

Netizens' Resistance Against Government Policies Through Tone Deaf Narratives (Rodney H. Jones' Digital Discourse Analysis on the TikTok Platform in 2025)

Nailatasya Aura Wahyu Tama ^{1*}, Syafrida N. Febriyanti ²

¹ Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur, Indonesia, 22043010173@student.upnjatim.ac.id

² Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur, Indonesia, syafrida_nurrachmi.ilkom@upnjatim.ac.id

Corresponding Author Email: 22043010173@student.upnjatim.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Received : 21 May 2026
Accepted : 10 June 2026
Published : 30 June 2026

Keywords:

Tone Deaf, Governmnet, Netizens, Politics

This study aims to analyze the digital discourse surrounding netizens' resistance against government policies through tone deaf narratives on TikTok in 2025. The study was conducted using a qualitative approach employing Rodney H. Jones' digital discourse analysis, which emphasizes text, context, action and interaction, as well as ideology and power. The findings of this study indicate that the tone deaf discourse on TikTok is constructed in a multidirectional manner. The casual appearance and simple background settings used by content creators build a sense of trust and emotional closeness with the audience. The consistent use of terms such as tone deaf, government policy, public grievances, and criticism across all content carrying tone deaf narratives is evident. Netizens' responses reveal a duality: there are both pro-content and anti-content groups. Videos with tone deaf narratives represent a form of digital political participation operating through the No Viral No Justice mechanism. The conclusion of this study is that TikTok has transformed into a serious public discourse space, where citizens and netizens freely express their criticisms and arguments in pursuit of justice and civic rights.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia holds the top rank globally in TikTok application usage. Based on data from We Are Social and Meltwater, the number of TikTok users in Indonesia as of July 2025 reached 194.37 million active users (Dataloka, 2026). Approximately 72% of TikTok users in Indonesia watch at least one hard news video covering topics such as politics, economics, and so on, while 54% watch more than three news videos daily on their For You Page (FYP) (Riyanto & Pertiwi, 2025). These figures indicate that TikTok has evolved beyond being merely an entertainment platform and has transformed into a digital public sphere for active political participation.

As a medium that has transformed into a space for political discussion, TikTok is utilized by netizens to protest against perceived political injustices. This was especially evident in 2025, when numerous conflicts arose as a result of government policies that were seen as detrimental to the public. These policies included the ratification of the revision of Law No. 34 of 2004 on the Indonesian National Armed Forces, plans to increase parliamentary allowances, increases in the value-added tax (PPN), controversies over LPG distribution, the MBG program, and increases in the property tax (PBB). The proliferation of such policies sparked large-scale demonstrations across all segments of society.

The emergence of several government policies that triggered public unrest compelled people to become more aware of the potential impacts on various aspects of their lives. The effects of policies made unilaterally, without incorporating public aspirations, can be harmful across economic, social, and welfare dimensions.

This phenomenon was then captured by content creators on TikTok, who used the platform to voice their grievances and educate segments of society that remained indifferent to the deteriorating political situation through tone deaf narratives. Using educational and satirical video content, these creators sought to shift public apathy and encourage political literacy, urging citizens not to remain silent when their rights are threatened.

The term "tone deaf" originally referred to a person's inability to accurately recognize and distinguish musical tones. Over time, however, it has undergone a semantic shift and is now used to describe social insensitivity. In a political context, the tone deaf narrative has become a sharp critical tool applied to individuals or groups who make statements or exhibit behaviors that are at odds with the suffering and crises experienced by the wider society.

