



Analysis Of the Symbolic Convergence of Activism with the Hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi on Twitter Social Media as A Virtual Public Space

Akhmad Ridha Djamaluddin^{1*}, Sri Hastjarjo², Ignatius Agung Satyawan³
Universitas Sebelas Maret

Corresponding Author: Akhmad Ridha Djamaluddin

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Hashtag Activism, Public Space, Symbolic Convergence

Received : 13 January

Revised : 15 February

Accepted: 18 March

©2023 Djamaluddin, Hastjarjo, Satyawan: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Atribusi 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



ABSTRACT

The hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi (which means it is useless to report to the police) emerged after a flurry of alleged child rape by his biological father in East Luwu, South Sulawesi, was halted by local police. This issue was then widely discussed, went viral on social media, and drew protests from netizens through the hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi. This study aims to analyze the symbolic convergence that occurs on Twitter social media through conversations between Twitter account users in the use of hashtags or hashtag activism #PercumaLaporPolisi in the context of Twitter as a virtual public space. This qualitative research uses descriptive analysis techniques based on case studies that collect and record data from the field through hashtag analysis on Twitter in the hashtag period from October 6, 2021, to December 7, 2021. The data obtained will then be analyzed based on Bormann's Symbolic Convergence theory. The results showed that hashtag activism #PercumaLaporPolisi is a form of symbolic convergence that occurs on social media as a public sphere. It was initiated by the spread of symbols in the form of messages by @projectm_org accounts through his tweets on Twitter which ultimately formed a fantasy chain based on the theme of fantasy of disappointment to police officers over rape cases handled unfairly and inappropriately.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the virtual world has become more accessible due to the development of technology-based communication tools that support the rapid exchange of information. Humans have various options to access virtual channels that they need in today's new media era regarding the functions possessed by virtual media themselves. Social media has also developed into a type of virtual media that is used to support online social interaction activities.

The development of communication technology places the Internet as one of the spaces essential in developing the virtual public sphere. It relates to Goode's opinion that most discussions about the new mediascape and the public sphere have highlighted the role of the Internet as a public sphere. The Internet provides an opportunity for every individual to gain access to information. Dahlgren in Pembayun (2017) argues that the Internet provides a virtual application prototype that improves democracy in a participatory and open manner

Social media has been used as a medium for public communication due to the current shift in social reality so that communication runs effectively and instantaneously with the public. Social media serves as a place for the public to convey their expressions through movements or mass actions carried out online on social media. If we classify it in the context of communication, the campaign on social media enters the realm of public communication because it relates to the audience's interests. This statement is based on the opinion of Schramm (1974) in Apriyani (2021), which states that communication is essentially a procedure of the individual mind to be able to influence the minds of other individuals.

Twitter is one of the social media that is a place or virtual public space for its users. Twitter is a social media where any registered user can write an opinion on any subject in short sentences. Twitter's distinct function combines private media consumption with public debate and conversation. On Twitter, anyone can give their idea on any topic, essential or not, creating a democracy where everyone enjoys the freedom of expression.

Referring to the report presented by We Are Social in 2022, Indonesia has the highest number of Twitter users worldwide. It is evidenced by the number of Twitter social media users, which stands at 18.45 million in 2022. This number is 4.23% of all global Twitter users, which is 436 million. There was also an increase of 31.3% in Twitter users in Indonesia in 2022, whereas, in the previous year, there were 14.05 million users (Ayu, 2022).

The data indirectly shows that Indonesia has high Twitter social media activity as well, as evidenced by the various discussion activities represented by

the emergence of many hashtags on Twitter. Some even rank as the most talked about hashtags. One of the most talked about hashtags in 2021 was #PercumaLaporPolisi.

The hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi emerged after a case of alleged child rape by his biological father in the East Luwu area, South Sulawesi, which the local police stopped investigating for no apparent reason. This condition eventually caused public anger and became a trend discussed on social media to create a movement through hashtags. Through this hashtag, netizens and the media have expressed their disappointment with the Indonesian National Police (POLRI) institution that does not carry out its duties properly. Twitter users and the public in cyberspace or on the internet form solidarity by protesting against the performance and demanding the POLRI to be more protective.

The movement carried out by Twitter social media users forms a discussion space through hashtags so that there is an exchange of the same symbol for efficient communication. With the same thought, these users moved towards using the same symbol system. This results in shared awareness, everyday thoughts, and feelings on the discussed topic. This concept relates to the Symbolic Convergence Theory, in which there is a symbolic sharing of reality with a fantasy theme that occurs in the community of social media users, namely Twitter, in this study.

