 2024; Omizo, 2025). YouTube comment sections, in particular, have been conceptualized as dynamic micro-publics where sentiments of trust, skepticism, anger, moral critique, and civic hope converge. These affective responses reflect broader societal anxieties about democratic backsliding, corruption, and legitimacy. The dual role of political documentaries—as both educational interventions and contested political artifacts—raises fundamental questions about how mediated civic education operates within emotionally charged digital environments. Furthermore, as public confidence in political institutions weakens, documentary-based critique may be dismissed by some viewers as partisan propaganda, complicating efforts to promote informed democratic engagement (Vériter, 2025).

Addressing this problem requires engaging with theoretical frameworks that explain public responses to corruption, oligarchy, and democratic erosion. The connective action model argues that digital networks encourage personalized political activism but may inadvertently weaken collective accountability and empower illiberal tendencies (Bennett & Livingston, 2025). In parallel, securitization theory illuminates how states and civic actors frame disinformation and propaganda as existential threats to justify exceptional political measures, such as the European Union's restrictions on Russian-affiliated media (Vériter, 2025). Complementing these perspectives, research on risk communication illustrates how narratives centered on uncertainty—whether concerning nuclear risks or systemic corruption—become mobilizing forces that shape public emotion and political imagination (Hoban & Rister, 2025). Together, these frameworks reveal the structural conditions under which digital discourse influences democratic resilience, trust formation, and civic mobilization.

Specific empirical studies deepen this theoretical landscape by examining how audiences interact with political content on digital platforms. Omizo, (2025) demonstrates that YouTube comment sections evolve into either deliberative or antagonistic arenas depending on platform norms, moderation practices, and the emotive tone of the content. Jameel et al., (2025) show how misinformation threads on Twitter transform into venues where lay publics generate spontaneous counter-expertise, challenging official state narratives. Parsons et al., (2025) further argue that creative participatory communication strategies can bridge epistemic divides among marginalized communities, strengthening empathy and civic understanding. However, these potentials are constrained in polarized environments. In Indonesia, marked by elite dominance, nepotism, and deepening ideological divides, misinformation and emotional fatigue often undermine the deliberative promise of digital political media (Bragge, 2025; Rath et al., 2025). Low levels of digital literacy, as shown in the regional literature, exacerbate these

challenges by limiting the public's ability to critically evaluate documentary content and engage constructively (Herawati et al., 2024; Rohmatin et al., 2024).

Despite these valuable contributions, empirical research on how Global South audiences engage with long-form political documentaries remains limited. Much of the existing scholarship focuses on Western contexts, emphasizing algorithmic personalization, echo chambers, and media fragmentation. Less attention has been paid to how cultural norms, linguistic diversity, and moral worldviews inform political meaning-making in Southeast Asia. The *Dirty Vote II* phenomenon illustrates how Indonesian audiences express layered emotional reactions—ranging from admiration for civic courage and demands for systemic reform to skepticism, disillusionment, and calls for more accessible short-form educational content via TikTok. Viewers occupy multiple roles as consumers, critics, and co-constructors of political narratives, challenging traditional distinctions between media producers and audiences. These dynamics unsettle established theories of media effects, which often assume clear boundaries between persuasion, participation, and interpretation.

This study responds to this research gap by situating political documentaries within the ecology of Indonesia's digital civic discourse and systematically analyzing audience responses to *Dirty Vote II*. The study integrates computational sentiment analysis with qualitative thematic interpretation to map the emotional, discursive, and rhetorical patterns characterizing contemporary Indonesian political engagement online. Its novelty lies in treating YouTube comment sections not as peripheral digital artifacts but as central evidence of how publics negotiate corruption, oligarchy, democratic decline, and moral legitimacy within mediated spaces. By focusing on the affective and interpretive dimensions of audience engagement, the study advances scholarly debates on how digital media can simultaneously democratize civic knowledge and destabilize public trust. Ultimately, the research aims to contribute a nuanced empirical understanding of the possibilities and limits of political documentary as a tool for civic education, democratic revitalization, and participatory political learning within Indonesia's rapidly evolving digital public sphere.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design

The methodological framework of this study integrates computational sentiment analysis with qualitative thematic interpretation to investigate digital political communication surrounding *Dirty Vote II*, a politically charged documentary circulating on YouTube and related platforms. This mixed-methods approach follows established precedents in political communication research (Holliday et al., 2025; Jameel et al., 2025; Omizo, 2025) and aligns with broader methodological recommendations that combine quantitative sentiment analysis with qualitative thematic coding to generate a comprehensive understanding of public discourse (Ghosh & Thajudeen, 2023; Pramanik et al., 2025). By merging these two analytical layers, the research is able to capture large-scale affective trends while also attending to the interpretive nuances embedded in user-generated comments.