This study employs Rodney H. Jones' digital discourse analysis theory to examine how the use of the term "tone deaf" can function as a political criticism tool. This discourse analysis aims to determine how a text can be produced and consumed by media users. In his book *Discourse and Digital Practices (Doing Discourse Analysis in the Digital Age)*, Rodney H. Jones identifies four elements for analyzing digital discourse: text, context, action and interaction, as well as ideology and power. Although political discourse on social media has received considerable scholarly attention, limited research has specifically examined how the "tone deaf" narrative is constructed and functions as a form of political criticism within TikTok's digital discourse. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by analyzing seven video content objects drawn from the TikTok accounts @miraclesitompul, @virdianaurellio, @alesanih, @thelmakisela, @beckymonster, @vanesyit, and @pejuangpepeskrl using a qualitative approach within a critical paradigm.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Discourse Analysis

Rodney H. Jones elaborates on how discourse in message production is closely connected to social practices. According to him, discourse plays an important role in maintaining, repeating, and transmitting social practices. Jones' discourse analysis asserts that language and digital media are capable of influencing the meanings people create, the actions they take, the relationships they form, and their identities. In conducting discourse analysis, Jones divides the framework into four components that must be considered: text, context, action and interaction, as well as power and ideology (Jones et al., 2015).

Tone Deaf Narratives as a Discourse Frame

Literally, the term "tone deaf" originated in the field of music, referring to a person's inability to accurately recognize and distinguish musical tones. Over time, the term has undergone a semantic shift into the social and political domain. In linguistics, this type of semantic shift is known as semantic extension — an expansion of meaning that occurs when the meaning of a word broadens, shifting from a specific to a more general usage (Mc. Manis in Rahmansyah & Ardiansyah, 2021).

In digital discourse, the use of the tone deaf narrative cannot be understood merely at the denotative level; it must be examined through the discursive practices that shape it. Rodney H. Jones (2015), within his digital discourse analysis framework, emphasizes that texts such as videos, comments, or captions on social media are forms of social action bound by context. In the context of netizens' resistance against government policies, the tone deaf narrative can be understood as a discourse frame that functions in shaping public perception of government policies.

Netizens' Resistance as a Form of Digital Political Participation

In the current digital era, social media has become one of the primary platforms for communication and information dissemination in society. Through social media, people and netizens can create, share, distribute, and exchange information, ideas, and content via the internet. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and X are no longer used solely for personal interaction but also for the dissemination of political information. As a result, social media plays a role in shaping political participation (Suryawijaya et al., 2024).

Political participation refers to the activities of individuals or groups to actively engage in political life (Budiarjo in Dewi et al., 2022). Forms of political participation refer to the involvement of individuals or groups in political processes, such as general elections, political campaigns, and so on. In the digital space, political participation can take the form of political discussions, online campaigns, and movements that emerge from social media platforms (Hafizi, 2023).

TikTok as a Platform for Political Discussion

The participation of young people in political discussions within the digital space is one of the important foundations of Indonesia's democratic system (Marlina, 2025). Young people — millennials and Generation Z — constitute the population segment most actively engaged with social media. According to Loader, Vromen, and Xenos, as cited in Marlina (2025), this generation has its own distinctive way of thinking in the political arena: they tend to be more critical, technologically literate, and prone to skepticism toward formal political institutions. TikTok is one of the platforms most widely used by young people as a means of political participation.

TikTok's popularity as a platform for digital political discussion can largely be attributed to its For You Page (FYP) algorithm. In a political context, TikTok's algorithm does not merely serve as a venue for watching entertaining videos; it also becomes a space where partisan preferences are produced and reinforced (Purboyo et al., 2025). In other words, users who open TikTok seeking entertainment may, through the algorithm's presentation of critical content about the tone deaf insensitivity of a political institution, ultimately develop a more critically engaged political outlook.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide the analytical foundation for this study. Rodney H. Jones' digital discourse analysis framework is used to examine how the tone deaf narrative is constructed through text, context, action and interaction, as well as ideology and power on TikTok, while the concepts of digital political participation and TikTok as a political discussion platform help explain how such discourse functions as a form of netizens' political criticism toward government policies.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research aims to analyze phenomena or research objects, including behaviors,

attitudes, and other dimensions of the subject under investigation (Bani, 2023). Qualitative research can also be defined as a type of approach in the social sciences that uses a scientific paradigm, grounded in phenomenological theory, to examine social issues (Abdussamad, 2021). To maintain the validity of the data during the analysis process, this study applied data triangulation by comparing findings across multiple TikTok video contents and ensuring consistency between the observed discourse and its contextual interpretation.