This study aims to analyze the symbolic convergence that occurs on Twitter social media through the conversations of Twitter account users using the hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi in the context of Twitter as a virtual public space.

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative. According to Nugrahani (2014) [6], qualitative research is research whose purpose is to understand the condition of a context that is directed at a complete and in-depth description of the situation based on its natural setting regarding objective facts and events in the field of study. The analytical technique used is the descriptive analysis based on case studies using the method of collecting and recording data from the area through analysis of the hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi on Twitter social media in the hashtag period from October 6, 2021, to December 7, 2021. The data obtained will then be analyzed based on Bormann's Symbolic Convergence theory, and conclusions will be drawn based on the descriptive analysis.

RESEARCH RESULT

The fantasy theme as the message content emerged from the dramatization created by the Project Multatuli account with the Twitter username @projectm_org through its tweets that shared stories about the results of their investigation into the case of child rape in East Luwu through a thread. The hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi reflects the media's skepticism towards the POLRI, shown through the word "Percuma" (useless) contained in this hashtag sentence. Project Multatuli mobilized this hashtag activism to reinforce their stance on POLRI's performance in responding to reports of legal cases experienced by the Indonesian people.

The hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi movement created by @projectm_org contains a sequence of events following the investigation into the rape of three children by their biological father. This Multatuli project provides a complex summary of the cases raised by using the hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi which has succeeded in getting the attention of netizens on Twitter social media so that it has successfully become hashtag activism by Twitter users in expressing their disappointment with the POLRI.

The dramatization of the message built by Project Multatuli then formed a fantasy chain from other Twitter users who participated in sharing stories with the same fantasy by pinning the hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi. On the other hand, most media accounts also contributed to spreading tweets as a form of support for the movement created by Project Multatuli. Several users also shared stories of similar experiences. There was momentum for sharing emotional expressions by repeating the same context.

Table 1. Tweet Messages as A Chain of Fantasy on the Hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi

No.	Username (Date)	Tweet
1	@magdaleneid (8 October 2021)	Kami mengunggah ulang laporan @projectm_org sebagai bentuk solidaritas untuk menuntut keadilan bagi korban. Semoga dengan ini makin banyak dukungan dan bisa membawa perubahan terhadap penanganan kasus kekerasan seksual 🙏 #PercumaLaporPolisi <i>(We are re-uploading the @projectm_org report as a form of solidarity to demand justice for the victims. Hopefully, there will be more support and can bring changes to the handling of cases of sexual violence #PercumaLaporPolisi)</i>

2	@ICJRid (9 October 2021)	<p>ICJR menerbitkan ulang laporan pemerkosaan anak di Luwu Timur, Sulawesi Selatan, atas izin dari redaksi @projectm_org.</p> <p>Republikasi laporan ini merupakan bentuk solidaritas atas pembungkaman media.</p> <p>#PercumaLaporPolisi</p> <p><i>(ICJR republishes reports of child rape in East Luwu, South Sulawesi, with permission from the editor of @projectm_org. The republication of this report is a form of solidarity with the media's silence.</i></p> <p>#PercumaLaporPolisi)</p>
3	@airakusumas (26 November 2021)	<p>Pagi2 baca reportase @projectm_org , hati saya sakit. Korban yang berusia 12 tahun kena kekerasan berlapis: rudapaksa dari pelaku dan pemaksaan kehamilan dari kepolisian.</p> <p>Sekarang korban trauma berat.</p> <p>#percumalaporpolisi</p> <p><i>(Reading the @projectm_org report this morning, my heart aches.</i></p> <p><i>The 12-year-old victim was subjected to multiple layers of violence: coercion from the perpetrator and forced pregnancy by the police.</i></p> <p><i>Now the victim is severely traumatized.</i></p> <p>#percumalaporpolisi)</p>
4	@ccermide (7 October 2021)	<p>Orang kenapa si astaga. Cerita dikit di lingkungan rumah gua lagi ada kasus kek gini, 2 bocah udah divisum juga yang satu tapi yang satunya orang tuanya gamau anaknya divisum katena takut anaknya dicemooh orang. Dan sedikiti cerita orang tua ini lapor ke polisi tapi malah dimarahi dan orang tua ini lapor ke komnas anak dan gua gatau lanjutannya gimana lagi. Tapi kemaren gua masih liat pelaku nya ini masih main catur umurnya sekitaran 50an ketaas i guess dia ini gapunya istri ya mungkin karena itu dia demen ma bocah aka pe do phill #PercumaLaporPolisi</p> <p><i>(Gosh. In my neighborhood, there is another case like this, two children have been sent for post-mortem, but one of the parents does not want their child to be sent for post-mortem because they are afraid that their child will be ridiculed. These parents reported to the police but were scolded. Then they reported it to the National Commission for Children, and I do not know what happened again. But yesterday, I still saw the culprit</i></p>

