

The Digital Afterlife of a Melody: Exploring Discourse Patterns of Personal and Collective Grief via .Feast's 'O Tuan' on TikTok

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ABSTRAK

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This research aims to identify and describe how digital grief narratives are constructed by TikTok users through content using the song "O, Tuan" by .Feast. Using Rodney H. Jones's digital discourse analysis approach, this study examines the construction process through four main aspects: text, context, actions and interactions, and ideology and power relations. The findings show that the grief narrative is built through the synchronization of the song's audio-visual elements with slide text and digital visual artifacts. These elements create experiential empathy, which allows audiences to connect with the content based on their own past experiences of loss in real life. The study also finds that this narrative construction produces a form of digital afterlife practice, where the song and TikTok features are used to keep the presence of the deceased alive in the digital space. Ideologically, this construction reflects the formation of affective publics that position users as "Memory Keepers" who try to challenge the physical limits of death. Interactions in the comment section show that the grief narrative is not only an expression of loss, but also an active communication practice that shapes new norms of mourning in the digital era.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of digital grief has emerged alongside the rapid growth of social media, which has become a new space for individuals to express sadness or loss. Grief reflects the breaking of a meaningful bond or relationship. Beyond that, grief is an emotional, spiritual, and psychological journey toward healing (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2015). Digital grief can be understood as a form of mourning expressed through digital platforms, where individuals share, write about, and process the loss of loved ones, pets, or even public figures (Riaz & Mustafa, 2025).

In constructing digital grief narratives, songs serve as a contextual medium that allows individuals to share their emotional experiences, either anonymously or openly, and to interact with others who are experiencing similar losses. This phenomenon shows that grief experiences in digital spaces can often be

understood and shared more easily through music than through words alone (Mattfeldt, 2024). One example is the use of the song "O, Tuan" by Feast. The song has been used by 349.8 thousand TikTok users, with the trend emerging in early 2025 and continuing to grow. The song frequently appears in videos that express grief.

In the past, grief typically occurred in private settings and within close communities, such as through family traditions, face-to-face gatherings, or localized religious rituals. The available mediums were also limited, such as newspaper obituaries, personal letters, and formal cultural or religious ceremonies (Iskandar, Hakim, & Rolando, 2024). This form of grieving, centered on memory, prayer, and nostalgia, reflects traditional grief structured, personal, and not openly expressed to the public (Estrada, Indrawati, & Marianti, 2023). Meanwhile,

Maudy Ayunda's song "Kamu & Kenangan" illustrates modern grief by highlighting an individual's direct emotional experience feelings of loss, the difficulty of letting go, and openly acknowledged vulnerability (Auralia & Khoirunnisa, 2023).

In contrast, the song "O, Tuan" portrays grief differently from other mourning songs. It does not offer imagery of heaven, peace after death, or assurances that the deceased has moved to a better place. For example, in the song "Bunga Matahari," lyrics such as "*Adakah sungai-sungai itu benar-benar dilintasi dengan air susu... kau dan orang-orang di sana muda lagi*" depict a heavenly space and restoration after death (Azzahra et al., 2024).

The TikTok platform itself has become highly relevant as a medium of expression. Since its launch in September 2016, TikTok has grown rapidly and attracted users to actively watch, share inspiration, encourage creativity, and enjoy entertainment. The platform has also motivated people to create engaging and innovative content (Limbert, 2023). TikTok is not only a source of entertainment but also a creative communication space where users can express their identities, emotions, and experiences openly while engaging with wider audiences (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2021).

According to the Indonesia Media Consumption Report 2025 released by YouGov, 81 percent of Indonesians actively use social media, with an average usage of 1–5 hours per day. Furthermore, a Kompas.com article published on July 30, 2025, titled "Pengguna TikTok di Indonesia Tembus 160 Juta, Terbanyak di Asia Tenggara," reported that as of March 2025, TikTok users in Indonesia exceeded 160 million, making the country the largest TikTok user base in Southeast Asia. The digital era itself is marked by rapid technological advancements that allow faster and easier access to information, influencing various aspects of social life (Saptarianto, Deviani, Anah, & Noviyanti, 2024).