RESULT

Based on a search conducted on TikTok, at least 12,400 video contents were found discussing the topic of tone deaf. However, the researcher filtered these videos further, considering their production date (2025) and thematic context (netizens' resistance against government policies through tone deaf narratives in 2025). After filtering, seven video contents were selected as research objects, drawn from the TikTok accounts @miraclesitompul, @virdianaurello, @alesanih, @pejuangpepeskrl, @beckymonster, @vanesyit, and @thelmakisela.

DISCUSSION

Based on the research findings, several themes emerged that represent the construction of the tone deaf discourse in video content concerning netizens' resistance against government policies on the TikTok platform. These themes are elaborated based on the analysis of text, context, action and interaction, as well as power and ideology.

Text

The textual analysis in this study considers not only written language but also video, photographs, visual elements, graphics, and other semiotic elements that function as tools for social action. Among the seven contents analyzed, the construction of tone deaf on TikTok is directed at two targets: first, tone deaf is constructed as a behavior attributed to the government and the House of Representatives (DPR), as expressed in the content of @miraclesitompul, @pejuangpepeskrl, @virdianaurello, and @alesanih. Second, tone deaf is constructed as an attitude held by netizens who are indifferent to political conditions, as expressed in the content of @vanesyit, @beckymonster, and @thelmakisela. These findings indicate that the construction of tone deaf on TikTok has developed beyond mere political criticism of those in power, evolving into a social reflection directed at fellow netizens.

Additionally, textual cohesion is evident through several elements: first, the consistent use of the terms tone deaf, government policy, public grievances, and criticism — delivered directly by creators and netizens through the comment sections of each tone deaf content. Second, sarcastic phrases directed at those deemed tone deaf, such as "I can't believe it," "amidst a people who are crying out," and "when you bring up substantive data, you're still ignored." Third, the visual presentation and background are consistently informal and simple — set in modest rooms — indicating that the content was produced spontaneously.

The coherence of meaning across the seven video contents produces a narrative that is logical and easy for the audience to follow. Across all seven contents selected as research objects, the narrations consistently converge on a single theme: the insensitivity of power toward the people. Additionally, a thematic arc moving from the external to the internal is present: criticism initially directed at the government or DPR as the tone deaf party gradually shifts toward critical reflection directed at netizens themselves.

Context

The Role of Content Creator Identity in the Construction of Tone Deaf Narratives

Upon closer examination, the content creator accounts selected as research objects do not have a specific niche for discussing politics. The TikTok account @miraclesitompul focuses on public speaking for Gen Z and daily life. The account @pejuangpepeskrl covers the lives of commuter rail (KRL) workers. The account @virdianaurellio discusses Indonesian political dynamics — this is the one account whose niche aligns directly with the political context being studied. The account @alesanih focuses on daily life and entertainment content. The account @vanesyit covers productivity and daily life, while @beckymonster focuses on daily life, feminine POV content, and entertainment. Finally, @thelmakisela focuses on fashion, mindset, and valid recommendations. Of the seven accounts selected, only one features content exclusively centered on politics. What all seven content creators share is that none of them are celebrities or public figures — they are ordinary individuals producing content in their own distinct styles.

This positioning as "ordinary people" grants these content creators a specific form of symbolic capital on TikTok. In a digital culture that places great value on

authenticity, presenting oneself as an ordinary individual speaking from personal experience and personal grievances often carries greater persuasive power than statements from formal authority figures. These creators, whether consciously or not, leverage this position. They tend to appear simply — filmed in their rooms, wearing casual clothing, using conversational language, and without heavy makeup — which constructs the image of a creator who is "honest" and "close to the people." This construction of authenticity becomes an effective discursive strategy for building credibility and audience trust