		<i>was still playing chess; he is around his 50s; I guess he does not have a wife, maybe that is why he likes kids, a.k.a pedophiles #PercumaLaporPolisi)</i>
5	@siskaaciss30 (7 October 2021)	Katanya pelajaran PPKn polisi tugasnya menjaga, mengayomi. Tapi bentar deh, setiap ada kasus apapun harus bayar dengan harga tinggi. Klo misal korban nya ini bukan orang berada, trus kasus dihentikan. Dimana letak menjaga & mengayomi ? #PercumaLaporPolisi <i>(He said in the Civics lesson that the police's job was to guard and protect. But wait a moment, you have to pay a high price every time there is any case. If, for example, the victim is not from a wealthy family, the issue is terminated. Where is the meaning to serve & protect? #PercumaLaporPolisi)</i>

Based on the data summarized by Wuriyani (2021) [9], the initial tweet that initiated the hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi gained quite a lot of interaction and engagement, with more than 10,000 retweets, 1706 quoted tweets, and more than 18,000 likes. This sensitive issue and caused public outrage over the chronology of a country with an alarming legal practice has developed into a complex issue. However, it can be delivered representatively using the #PercumaLaporPolisi hashtag created by Project Multatuli.

The hashtag buzzed again with the same fantasy message but with a different context. It was motivated by the suicide case of Novia Widyasari caused by her lover, a member of the Indonesian National Police (POLRI) named Bripda Randy Bagus. He forced her to have an abortion, but the case was not handled properly by the police, causing public anger, and jointly re-raising the hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi demanded justice for the suspects as Project Multatuli initiated the movement.

Table 2. Tweet Messages as A Fantasy Chain on the Hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi

No.	Username (date)	Tweet
1	@camaraderie693 (6 Desember 2021)	Ini gila sih, fakta diputar balik. Bahkan ga ada statement kalau Novia depresi karena dipaksa aborsi It's all victim blaming. #PercumaLaporPolisi #SAVENOVIAWIDYASARI <i>(This is crazy, facts are twisted. There is no statement that Novia is depressed because she was forced to have an abortion. It is all victim blaming. #PercumaLaporPolisi #SAVENOVIAWIDYASARI)</i>

2	<p>@LorNerver (6 Desember 2021)</p>	<p>#Percumalaporpolisi Hukum di Indonesia sangat aneh. Ingat ada uang ada hukum. Gak ada uang nunggu di hukum. Randy sebagai pelaku pemerkosaan pada Novia dijatuhi hukuman 5 tahun dengan kamar vvip di penjara. Dan denger kabar si randay hanya menjalani hukum formalitas. (#PercumaLaporPolisi <i>(The law in Indonesia is extraordinary. Remember, there is money, and there is the law. There is no money waiting in the direction. Randy, the perpetrator of raping Novia, was sentenced to 5 years with a VIP room in prison. Furthermore, I heard that Randay was only undergoing legal formalities.)</i>)</p>
3	<p>@olivia_aletea (5 Desember 2021)</p>	<p>Novia diperkosa! Aborsinya dipaksa! Dan rilis resminya? "Setelah resmi berpacaran, mereka melakukan hubungan layaknya suami-istri..." Hah? Fix, ini beneran #percumalaporpolisi ! <i>(Novia raped! The abortion was forced! And the official release? "After officially dating, they have a relationship like a husband and a wife..." Hah? Fix, this is #percumalaporpolisi!)</i></p>
4	<p>@brightestfajr (5 Desember 2021)</p>	<p>Makin jengkel setelah melihat rilis kepolisian atas kasus novia widyadari. Kian hati-hati ya guis buat melindungi diri sendiri, lembaga perlindungan dari negara gabisa dipercaya apalagi diandalkan buat masyarakatnya. #percumalaporpolisi <i>(More annoyed after seeing the police release on the case of Novia Widyasari. Be more careful, you all, to protect yourself. Protection agencies from the state cannot be trusted, let alone relied on for the people. #percumalaporpolisi)</i></p>
5	<p>@sknhkim (5 Desember 2021)</p>	<p>Dengan adanya kasus kak Novia ini semakin hancur aja citra polisi dimata masyarakat. Hukumannya pun hanya di mutasi saja. Gak adil sih korban nya sudah meninggal, pelaku masih bisa hidup enak.</p>