The unit of analysis in this study consists of five TikTok contents that specifically use the song "O, Tuan" as a narrative instrument for digital grief. The units of analysis include multimedia elements such as slide texts, funeral or memory photographs, visual expressions, narrative structures across slides, and the use of the song "O, Tuan" as audio.

Several previous studies have highlighted digital phenomena with different areas of focus. Budianti and Febriyanti (2024) examined digital

discourse on social issues through YouTube. Mattfeldt (2024) investigated expressions of grief conveyed through music and language in YouTube comments, while Davoudi and Douglas (2025) explored digital grief practices on TikTok using thematic content analysis. Therefore, this study aims to offer a new contribution by combining a different research object the song "O, Tuan" on TikTok and applying Rodney H. Jones's digital discourse analysis approach. Through this approach, the study seeks to understand how meanings of sadness and loss are constructed across four aspects: text, context, actions and interactions, and ideology and power. Based on this framework, the researcher is interested in examining how digital grief narratives are constructed by TikTok users through the use of the song "O, Tuan."

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Grief Narratives on TikTok

Digital grief is a derivative concept of grief, which originally refers to a person's emotional reaction to loss, such as the death of a loved one or major life changes. Grief is not always related to death; rather, it is an emotional response to various forms of meaningful loss in a person's life (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2015). Digital grief refers to the expression and negotiation of loss through media such as text, images, videos, and audio, enabling individuals to communicate emotions ranging from denial and anger to sadness and isolation within shared digital environments (Gamba, 2018).

Dimensions of Grief

Wilson and O'Connor (2022) describe grief through two dimensions: personal–collective and direct–parasocial. Personal grief stems from individual losses, while collective grief arises when a community shares the emotional impact of a loss. Direct grief involves the death of someone with a real-life reciprocal relationship, whereas parasocial grief refers to mourning media figures with whom individuals have one-sided emotional connections. In digital spaces, these forms often intersect personal-direct grief appears in expressions of loss toward close individuals through digital memories, while collective-parasocial grief emerges when audiences collectively mourn public figures. Social media enables these practices by allowing users to express, negotiate, and sustain grief through shared multimodal content, turning mourning into a participatory digital process.

Digital Afterlife Narratives on TikTok

Digital afterlife is defined as the continuation of a person's digital presence, whether active or passive, after their biological death (Savin-Baden & Mason-Robbie, 2020). It refers to the ongoing existence of an individual's identity and memories in the digital world such as photos, social media accounts, messages, or stored digital archives that remain accessible even after the person has passed away.

Experiential Empathy Narratives on TikTok

Experiential empathy explains why social media users feel compelled to engage with digital grief content, as it enables audiences to emotionally connect through shared experiences of loss. Through visual narratives, music, and emotionally resonant audio, digital artifacts act as bridges that transform private mourning into a collective practice, sustaining the deceased's post-mortem identity within the digital afterlife. This mechanism aligns with creative storying, in which audiences collaboratively reconstruct the memory of the deceased, allowing sympathy to evolve into ongoing communicative action. Within Sofka's Typology of Death and Digital/Social Media, experiential empathy drives the progression from initial memorialization to maintaining continuing bonds and long-term digital legacy. As Bassett notes, this process reflects a desire to prevent "second loss" by preserving digital traces, making experiential empathy a key force that enables grief, memory, and social meaning to endure in online spaces..

TikTok as a Medium for Expression

The rise of digital technology has expanded social media into a space for communication, self-expression, and emotional articulation. TikTok enables users to craft short-form, multimodal narratives using music, text, and visuals, while its algorithmic For You Page allows these expressions to reach broad audiences. This makes TikTok a participatory environment where users share a wide range of emotions through creative storytelling. As emotional expression becomes a basis for digital connection, TikTok reflects the idea of affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015), where users are linked by shared emotional resonance rather than formal

structures. Through interactions such as likes, comments, and responses, individual feelings especially those related to loss can circulate widely and generate collective engagement. In this way, TikTok functions not only as a platform for personal expression but also as a space where emotions enable digital solidarity, empathy, and the formation of temporary yet meaningful online communities.