TikTok as a Public Discourse Space

TikTok has undergone a functional transformation — from a simple entertainment platform to a strategic public discourse space, particularly in a political context. Indonesia is recorded as the country with the highest number of TikTok users in the world, reaching 194.37 million active users as of July 2025. This makes the digital space a vital ecosystem for the dissemination of political messages, a point further supported by TikTok's internal data, which states that approximately 72% of users in Indonesia watch at least one hard news video covering politics and economics, while 54% watch more than three news videos daily on their FYP (Riyanto & Pertiwi, 2025). This extensive user base makes TikTok a fitting medium for netizens to produce, consume, and distribute critical discourse — including tone deaf narratives that proliferated during the 2025 demonstrations. In this study, TikTok is therefore understood not merely as a channel for distributing tone deaf narratives, but as an active discourse space that shapes the very meaning of that discourse.

Indonesian Political Dynamics as the Context for Tone Deaf Narrative Production

The wave of protests in Indonesia in 2025 began in March, following the ratification of the revision of Law No. 34 of 2004 on the Indonesian National Armed Forces, and culminated in peak public anger in August 2025. The demonstrations were triggered by many factors, most notably plans to increase parliamentary (DPR) allowances, which were seen as inconsistent with the economic realities faced by a still-struggling population. These protests were not the result of a single event but rather an accumulation of long-simmering public dissatisfaction — ranging from tax increases and weak labor protections to the ratification of regulations widely viewed as not being in the public interest.

The situation was further aggravated by responses from political elites who, rather than demonstrating empathy, issued statements that only inflamed tensions further. A member of the DPR, Ahmad Sahroni, for instance, referred to those calling for the dissolution of the DPR as "stupid." This provoked widespread anger and criticism. From a discourse perspective, such a statement was more than a mere communication blunder — it explicitly signaled the political elite's discomfort or unwillingness to place themselves in the position of the very people they are supposed to represent. This became the primary catalyst for the mass emergence of tone deaf narratives in the digital space, particularly on TikTok.

Statements of this kind provided fuel for content creators on TikTok to produce tone deaf narratives as a form of resistance against political elites who displayed no empathy toward the socioeconomic conditions of the people. Social media, particularly TikTok, played an important role in disseminating information — especially regarding the demonstrations — since the videos and information shared created national awareness and applied pressure on political actors to respond.

Action and Interaction

The comment sections of digital content serve as the primary space for audiences to respond, share opinions, and debate one another, thereby fostering a participatory culture among netizens. This constitutes the action and interaction dimension in the form of comments and public responses. Such interaction can create a close bond between the audience and content creators, even if not all comments are replied to or acknowledged by the creator. Audiences also frequently read, comment on, and respond to one another's comments to learn the views of fellow users.

The interaction observed in the comment sections of the selected tone deaf content reveals two distinct camps: those in favor and those opposed. The group of netizens who are pro-content tends to express support through statements such as "thanks for representing us," "your statement represents the people better than the DPR," and "say it louder!" Such phrases are commonly found in TikTok content carrying tone deaf narratives. Additionally, comments referring to "tone deaf final boss" appear with great frequency. Through such comments, netizens express their disappointment at a situation they perceive as unjust. The recurrence of similar responses from many netizens indicates shared feelings and experiences that ultimately foster solidarity in the digital space. By seeing comments

from other users with similar views, netizens find a space to support one another and affirm that their concerns are shared.

Alongside supportive comments, there is also a group of netizens who oppose the tone deaf content. Their comments include statements such as "I don't care if they call it tone deaf or whatever," "better to focus on earning money than joining these protests," and "whether the government is doing fine or struggling, it makes no difference to my life." The presence of such comments reflects differing views among internet users regarding the issues being discussed. While some users regard indifference to public affairs as a form of insensitivity, others view focusing on personal needs and economic concerns as perfectly normal. The comment section thus becomes a space that displays a range of social positions and interests in opposition to one another.