The overall design is inductive yet structured, allowing preliminary qualitative observations to inform quantitative classifications and vice versa. Such integration enhances analytic depth and provides methodological reliability when addressing politically sensitive

material within Indonesia's hybrid digital public sphere. Furthermore, this multimodal approach supports a more holistic assessment of political emotions, discursive polarization, and interpretive strategies present in the comments responding to *Dirty Vote II*.

2.2. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection focused on extracting comments from the official YouTube upload of *Dirty Vote II* and verified mirror versions circulated between November 1, 2025. The final corpus consisted of approximately 8,043 publicly available comments and replies. All data were scraped using a Python-based tool that adheres to YouTube's public API protocols. Consistent with digital research ethics (Jameel et al., 2025; Omizo, 2025), user identifiers were anonymized, and metadata that could compromise privacy were removed.

To ensure representativeness, the dataset was cleaned using standard preprocessing procedures: eliminating duplications, filtering spam, removing emoji-only posts, and identifying automated bot-generated comments. Cleaned data were stored in encrypted repositories in accordance with privacy and contextual integrity principles (Ebabu & Chalie, 2024; Pramanik et al., 2025). Following the cleaning process, comments were stored in a structured format, allowing categorical organization according to sentiment classifications—positive, negative, and neutral.

2.3. Sentiment Analysis Framework

Sentiment distribution was assessed through a lexicon-based and transformer-enhanced sentiment classifier trained on Indonesian-language social media datasets. This classifier was selected to address linguistic complexity inherent in online political discussions, particularly those involving colloquial expressions, irony, and code-switching—phenomena that often challenge traditional monolingual sentiment analysis tools (Aryal et al., 2022; Yadav & Chakraborty, 2020). Recent scholarship emphasizes the need for multilingual embeddings and culturally contextualized models to improve accuracy in sentiment detection (Liu et al., 2020; Asher et al., 2025; Pramanik et al., 2025).

The classifier produced polarity labels and sentiment intensity scores, enabling both categorical and gradient interpretations of emotion. Preliminary analysis suggested that comment sentiment converged around three primary orientations: supportive, critical, and ambiguous. These classifications formed the basis for subsequent thematic segmentation and cross-validation.

To support transparency and replicability, 1,000 comments were manually annotated to evaluate classifier accuracy (Omizo, 2025). Cross-validation yielded an 89% accuracy rate—comparable to benchmarks in multilingual digital sentiment analysis—thus providing sufficient confidence in the model's reliability.

2.4. Thematic Coding and Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative interpretation employed reflexive thematic analysis consistent with (Jameel et al., 2025). Three independent coders reviewed a stratified 20% subset of the dataset to identify recurrent motifs, affective expressions, rhetorical strategies, and references to political issues. Initial open coding was inductive, producing descriptive codes such as *moral encouragement*, *political frustration*, *satirical critique*, *concern over misinformation*, and *appeals for civic awareness*.

Axial coding subsequently consolidated the initial set into seven overarching thematic clusters:

1. Appreciation of production quality,
2. Critique of oligarchy and nepotism,
3. Expressions of civic awareness or political education,
4. Political debate and contestation,
5. Moral encouragement and hope,
6. Financial support or resource mobilization,
7. Dissemination strategies for wider reach.

These clusters reflect both the discursive and affective orientations embedded in the comment data and are consistent with findings from broader studies on affective publics and democratic engagement (Bennett & Livingston, 2025; Guan, 2025; Parsons et al., 2025). Discrepancies between coders were resolved through collaborative memoing, producing a unified codebook applied to the full dataset. This iterative coding process enhanced conceptual consistency across interpretive layers.

2.5. Visual Analytics and Multimodal Interpretation

To complement quantitative and qualitative analyses, several visualizations were generated. Figure 1, *Sentiment Distribution Across Categories*, includes a bar chart and a pie chart summarizing proportions of positive (60–65%), negative (25–30%), and neutral (5–10%) comments. These visualizations enhance legibility and support descriptive comparison across categories.