The Use of Songs as Narrative Devices on TikTok

Songs function as narrative texts that merge lyrical language and melody to communicate emotions and human experiences, operating as systems of meaning as suggested by Barthes (1977). On TikTok, this narrative role becomes central as users rely on songs to shape the emotional tone of their stories, especially when expressing vulnerability or loss. Music intensifies the affective atmosphere of videos and aligns with themes of grief, memory, or longing, allowing users to build multimodal narratives where sound, text, and visuals work together. In digital grief contexts, songs act as key narrative tools that unify visual and written elements, enabling individuals to articulate personal sorrow in a form that feels both intimate and publicly shareable.

Digital Discourse Analysis

Discourse is the most complete form of language, typically presented as a series of sentences that create a coherent and meaningful text or conversation (Junadi, 2022). Every communication activity can be considered part of a discourse because communication always involves delivering a message to a receiver, where the message contains meaning intended by the speaker or sender for the audience or recipient.

Rodney H. Jones (2012) emphasizes that digital discourse must be examined through four core elements: text, context, action and interaction, and ideology and power. Digital texts are inherently multimodal, integrating written language, images, sound, and video to shape meaning. Context social, cultural, and technological determines how these texts are interpreted. User actions such as posting, commenting, liking, and tagging form interactional practices that construct identity and social relations. Meanwhile, ideology and power operate through digital communication by reinforcing or challenging dominant values. In this study, these elements provide a framework for analyzing how TikTok users construct narratives of digital grief through the interplay of caption, visual content, and music.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative approach aimed at gaining a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena through in-depth descriptions of data in textual form, contextualized in the natural settings where the phenomenon occurs (Mulyono, 2024). A qualitative approach is flexible and emphasizes subjective understanding from the participants' perspectives within their social contexts (Waruwu, 2023). As a naturalistic method that does not rely on numerical measurement, qualitative research emphasizes close engagement between the researcher and the subject to gain an in-depth understanding of experiences and meanings. Qualitative research is non-numerical and conducted in natural settings without manipulating the environment. The data collection methods include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis (Nurrisaa, 2025). Guided by a constructivist paradigm, this study examines how users on TikTok construct digital grief narratives through content featuring the song "O, Tuan" by .Feast. Using Rodney H. Jones's Digital Discourse Analysis, focusing on text, context, action and interaction, as well as ideology and power the research analyzes how captions, comments, lyrics, and visual elements collectively shape expressions of loss in the digital space.

Data Collection Method

Data collection in this study followed three primary techniques to ensure the validity and reliability of findings, as accurate data gathering is essential for producing credible research outcomes (Romdona, 2024). First, media text analysis was conducted by examining TikTok videos that use the song "O, Tuan" by .Feast, focusing on captions, comments, visuals, and audio to understand how users construct digital grief narratives. Five high-engagement videos from TikTok were selected based on views, likes, comments, and thematic relevance to grief expression. Second, non-participant observation was applied to directly observe how users create, share, and respond to these grief-related contents, allowing the researcher to capture interaction patterns and emotional expressions in the digital environment (Sugiyono, 2020). Third, a literature review was conducted by examining books, journal articles, and scholarly

sources to build the theoretical foundation and support the analysis of how the song "O, Tuan" is interpreted and utilized as a form of digital grief expression on social media.

Data Analyzed Method

Data analysis in this study followed a systematic process of organizing and interpreting the collected data by aligning it with relevant theoretical foundations to produce scientific conclusions (Sugiyono, 2020). Using Rodney H. Jones's Digital Discourse Analysis framework, the study examined four key aspects: (1) text, which includes captions, comments, visuals, facial expressions, and the use of the song "O, Tuan" by .Feast as an emotional narrative device; (2) context, which considers the social background, cultural meaning, and emotional environment surrounding the trend on TikTok; (3) action and interaction, focusing on user engagement through likes, comments, and communal responses that shape how grief is shared and interpreted; and (4) ideology and power, which explores how the use of "O, Tuan" serves as a symbolic challenge to traditional norms of mourning and creates a more inclusive digital space for expressing loss. This analytical framework enabled the researcher to understand how digital grief narratives are constructed, negotiated, and circulated within the platform.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Textual Analysis: Constructing Digital Grief Narratives in TikTok Content

Digital Grief Narratives in Overlay Text and Captions

Digital grief can be understood as a way of confronting and expressing loss, where individuals share their experiences of bereavement through digital media (Gamba, 2018). It represents a new form of grieving that emerges from technological developments and the culture of online sharing (Moreman & Lewis, 2014). The overlay text and captions in the analyzed TikTok content play a central role in constructing digital grief narratives, particularly by bridging private experiences of loss into the public digital space (Jones, 2012).