Power and Ideology

From the perspective of power and ideology, the dominant group in this discourse is the community of netizens who freely express their arguments, criticisms, and opinions regarding the government on social media, particularly TikTok. As a medium, TikTok plays a major role in shaping discourse. Its algorithmic technology (FYP) plays an important role in rapidly distributing content to hundreds of thousands or even millions of users in a short period of time, regardless of how many followers the producing account has. In addition, TikTok plays a key role in driving the No Viral No Justice phenomenon. The proliferation of tone deaf content on TikTok is clearly intended to pressure policymakers into listening to the grievances of the people. It is TikTok's algorithm that helps disseminate and viralize such content. Moreover, TikTok's true strength lies in its ecosystem's ability to unite netizens on the basis of shared grievances — and it is from this that the collective power of netizens, or "people power," emerges.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study demonstrates that the tone deaf discourse on TikTok is constructed in a multidirectional manner — directed not only at the government and the DPR as insensitive policymakers, but also at fellow netizens who exhibit apathy due to the privileges they hold. Furthermore, the repeated and consistent use of the term "tone deaf" across all content functions not merely as a marker of textual

cohesion, but as a discourse-formation mechanism that transforms the term from a political critique into a collective public discourse. TikTok proves to be a highly important medium for spreading this discourse, supported by its algorithm (FYP) and the people power formed on the basis of shared grievances. The virality of content carrying tone deaf narratives is recognized as a manifestation of the No Viral No Justice phenomenon, as content creators use virality as an instrument of pressure — transforming TikTok from a mere entertainment platform into a space of collective struggle for the articulation of justice and civic rights that have long been ignored.

References

- Abdussamad, Z. (2021). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (P. Rapanna (ed.); Cetakan I). CV. syakir Media Press.
- Bani, M. D. (2023). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif dan Kualitatif: Teori dan Praktik* (Issue January 2024).
- Dataloka. (2026). *Indonesia Jadi Negara Pengguna TikTok Terbanyak di Dunia 2025*. Dataloka.Id. <https://dataloka.id/humaniora/4424/indonesia-jadi-negara-pengguna-tiktok-terbanyak-di-dunia-2025/>
- Dewi, L. Y., Sinaga, H. L. N., Pratiwi, N. A., & Widiyansono, N. (2022). *Analisis Peran Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU) dalam Partisipasi Politik Masyarakat di Pilkada serta Meminimalisir Golput*. 8, 36–47. <https://doi.org/10.37058/jipp.v8i1.4082>
- Hafizi, R. (2023). Pengaruh Media Sosial terhadap Persepsi Masyarakat tentang Politik dan Partisipasi Politik. *Journal of Mandalika*, Vol. 1, 1–4.
- Jones, R. H., Chik, A., & Hafner, C. A. (2015). *Discourse and Digital Practices: Doing Discourse Analysis in the Digital Age*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315726465>
- Marlina, S. (2025). *Dinamika Partisipasi Politik Generasi Milenial di Era Digital : Studi Kasus Media Sosial di Indonesia*. 1(1), 13–18.
- Purboyo, M. G., Amriwan, A., Junaidi, Tivantara, B. J., & Putra, H. D. (2025). *Ambivalensi Politik Digital : Algoritma , Gamifikasi , dan Polarisasi Generasi Z di TikTok*. 11(2), 172–190.
- Rahmansyah, S., & Ardiansyah, T. (2021). Semantic Extensions dalam Komentar Netizen pada Akun Instagram Artis Indonesia: Kajian Semantis Sutiadi. *The Gist: Jurnal Sastra Dan Bahasa*, Vol. 4 No. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.53675/gist.v4i1.142>
- Riyanto, G. P., & Pertiwi, W. K. (2025). *Pengguna TikTok di Indonesia Tembus 160 Juta, Terbanyak di Asia Tenggara*. Kompas.Com. <https://tekno.kompas.com/read/2025/07/30/14164347/pengguna-tiktok-di-indonesia-tembus-160-juta-terbanyak-di-asia-tenggara?page=all#page2>
- Suryawijaya, T., Fauzy, M. R. N., & Maulidina, N. F. (2024). *Peran Media Sosial dalam Membentuk Partisipasi Politik Gen Z Pada Pemilu 2024*. 15(2), 125–147. <https://doi.org/10.22212/jp.v15i2.4441>