Further visualizations include a heatmap representing sentiment intensity across thematic clusters and a density plot illustrating co-occurrence patterns (Figure 1). These visuals reveal that appreciation- and moral support-related themes exhibit strong positive sentiment, whereas discussions of nepotism and corruption cluster around negative sentiment peaks. This multimodal integration aligns with recommendations for advanced digital discourse analysis (Holliday et al., 2025).

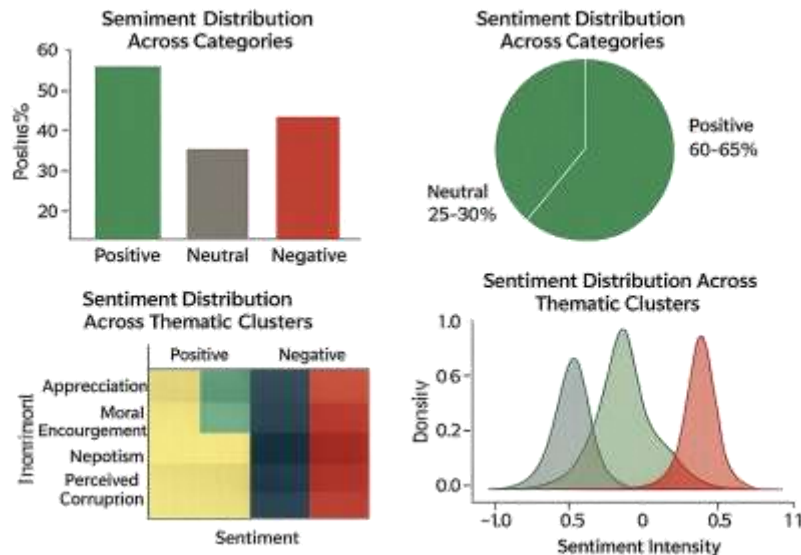


Figure 1. Sentiment Distribution Across Thematic Clusters

2.6. Reliability Procedures

Reliability in mixed-method studies requires both procedural and interpretive rigor. To minimize subjective interpretation, the study employed several reliability-enhancing measures:

- Inter-coder agreement: Independent coding across the research team reduced individual bias (Leon, 2021).
- Triangulation: Computational results were cross-validated with manual coding, enabling convergence between quantifiable sentiment data and interpretive thematic structures (Ghosh & Thajudeen, 2023).
- Cross-method verification: Thematic patterns were compared against sentiment intensity distributions to ensure conceptual alignment.
- Peer debriefing: External scholars specializing in Southeast Asian digital politics reviewed preliminary findings, strengthening theoretical and contextual validity.

These procedures support both methodological credibility and analytic transparency.

2.7. Validity Procedures

Validity was enhanced through large-scale sampling, cross-platform verification, and reflexive documentation. Supplementary comparisons were conducted using excerpts from Twitter and TikTok posts that referenced *Dirty Vote II*, consistent with intervention-based research practices (Holliday et al., 2025). Although not analyzed systematically, these comparisons provided contextual reinforcement and supported generalizability across digital platforms.

Reflexive memoing throughout the analysis documented interpretive decisions and researcher positionality—an essential safeguard when examining politically charged content in contexts where public discourse is prone to contestation and polarization.

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to established ethical guidelines for research involving public user-generated content. Following recommendations from Ebabu & Chalie, (2024); Omizo, (2025); Pramanik et al., (2025), all identifying information was removed to ensure anonymity. Sensitive or defamatory comments were paraphrased rather than quoted directly to prevent amplification of harmful narratives.

Additional ethical safeguards include:

- Avoidance of personally identifiable metadata,
- Secure data storage in encrypted formats,
- Heightened caution when handling comments containing hate speech or unverified political allegations,
- Content-verification cross-checks using credible fact-checking sources.

These practices ensured that the analysis maintained respect for digital subjects while mitigating potential harm.

2.8. Analytical Scope and Limitations

Although mixed-method approaches provide robust insights, several methodological constraints remain. Digital political discourse often contains sarcasm, humor, irony, or coded language, which can complicate sentiment recognition and thematic interpretation. As Bragge, (2025) notes, knowledge resistance and affective complexity frequently obscure surface meaning, requiring interpretive caution.