1. Personal Digital Grief Narratives

Figure 1. TikTok Content @jisooaamiin



The first content (@jisooaamiin) shows that the text “*why are you crying? it’s just a message*” functions as a hook that sparks curiosity while simultaneously signaling irony, as a seemingly simple message carries deep emotional weight (Jones, 2012). In the context of direct loss, the word “*just*” represents relational variables, where the digital message becomes an emotional artefact that holds the mourner’s attachment to the deceased (Worden, 2018). Conversations such as “*Papa udah gak ada*” (Dad is gone) and “*Ntr di kuburnya nungguin inun*” (He will be waiting at the grave) illustrate how digital text is brief yet heavily meaningful, marking the early expression of digital grief and reflecting the effort to maintain continuing bonds (Wilson & O’Connor, 2022; Jones, 2012).

Meanwhile, the third content (@1morepi) uses the minimalist text “*ibu*” (mother) as a form of internalized grief that carries dense emotional meaning. Its simplicity reinforces the strength of the emotional bond and serves as an effective strategy for maintaining continuing bonds and sustaining the deceased’s digital identity within the public space (Jones, 2012; Worden, 2018; Gamba, 2018).

2. Collective Digital Grief Narratives

The fourth content (@hazelbbns) presents a series of daily conversations arranged as a constructed narrative to build emotional closeness and evoke public sympathy (Jones, 2012). This narrative transforms private conversations into digital artefacts that generate collective-parasocial grief, particularly through captions that shift personal mourning into social criticism and demands for justice (Wilson & O’Connor, 2022; Papacharissi, 2015). Affan’s identity is constructed as a collective symbol through the digital afterlife, where his death

becomes a reminder and a form of public advocacy (O’Connor, 2020; Döveling et al., 2018).

Figure 2. TikTok Content @.feast



In the fifth content (@.feast), the phrase “*REST IN POWER... USUT TUNTAS*” (rest in power... investigate thoroughly) marks the transformation of grief into political digital activism. This text frames the deceased as a symbol of resistance and strengthens public emotional solidarity through the role of public figures and the amplification of collective emotions (affective publics) (Jones, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015). This illustrates how digital grief can evolve into a social movement demanding justice.

Furthermore, the narrative about the role of the online motorcycle taxi driver expands the meaning of loss through everyday experiences, enabling audiences to feel collective grief even without direct personal connections (Worden, 2018). The caption “*RIP AFFAN*” triggers a shared emotional response that reinforces digital solidarity (Wilson & O’Connor, 2022). Overall, Affan’s post-mortem identity is dynamically constructed as a symbol of humanity and dedication, demonstrating that digital grief can transform personal mourning into collective memory and ongoing social reflection (Savin-Baden & Mason-Robbie, 2020).

Digital Grief Narratives in Non-Verbal Elements

1. Digital Grief Narratives Through Visuals

The visual analysis shows that the first two contents construct *direct loss* through slide-based images depicting emotional reactions, digital artifacts (chat messages), and ritual spaces such as graves and coffins. These visuals emphasize personal grief through *continuing bonds* and the

formation of *post-mortem identity*, while also transforming private experiences into public narratives validated by audiences (Jones, 2012; Wilson & O'Connor, 2022; O'Connor, 2020). The use of visual contrasts (life vs. death, color vs. monochrome) strengthens the emotional journey and the meaning of loss.

In the third content, the visuals shift toward a more public domain by constructing Affan's identity as a moral figure and a victim of injustice through narrative illustrations. Visual elements such as worker symbols, power contrasts, and spiritual representations direct the grief toward *collective-parasocial grief* and position Affan as a social symbol (Jones, 2015; Leeuwen, 2006).

The fourth content shows the peak of this transformation into a collective movement. Visuals of concerts and crowds carrying demands for justice represent *affective publics* and the politicization of death. Affan's identity is reconstructed as a symbol of struggle that inspires broader solidarity (Papacharissi, 2015).

Meanwhile, the fifth content presents close-up facial expressions as an intimate representation of collective grief. These visuals build emotional closeness and validate shared sorrow (Jones et al., 2015; Wilson & O'Connor, 2022).