		<p>#savenoviwidyasari #percumalaporpolisi <i>(With the case of Ms. Novia, the police image has only deteriorated. The punishment is just a transfer. It is not fair that the victim is dead. The perpetrator can still live well.</i> #savenoviwidyasari #percumalaporpolisi)</p>
--	--	---

The meeting of fantasy themes and symbols created by Project Multatuli with the same signs shared by other users is at a meeting point to be related and close together. In the end, a meeting of mind was formed. It was marked by a meeting of the same thoughts between hashtag followers and the @projectm_org account and their followers. This interaction creates a fantasy chain on the Twitter account @projectm_org. Not only that, but many users are not followers who also take advantage of the hashtag as a form of disappointment and openly criticize the POLRI. This fantasy chain increases the tempo of the conversation on the account. It inspires the enthusiasm of Twitter users to participate in giving their views to form a symbolic convergence.

DISCUSSION

Hashtags are one of the technological features that make it easy for users to find and share specific topics by attracting participation from other users using the hash symbol "#" on keywords within particular contexts (Halavais, 2014). Twitter users can open discussion forums on topics they find interesting. In contrast, other users can access them by using the Twitter search bar to find and follow tweets with similar hashtags. This feature allows users to join discussions with specific hashtag keywords on the channel without following the user. Hashtags have proven to be very important in their use on Twitter, especially to access responses containing the latest news (Bruns et al., 2011). Hashtags also allow users to discuss common topics of interest or engage in shared audience activities.

Many public users overlap with each other because of the mutual connections of friendship that occur between individual users. It enables the flow of information that is determined by common sociodemographic identities, topical interests, and communication practices among interconnected users, unifying social media, face-to-face, and other forms of communication channels, which can be seen as the lowest foundation of the entire public sphere (Bruns & Highfield, 2015).

Whenever a user uses a hashtag as a status marker, they will get specific information about that status and allow other users to get contextual information, join the channel, and contribute to the hashtag created. In addition,

hashtags also function as markers of tweets relevant to specific themes or topics known by users (Bruns & Burgess, 2011).

In general, hashtag activism is one component of a global movement, which can also include other forms of media and action, such as protests, petitions, boycotts, opinions, public service advertisements, and others. As part of a comprehensive approach, hashtags can play an influential role in reaching the right audience in the right way, on the right platform, and at the right time. While hashtags may not be the only tool for triggering social change, they can be an essential conversation starter to highlight crucial issues that require advocacy.

Twitter is one of the social media with rapid information flow based on the characteristics of its hashtags. It will be the trend if the hashtags have high user interaction and engagement, making it easier for users to access them by opening the 'trending topic' bar in the search options.

Social movements in hashtag activism have a narrative form. Such narratives have a complex structure in which the campaign comprises conflicts, causal explanations, and sequences of events. Hashtag activism is characterized by many comments and retweets appearing on social media in response to a hashtagged word, phrase, or sentence. Because these comments and retweets consist of multiple personal stories and appear in a temporal sequence, they take on a narrative form. Thus, the narrative context becomes the center of the hashtag's activism (Yang, 2016).

#PercumaLaporPolisi is one of the narrative contexts of a social movement that is expressed through hashtag activism. A social movement by Angeline (2016) is a group of individuals who initiate a conflict by identifying a specific issue, are connected through informal networks, and share the same collective identity. In the case of the #PercumaLaporPolisi activism, collective identity was built to protest against POLRI officers by sharing stories containing disappointment over the failure of the tasks that they should have completed.

The stories shared through these hashtags are not only a collective identity but also a starting point for why social movements can be formed. Bormann's symbolic convergence theory relates the ability of imagination and storytelling of a community in a social direction. Bormann states that humans are social storytellers who use symbols as a tool to share fantasies and arouse the enthusiasm of a group (Griffin, 2012; Angeline, 2016). Bormann also mentions that there are two main concepts in this theory, namely (Suryadi, 2010): (1) communication creates a reality with the attribution of experience or information obtained. (2) Individuals can unify the meaning of their symbols to

form a shared reality. The reality referred to in this theory is a story in the form of a narrative sequence that explains the context members must believe.

This process fosters symbolic awareness to form meanings, emotions, and motives for a group of people who are members of it to take specific actions. The members can come from a group of individuals who have known and interacted with each other for a long time. They might also come from a group of people who do not know each other and have different ways of interpreting symbols. However, they are involved in communication, so it causes convergence, which in the end, can form a shared symbolic reality.

Bormann, through his theory, explains that in symbolic convergence, individuals involved in a conversation bring up a symbol in the form of a fantasy that gets responses from other groups so that there is continuity between the recipient and the sender of the message regarding the perception of the message conveyed. Bormann also mentioned his theory-testing research method, namely fantasy theme analysis, with the following main components (Suryadi, 2010).