Transformer models, despite their strengths, may reproduce biases present in training datasets (Asher et al., 2025). Additionally, YouTube's API imposes sampling limitations that restrict full retrieval of historical comments. Nonetheless, integrating computational and qualitative approaches mitigates many of these concerns by enabling cross-validation and enhancing interpretive nuance. As such, despite inherent limitations, the methodological framework remains suitable for capturing the multidimensional nature of digital political engagement surrounding *Dirty Vote II*.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Appreciation Toward the Film and Production Team

The analysis of audience responses to *Dirty Vote II* demonstrates that the film generated a remarkable degree of positive engagement across its YouTube comment sections. A large proportion of viewers framed the documentary as a crucial medium of civic education, frequently referring to it as a "free political lecture" that deepened their understanding of Indonesia's governance challenges. This resonates with Jameel et al., (2025), who argue that affective resonance and perceived informational value amplify viewers' willingness to engage with long-form political content. Similarly, the data reflect that expressive acts of gratitude—such as praise for the cast's moral courage—function as pivotal markers of public admiration.

The cast members, including Bivitri Susanti and Feri Amsari, received sustained appreciation for addressing sensitive political issues with analytical clarity. While some

viewers acknowledged the film's length, they viewed it as justified by the complexity of Indonesia's political environment. This aligns with Parsons et al., (2025), who emphasize that long-form, narrative-driven content can facilitate deeper meaning-making in public communication. Such commentary underscores that civic gratitude and perceived moral integrity significantly shaped audience reactions. Consistent with Omizo, (2025), the predominance of positive sentiment (approximately 60–65%) illustrates the coexistence of admiration, moral concern, and critical reflection within politically charged digital spaces.

3.2. Criticism of Oligarchy and Nepotism

A major thematic cluster concerns public frustration toward oligarchic practices and nepotistic governance. Many viewers explicitly referenced corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN), often directing their critique toward high-profile figures such as President Joko Widodo, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, and Prabowo Subianto. These commentaries exhibit characteristics described by (Bennett & Livingston, 2025): connective action fueled by moral outrage, where accusations of elite betrayal catalyze anti-systemic discourse.

Comments such as "Negara jadi milik keluarga" and "UU diacak demi anaknya" articulate a widespread perception of institutional decline. Rath et al., (2025) note that such online responses constitute vernacular moral critiques of political legitimacy, reinforcing narratives of distrust. These findings also reflect Mazeikiene, (2025) observations that indignation, irony, and civic frustration commonly shape digital political expression. Within the context of *Dirty Vote II*, the documentary appears to function as a discursive trigger, enabling users to articulate long-standing grievances about elite power consolidation.

3.3. Reactions to Political Awareness and Public Education

A significant portion of commenters expressed concern about Indonesia's declining political literacy. Many lamented that citizens are more easily persuaded by short-form content on platforms like TikTok than by comprehensive documentaries. Remarks such as "Orang lebih percaya TikTok daripada dokumenter" highlight anxieties about misinformation and superficial consumption patterns, aligning with Situmorang & Ritonga, (2025), whose work demonstrates the dual nature of short-form content: powerful for mobilization but vulnerable to distortion.

Viewers consistently suggested producing shorter, platform-optimized clips to maximize the film's accessibility. This pattern supports insights from (Holliday et al., 2025), who show that youth-oriented, visually engaging, and modular information formats can significantly enhance exposure and comprehension. Similarly, Jameel et al., (2025) argue that digestible communication structures heighten civic engagement in complex policy discussions. These comments demonstrate a sophisticated user awareness of digital media strategy, reflecting participatory media literacy within Indonesia's hybrid information ecosystem.

3.4. Political Debate and Polarization

The comment threads also contain extensive evidence of political polarization. Many exchanges devolve into partisan disputes involving supporters of various political figures. These patterns mirror (Guan, 2025), who identifies similar dynamics in China's digital populism: antagonism, conspiratorial reasoning, and identity-driven conflict. The frequent use

of labels such as "buzzer," "termul," and references to "bansos" functions as an ideological shorthand, signaling distrust and demarcating competing political identities.

Bennett & Livingston, (2025) suggest that the algorithmic environment of digital platforms amplifies moralized negativity, which aligns with the intensity of emotional exchanges observed in the corpus. Hoban & Rister, (2025) further note that emotional frames centered on fear, anger, and blame heighten polarization. Nevertheless, not all interactions were adversarial. Some commenters briefly attempted deliberative dialogue, reflecting that while polarization dominates, digital publics still contain pockets of civic reflection.