2. Digital Grief Narratives Through Music

Based on the idea that music functions as a meaningful narrative system (Barthes, 1977), the use of the song "*O, Tuan*" across all five contents demonstrates its role as a key instrument in shaping digital grief narratives. Through recontextualization, fragments of lyrics are strategically selected to merge with the visuals, giving "voice" to grief and transforming private emotions into public, resonant narratives (Jones, 2012).

In the first two contents, the song validates personal grief (*direct loss*). The lyrics reinforce resistance to death, express authentic emotion, and create spiritual closeness through the combination of text, visuals, and audio (Markhamah, 2024).

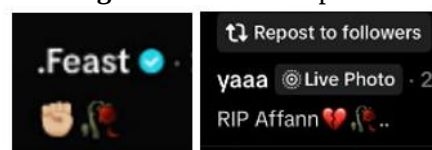
In the third to fifth contents, the song's function shifts into an affective frame for *collective grief*. The song no longer expresses individual loss but shapes social identity, public

solidarity, and critiques of injustice (Wilson & O'Connor, 2022). At this stage, the music intensifies mass emotion, particularly in the context of social tragedy and collective action (Leeuwen, 2006).

Overall, the recontextualization of "*O, Tuan*" on TikTok shows that music can transform personal grief into collective memory. The song becomes not only a medium of emotional expression but also a *digital legacy* that validates identity, manages trauma, and preserves grief narratives in digital public spaces (Harnia, 2021).

3. Digital Grief Narratives Through Emoji

Figure 3. TikTok Caption



The emoji elements in this study do not stand alone but work together as an organized multimodal performance that constructs *post-mortem identity*. The combination of the red heart emoji (❤️) and the wilted flower emoji (🌹) in the caption "*RIP Affann* ❤️🌹" creates layered meaning: one element preserves personal affection, while the other acknowledges systemic injustice. In the perspective of Jones et al. (2015), these non-verbal symbols form a *semiotic ensemble* that strengthens empathy narratives in online spaces. Emoji use in digital grief demonstrates that simple visual symbols can unite audiences to form *affective publics*, collectively process trauma, and ensure that grief narratives remain alive in digital memory.

Digital Afterlife Narratives

Based on the analysis of all five contents, digital media significantly shifts mourning practices from private rituals to dynamic public narratives. The concept of *digital afterlife* shows that the presence of the deceased continues through digital traces that are accessed and reactivated by users, audiences, and platforms (Savin-Baden et al., 2020; Savin-Baden & Mason-Robbie, 2020).

The continuation of identity is produced through *creative storytelling*, where digital artifacts such as messages, photos, and videos are woven into new narratives. In collective grief contexts, the deceased's identity can even be reconstructed as a social symbol by the public, reinforcing that *post-mortem identity* is

collectively shaped in digital spaces (O'Connor, 2020; Savin-Baden et al., 2020). This process also strengthens *continuing bonds* as an ongoing relationship between the living and the dead (Sofka, 2020).

Digital spaces also enable the democratization of grief, allowing ordinary individuals to receive broad recognition and “narrative justice” through public solidarity (Jandrić, 2020). Overall, these practices create a *digital sympathy bridge* that connects personal grief with collective awareness, ensuring that the memory of the deceased remains alive, meaningful, and influential through shared digital legacies (Burden, 2020).

Context Analysis: Thanatechnology and Collective Participatory Culture

In digital discourse analysis, context is understood as the social space that shapes how content is produced, circulated, and interpreted. In this study, the context shows that the use of the audio “*O, Tuan*” is closely connected to social conditions, cultural practices, TikTok trends, and users’ emotional experiences, all of which influence how audiences understand grief narratives (Jones et al., 2015).

TikTok, as a participatory platform, allows users not only to consume content but also to actively produce meaning and construct shared grief narratives (Jenkins, 2006). In this sense, TikTok functions as a form of *thanatechnology* that mediates modern mourning practices, transforming private grief into collective expressions in digital spaces (Sofka, 2020).

Participatory culture encourages creators and users to engage in *creative storytelling*, which involves reactivating the deceased’s digital artifacts so they continue to hold meaning and “speak” within public spaces (O'Connor, 2020). In the context of collective grief, social factors such as empathy toward “ordinary people” amplify viral spread and help build digital solidarity as a way to protect the dignity of the deceased and prevent *second loss* the erasure or neglect of their story (Savin-Baden & Mason-Robbie, 2020; Bassett, 2020).