1. Fantasy Theme is the message conveyed to form a fantasy chain which is the central theme of symbolic convergence. It can be seen as an interpretation of the factual context shared by the people involved creatively and imaginatively.
2. Fantasy Chain, namely aspects that arise from the dramatization of messages in the form of statements shared by someone. According to Bormann, the play of letters can be delivered through various forms, such as anecdotes, puns, jokes, myths, and legends, that can attract the audience's attention. Dramatization causes people to be interested in participating in the built story, sharing it, or even adding levels to it. The tempo of the conversation will increase along with the number of people who contribute. This group will eventually share the same emotional expression and produce a shared fantasy theme.
3. Fantasy type is a storyline repeated by the same or similar characters. One sign of shared fantasy is the existence of a type of fantasy.
4. Rhetorical Vision, namely the development of a fantasy theme that extends beyond the group. Due to the effects, the fantasy theme can turn into the fantasy of the wider community or the rhetorical community (Suryadi, 2010).

Symbolic convergence can be identified as a general outline by analyzing fantasy themes. Fantasy themes are interactions and discussions built to form a rhetorical vision. Therefore, theme analysis proves the existence of symbolic convergence in an event.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The activism of the hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi is a form of symbolic fusion that occurs in social media as a public space. It was initiated by @projectm_org, which spread symbols in the form of messages through their tweets on Twitter, culminating in a chain of fantasies about disappointment with the police over the inappropriate treatment of rape cases. Interactions between accounts on Twitter social media that echo the hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi with the same goal, as well as the exchange of information and stories between users, meet at a crossroads of ideas. It causes a series of movements in hashtag activism to form symbols in the concept of symbolic interaction through stories. Values are grown and shared within the group, and members can connect with other members to achieve common goals. Convergence refers to the fusion of personal meanings of a symbol between two or more people—this closeness of meaning results in a person having the same purpose as others. Symbolism means human activity to understand, interpret, and give sense to what happens and other people's actions. The core of this theory is the distinction between dramatized information and shared collective fantasy. A difference emerges when a play is accepted, modified, and shared openly by an active audience. Joint dramatization leads to a process of symbolic fusion and creates a common ground that helps unite participants. Collective fantasy is a dramatized message publicly displayed and adapted by actors so that each actor seems to have dramatization as part of his consciousness.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We express our gratitude and appreciation to the Indonesian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, which has supported the funding of this research.

REFERENCES

- Angeline, M. (2016). Symbolic convergence in a social movement: A case of "Pengumpulan Satu Juta KTP" by Teman Ahok. *Humaniora*, 7(4), 535-543.
- Apriyani, T. (2021). Peran Sosial Media Pada Gerakan Protes Massa Aksi dan Demokrasi Baru di Era Milenial. *Kalijaga Journal of Communication*, 3(1), 17-30. <https://doi.org/10.14421/kjc.31-02.2021>
- Ayu, Monavia. (2022). "Pengguna Twitter di Indonesia Capai 18,45 Juta pada 2022". *Data Indonesia*. <https://dataindonesia.id/digital/detail/pengguna-twitter-di-indonesia-capai-1845-juta-pada-2022>

- Bruns, A., & Burgess, J. (2011). The use of Twitter hashtags in the formation of ad hoc publics. In Proceedings of the 6th European consortium for political research (ECPR) general conference 2011 (pp. 1-9). The European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR).
- Bruns, A., & Highfield, T. (2015). Is Habermas on Twitter?: Social media and the public sphere. *The Routledge companion to social media and politics* (pp. 56-73). Routledge.
- Nugrahani, F., & Hum, M. (2014). *Metode penelitian kualitatif*. Solo: Cakra Books, 1(1).
- Pembayun, J.G. (2017). Rekonstruksi Pemikiran Habermas di Era Digital. *Jurnal Komunikasi dan Kajian Media*. Volume 1, Nomor 1, Oktober 2017: 1-14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.31002/jkkm.v1i1.381>
- Suryadi, I. (2010). Teori Konvergensi Simbolik. *Jurnal Academica Fisip Unlad*, 2(2), 426-437.
- Wuriani, N. I. (2021). AKTIVISME TAGAR #PERCUMALAPORPOLISI SEBAGAI ZEITGEIST DEMOKRASI SIBER DI INDONESIA. *WACANA: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Komunikasi*, 20(2), 171-183. <https://doi.org/10.32509/wacana.v20i2.1702>
- Yang, G. (2016). Narrative agency in hashtag activism: The case of #blacklivesmatter. *Media and Communication*, 4(4), 13-17. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v4i4.692>