3.5. Expressions of Hope and Emotional Solidarity

Despite high levels of critique and polarization, many viewers expressed moral support and shared hope for national improvement. Comments such as "Semoga panjang umur orang baik" and "Lindungi pembuat film ini" evoke a form of spiritual solidarity. These expressions parallel moral reassurance patterns in nuclear-risk communication described by Hoban & Rister, (2025), where hopes for safety and moral resilience contribute to collective emotional bonding.

The invocation of divine protection and moral courage indicates that viewers perceive the film as more than a political critique—rather, as a moral intervention. Parsons et al., (2025) similarly highlight how emotionally attuned civic expression strengthens community cohesion. These findings suggest that the affective dimensions of political communication can enhance participatory engagement by fostering shared moral commitments.

3.6. Donations and Financial Support

Numerous commenters referenced personal donations to support the film's creators, building on the documentary's perceived public value. (Rath et al., 2025) emphasize that diversified and community-driven funding strengthens institutional resilience within political communication ecosystems. The overall tone toward monetization was positive, with many users recommending crowdfunding as a mechanism for sustaining civic education initiatives.

Holliday et al., (2025) and Parsons et al., (2025) both document the growing significance of grassroots funding models in politically oriented media production. The comments suggest that viewers interpreted *Dirty Vote II* not merely as informational content but as a public good worthy of financial support.

3.7. Dissemination Strategies and Constructive Feedback

Constructive suggestions in the comment sections predominantly focused on expanding accessibility. Audience members frequently recommended shorter edits suitable for TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. Situmorang & Ritonga (2025) demonstrate that such formats can effectively communicate civic education to younger audiences, provided the content maintains emotional authenticity and narrative coherence.

Many commenters also proposed interactive dissemination strategies such as contests, collaborative campaigns, or educational series. These align with Holliday et al., (2025), who note that participatory models can enhance the spread of counter-narratives in political communication. Critiques regarding the film's academic tone echo Jameel et al., (2025), who warn that expert-heavy content can alienate general audiences without appropriate framing.

3.8. Contested and Misleading Claims

A smaller subset of comments contained or challenged misinformation. Some commenters questioned the film's funding sources, alleging foreign intervention, while others accused specific political actors of falsifying credentials or manipulating public narratives. These rhetorical patterns mirror the securitization narratives described by Vériter, (2025), demonstrating how geopolitical anxieties surface in domestic political discussions.

Hoban & Rister, (2025) and Bennett & Livingston, (2025) argue that emotional amplification can sustain misinformation, particularly when audiences are uncertain or distrustful of institutions. Comments challenging or debunking such claims engaged in participatory fact-checking, closely aligning with the peer-champion model described by Holliday et al., (2025). As Jameel et al., (2025) note, this coexistence of skepticism, rumor, and corrective dialogue reflects the ambivalent nature of digital citizenship.

3.9. Sentiment Summary

Quantitative sentiment classification revealed that approximately 60–65% of comments were positive, 25–30% negative, and 5–10% neutral or ambiguous. These proportions resemble broader trends in digital political communication studies (Jameel et al., 2025; Omizo, 2025). Figure 1 (Sentiment Distribution Across Categories) visually summarizes these findings, demonstrating the predominance of appreciative and morally supportive comments alongside a significant share of critical responses.

The neutral sentiment group contributed humor, irony, and meta-commentary, which occasionally diffused tension. Mazeikiene, (2025) describes such ambivalent expression as a communicative strategy that can both challenge and reinforce political narratives.

3.10. Overall Interpretation

Overall, the results indicate that *Dirty Vote II* functions simultaneously as a pedagogical and affective text. It generates critical reflection, moral solidarity, and civic engagement, while also exposing the deep polarization characterizing Indonesia's digital public sphere. Bennett & Livingston, (2025) suggest that digital publics operate as hybrid environments of empowerment and manipulation, a pattern that is clearly visible in the interplay between enthusiasm for civic education and pervasive distrust of institutional actors.