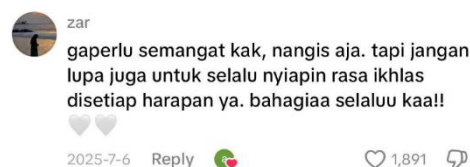
Additionally, TikTok’s algorithm (FYP) plays a crucial role in distributing personal grief into collective experiences, allowing the audio “*O, Tuan*” to operate as a shared “grief code.” Overall, this context demonstrates that grief narratives are shaped through the interaction between technology, participatory culture, and the human need to maintain

emotional bonds (*continuing bonds*). Together, these elements create a dynamic and inclusive ecosystem of *digital afterlife* (Jandrić, 2020).

Interaction and Actions Analysis: Discourse Practices in the TikTok Comment Section Expressions of Condolence and Digital Empathy

Consistent expressions of condolence and digital empathy across the uploads indicate that netizens act as active receivers who validate the creator’s grief. In the TikTok content from the @jisooaamiin account, user comments show strong emotional engagement with the losses depicted.

Figure 4. TikTok Comment @zar



“*Gaperlu semangat kak, nangis aja. tapi jangan lupa juga untuk selalu nyiapin rasa ikhlas di setiap harapan ya. bahagia selalu kaa!!*”

A comment from @zar encouraging the creator to cry and seek acceptance, illustrates supportive digital empathy. This functions as a recognition act that affirms the legitimacy of the creator’s grief. Referring to Sofka’s Pyramid (2020), such responses signal a shift from initial online memorialization toward forming communities of bereavement, where audiences provide a shared emotional space that collectively validates the grieving process.

Sharing Similar Experiences of Loss

Within Sofka’s Pyramid (2020), the practice of sharing similar experiences of loss in the comment section reflects the stage of Creating Communities of Bereavement. At this level, users collectively construct an emotional support space where grief is acknowledged, validated, and connected through shared narratives. The comment section thus functions not merely as a place for responses, but as a communal environment in which individuals recognize each other’s bereavement and form a shared sense of solidarity.

Expressions of Anxiety Toward Potential Loss

Figure 5. TikTok Comment @iqiss



Comments also show that interactions come not only from individuals who have experienced loss but also from those who have not, yet feel anxious about the possibility of losing someone in the future (*anticipatory grief*). Expressions of fear about losing parents illustrate how TikTok content triggers personal reflection on relationships and mortality, consistent with the role of *thanatechnology* in bringing the reality of death into everyday spaces (Sofka, 2020).

The support received by such comments indicates the presence of a *Experiential Empathy*, where empathy toward others' grief intersects with shared personal anxieties, creating collective solidarity. This also reflects *post-mortem agency*, as the deceased's digital traces evoke emotional responses even from audiences with no prior experience of bereavement (Reader, 2020).

Moreover, users' wish for the "eternity" of their parents reflects an attempt to resist *second loss* the complete fading of memory by relying on digital traces as a form of enduring *digital legacy* (Bassett, 2020). Overall, these interactions show that digital grief on TikTok functions as a space of emotional simulation, shaping collective awareness of human vulnerability and mortality for both mourners and those who anticipate future loss.

Trauma Responses and Emotional Triggers Toward the Audio "O, Tuan"

The high number of likes on multiple comments indicates that emotional associations with the song "O, Tuan" have become a shared social construction rather than a personal interpretation. Through repeated interactions, audiences collectively establish the song as a form of *digital legacy* that automatically frames content within a mourning context whenever it is used. Thus, the song does not merely accompany the content; it actively "works" to ensure that the deceased's *digital afterlife* continues to exert emotional agency within the digital community.

Demands for Justice in the Case of Affan Kurniawan

Figure 6. TikTok Comment @-



"20 hari dipenjara?? SUNGGUH TIDAK ADIL NEGARA INI!!!!"

In the collective grief surrounding Affan Kurniawan, there is a noticeable shift from

expressions of sadness to acts of mobilization and demands for justice. Netizen comments show that Affan's digital afterlife not only evokes emotional responses but also sparks symbolic advocacy and shapes public opinion, positioning him as a symbol of injustice (Reader, 2020).