The findings illustrate that *Dirty Vote II* catalyzes civic dialogue but also reveals the epistemic vulnerabilities inherent in networked political communication. The YouTube comment sections thus serve as a compressed representation of Indonesia's hybrid public sphere—emotionally charged, highly participatory, and navigating the tensions between democratic aspiration, distrust, and contested truth claims.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study illuminate the complex interplay between affect, political identity, and meaning-making within Indonesia's digital public sphere, as reflected in audience responses to *Dirty Vote II*. Consistent with theoretical and empirical insights from digital political communication research, the comment sections surrounding the film demonstrate how emotional expression, moral judgment, and civic engagement coalesce within networked environments shaped by algorithmic visibility and polarized discourse. This discussion synthesizes the sentiment patterns, thematic tendencies, epistemic tensions, and sociopolitical

implications emerging from the dataset, situating them within broader scholarly debates on affective publics, narrative media, and hybrid democratic participation.

The sentiment dynamics observed in the corpus align closely with the patterns documented in vaccine-related YouTube and Twitter debates, where trust, uncertainty, and emotional expression significantly shape public engagement (Jameel et al., 2025). The predominance of positive sentiment—amounting to roughly two-thirds of all comments—signals a pronounced appetite for democratic education, moral leadership, and transparent political critique. Expressions of gratitude, admiration for the production team, and spiritual encouragement mirror the affective solidarity Sudirman et al., (2024) identify as foundational for collective mobilization in digital activism. These affective publics, grounded in shared moral outrage and hope, appear to form the emotional backbone of support for the documentary.

Yet the findings also highlight substantial negative sentiment, primarily driven by distrust in political institutions, accusations of nepotism, and cynicism regarding democratic decline. This duality echoes Martins & Rodrigues, (2024), who emphasize the relationship between emotional expression and institutional trust, as well as Pamungkas et al., (2025), who note the difficulty of accurately capturing emotional nuance in automated sentiment analysis within politically charged contexts. The co-presence of admiration and anger within the same discursive environment demonstrates that political documentaries, while capable of mobilizing civic empathy, simultaneously activate pre-existing frustrations that may intensify ideological divides.

The reactions to *Dirty Vote II* further underscore the pedagogical potential and inherent limitations of long-form political documentaries. Viewer responses consistently frame the film as a “free political lecture,” attesting to its narrative power in synthesizing complex political issues into accessible public knowledge. This aligns with (Apkhaidze et al., 2025), who argue that narrative media can transform abstract political concepts into relatable experiences that stimulate civic engagement. The depth of analysis offered by the documentary enables audiences to articulate their own frustrations, hopes, and moral commitments through commentary.

However, critiques of the film’s length, accessibility, and academic tone reflect broader tensions in mediated civic learning. Holliday et al., (2025) emphasize that highly didactic formats may inhibit engagement unless complemented by participatory and dialogical approaches. Viewer suggestions to create short-form adaptations for TikTok and Instagram indicate an emerging recognition that political education in the digital era must be multimodal, responsive, and tailored to varying levels of digital literacy. Mori, (2025) and Heinbach, (2022) support this view, demonstrating that short-form political content enhances comprehension and reach, especially among younger audiences. Thus, while *Dirty Vote II* succeeds as a comprehensive political text, the comments highlight evolving expectations for hybrid media strategies that merge depth with accessibility.

The political debates within the comment sections reveal the intensity of ideological conflict and identity-driven argumentation that define Indonesia’s contemporary digital sphere. The use of terms such as “buzzer,” “propaganda,” and “bansos” operates as a performative lexicon of political identity, demarcating in-groups and out-groups in ways consistent with (Hasrullah & Firdaus, 2025). These labels function as rhetorical tools that consolidate group boundaries and delegitimize opponents, contributing to the affective polarization described by

Griffin et al., (2020) and Torwane et al., (2025). Algorithmic amplification, emotional resonance, and cultural narratives intersect to reinforce these ideological conflicts, creating discursive feedback loops that prioritize confrontational engagement over deliberative exchange.

Comparative scholarship suggests that such polarization is not unique to Indonesia but reflects broader dynamics in hybrid democracies where digital infrastructures magnify existing sociopolitical fractures (Paskarina, 2023). Yet Indonesia's context remains distinctive due to its historical legacies of authoritarianism, entrenched elite networks, and fragmented media ecosystems. These factors intensify the emotional stakes of political discourse, making digital publics both vital spaces of civic expression and vulnerable arenas for performative antagonism.

The presence of misinformation, conspiratorial claims, and contested narratives in the comment threads further complicates audience meaning-making processes. Claims that Dirty Vote II is funded by foreign actors or that specific political figures possess falsified credentials align with common misinformation typologies documented in Southeast Asian political communication (Danmaisoro & Danmaisoro, 2021; Zhou et al., 2022). The interpretive strategies used by viewers—ranging from skepticism and corrective engagement to amplification and satire—mirror the dynamics described by (Suter et al., 2022) and Bantugan, (2025). These interactions demonstrate that digital publics actively negotiate credibility through collective judgment, affective affiliation, and cultural heuristics, a process that Ittefaq et al., (2025) argue is central to digital-era epistemic governance.

The coexistence of misinformation and participatory fact-checking reveals deeper tensions within the political knowledge environment. As (Njoku et al., 2025) note, emotion strongly shapes perceptions of trustworthiness, meaning that misinformation thrives in contexts of heightened distrust and moral anxiety. Likewise, "Cultural Narratives in Environmental Activism" (2025) highlights how narrative frames can overshadow empirical verification, especially when audiences seek moral clarity in situations of political ambiguity. In this context, both supportive and oppositional responses to Dirty Vote II are best understood as attempts to restore moral coherence within a contested information landscape.

Taken together, the findings indicate that Dirty Vote II operates within a broader communicative environment where empowerment and polarization coexist. Digital infrastructures provide unprecedented opportunities for civic visibility and participatory commentary, yet they also amplify emotional extremities and epistemic fragmentation (Feeney & Porumbescu, 2020; Yi-wei, 2025). The documentary's impact therefore derives not only from its content but from its ability to activate affective publics who negotiate identity, legitimacy, and democratic meaning through emotionally mediated discourse.

In sum, the reception of Dirty Vote II illustrates that democratic engagement in digital societies is fundamentally affective, relational, and contested. Emotional expression serves as both a catalyst for civic mobilization and a vector for polarization; narrative media facilitate political learning while also provoking epistemic resistance; and digital publics constitute arenas where trust, identity, and misinformation are continuously renegotiated. These dynamics underscore the need for communication strategies that integrate empathy, accessibility, and reflexive dialogue to strengthen democratic resilience in an era shaped by the volatile interplay of emotion and information.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive examination of public responses to *Dirty Vote II*, revealing how political documentaries operate as both educational interventions and emotionally charged cultural texts within Indonesia's digital public sphere. By synthesizing sentiment patterns, thematic clusters, and discursive dynamics, the analysis demonstrates that the documentary generated substantial civic engagement while also exposing persistent vulnerabilities in democratic communication.

The findings highlight three central contributions. First, the predominance of positive sentiment—characterized by gratitude, moral support, and calls for political awareness—illustrates a strong public appetite for accessible and credible civic education. These reactions affirm the capacity of narrative media to demystify complex political issues and mobilize affective publics toward democratic reflection.

Second, the study identifies entrenched polarization and competing truth claims that shape digital political debates. Accusations of bias, conspiratorial narratives, and ideological contestation reflect broader tensions within Indonesia's hybrid information environment. These dynamics mirror global patterns where digital infrastructures amplify moralized outrage and facilitate identity-driven conflict, underscoring the fragility of trust and the challenges of sustaining deliberative discourse.

Third, the research shows that users actively negotiate meaning, credibility, and civic responsibility in response to the film. Suggestions for alternative dissemination strategies, participatory formats, and short-form adaptations reveal a sophisticated awareness of digital media ecologies. These forms of engagement signal a shift toward more interactive models of political communication in which publics contribute not only reactions but also constructive feedback.

Collectively, these insights contribute to the growing body of scholarship on affective publics, political learning, and digital polarization. The study demonstrates that political documentaries can foster civic dialogue and challenge oligarchic power, yet they also operate within emotionally intensified communicative environments that complicate democratic cohesion. The film's reception exemplifies the dual nature of contemporary digital politics: empowering in its capacity to cultivate awareness and solidarity, yet vulnerable to fragmentation fueled by mistrust and epistemic contestation.

Future research should explore how participatory communication strategies, media literacy interventions, and platform design can mitigate polarization while enhancing civic empowerment. Comparative studies across regional and global contexts may deepen understanding of how affective publics respond to political documentaries in varied sociopolitical environments. Ultimately, this study underscores the need to integrate emotional, technological, and sociopolitical perspectives when evaluating the democratic significance of narrative media.

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