Expressions of dissatisfaction and criticism reflect an effort to protect the deceased's dignity through *narrative justice*, where audiences act as agents defending the digital legacy in public spaces (Jandrić, 2020). The comment section transforms into a digital political solidarity space, exerting pressure on institutions and expanding grief into a social issue.

The use of emotional language (capital letters, exclamation marks) highlights the intensity of collective responses within an ecosystem shaped by *thanatechnology*. It also demonstrates that *post-mortem identity* can produce tangible social impacts.

Overall, these interactions form a *Digital Sympathy Bridge* that transforms private grief into a collective identity. This process is reinforced by the use of the audio "O, Tuan" as an emotional anchor, ensuring that the memory and dignity of the deceased remain alive and influential in the digital environment.

Ideology and Power Analysis: The Hegemony of Digital Grief in the Use of the Song "O, Tuan" **Ideological Construction: The Democratization of Grief and the Right to a Digital Afterlife**

The use of the song "O, Tuan" in grief-related content reflects the emergence of a new ideology: the democratization of grief. In this context, experiences of loss are no longer confined to private spheres or traditional institutions but are recognized as legitimate public expressions. This development affirms that every individual has the right to construct a digital afterlife and maintain their presence through collectively mediated digital traces. The song functions as an emotional legitimizing tool that unifies diverse narratives of loss and gives creators an active role in shaping meaning.

TikTok reinforces this ideology through the aestheticization of grief such as visuals of graves, final messages, and cemetery visits which serve as efforts to resist *second loss* (Bassett, 2020). As long as content continues to be produced and the song continues to be used, the memory of the deceased remains alive within the digital space. This phenomenon also creates an *affective overload*, where audiences feel compelled to participate in the

Experiential Empathy. Engaging with others' grief becomes a form of digital solidarity, while interactions such as comments and likes are viewed as moral responsibilities to sustain the memory of the deceased within algorithmic flows.

Power Relations: Counter-Narratives and Justice in the Digital Afterlife

In digital discourse, power relations are formed horizontally through the collective control of netizens over *post-mortem identity*. The digital public is able to dismantle traditional hierarchies of grief by giving “voice” and visibility to ordinary individuals, allowing them to retain agency within public discussions.

In the case of Affan, these power relations evolve into acts of resistance against injustice, with netizens acting as “memory guardians” who protect the dignity of the deceased. The use of “*O, Tuan*” functions as an emotional amplifier that keeps the digital afterlife active while simultaneously pushing demands for justice through collective actions such as commenting, resharing, and public engagement.

Overall, this practice illustrates that digital communities are not merely passive receivers but active agents capable of giving the deceased a “second life.” Through repeated digital rituals, they maintain *digital endurance* and position TikTok as a space for discursive resistance one that demands recognition, justice, and the continued preservation of collective memory.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of five TikTok videos using the song “O, Tuan,” this study concludes that digital grief narratives are constructed through practices that collectively produce a digital afterlife. At the textual level, captions, overlay text, visual cues, emojis, and the musical layer work together to sustain the memory of the deceased and articulate post-mortem identities in the digital space. Contextually, TikTok’s algorithmic circulation and participatory culture transform the song into a shared symbol of mourning, enabling grief to be publicly recognized and continuously reproduced.

Interactionally, users contribute to this narrative through expressions of empathy, shared experiences of loss, emotional reactions to the audio, and calls for justice, forming experiential empathy and shifting personal grief into collective solidarity. Ideologically, these dynamics reflect a democratization of mourning,

where users collaboratively maintain and negotiate the presence of the deceased beyond biological death.

Overall, the findings show that digital grief on TikTok is constructed primarily through the ongoing production of a digital afterlife, sustained by multimodal storytelling, platform dynamics, and participatory emotional engagement.

Author Contribution

Anisa Julia Witana was responsible for carrying out all stages of the research, including developing the research concept, designing the study, collecting and analyzing data, and writing the manuscript. The author also integrated relevant theoretical perspectives and formulated the overall discussion and conclusions of the study. Roziana Febrianita, S.Sos., M.A., provided supervision throughout the research process, offering guidance, evaluation, and constructive input to strengthen the academic quality and structure of the paper. The author has reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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