

Digital Vigilantism in the Wake of the Collapse of Privacy: Netnographic Evidence from Comments on Indonesian Infotainment YouTube Channels

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ABSTRAKSI

Abstrak: Studi ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana keruntuhan batas privasi dalam video YouTube infotainment memicu terbentuknya vigilantisme digital lunak dalam budaya komentar netizen Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif netnografi terhadap 845 komentar pada video “[FULL] Cerita Awal Permasalahan Antara Ruben dan Mantan Istrinya! - BROWNIS (8/6/26)” di kanal TRANS TV Official. Data dikumpulkan melalui crawling Google Colab, dibersihkan menggunakan Microsoft Excel, lalu dianalisis dengan model tematik RİPES yang mencakup refleksivitas, interpretasi, konsistensi prosedural, evaluasi, dan konteks, serta didukung analisis sentimen menggunakan Communalytic.org. Temuan menunjukkan tiga pola utama: pertama, konflik keluarga mengalami keruntuhan koordinasi batas privasi sehingga informasi domestik diperlakukan sebagai milik publik; kedua, simpati parasosial dan religiusisasi penderitaan menjadi dasar legitimasi penghakiman sosial; ketiga, dukungan emosional berkembang menjadi vigilantisme digital lunak melalui pembelaan korban, koreksi publik, pelabelan moral, likes, dan penghukuman simbolik. Signifikansi penelitian ini terletak pada perluasan teori Communication Privacy Management dengan menunjukkan bahwa privacy turbulence tidak hanya lahir dari pelanggaran interpersonal, tetapi juga dari partisipasi massa dalam ekologi platform.

Abstract: This study aims to analyse how the breakdown of privacy boundaries in YouTube infotainment videos triggers the emergence of ‘soft’ digital vigilantism within the Indonesian netizen comment culture. The research employs a qualitative netnographic approach to analyse 845 comments on the video “[FULL] The Story Behind the Problems Between Ruben and His Ex-Wife! – BROWNIS (8/6/26)” on the TRANS TV Official channel. Data were collected via Google Colab crawling, cleaned using Microsoft Excel, and then analysed using the RİPES thematic model—which encompasses reflexivity, interpretation, procedural consistency, evaluation and context—and supplemented by sentiment analysis using Communalytic.org. The findings reveal three main patterns: first, family conflicts experience a breakdown in the coordination of privacy boundaries, resulting in domestic information being treated as public property; second, parasocial empathy and the religious framing of suffering form the basis for the legitimisation of social judgement; third, emotional support evolves into soft digital vigilantism through the defence of victims, public correction, moral labelling, ‘likes’, and symbolic punishment. The significance of this research lies in the expansion of the Communication Privacy Management theory by demonstrating that privacy turbulence arises not only from interpersonal violations, but also from mass participation within the platform ecosystem.

I. Introduction

Indonesia's digital space has undergone a significant transformation from merely a space for entertainment and the consumption of information into a social arena where people express their opinions, form perceptions, offer assessments and criticise various social and political phenomena. This change is closely linked to the increasing penetration of the internet and the use of social media in Indonesia. According to the 2025 Indonesian Internet Profile Survey published by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), the number of internet users in Indonesia stands at approximately 229.4 million, representing a penetration rate of 80.66 per cent of the total national population. This figure indicates that the internet has become the primary communication infrastructure reaching the vast majority of the Indonesian population (APJII, 2025). In line with this, the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), through its 2024 Indonesian Telecommunications Statistics, recorded that 72.78 per cent of Indonesia's population had accessed the internet in 2024, indicating the increasingly strong integration of digital technology into the social activities of the population (BPS, 2025). In the context of social media usage, the DataReportal Digital 2025: Indonesia report indicates that Indonesia had approximately 143 million social media user accounts at the start of 2025, whilst YouTube emerged as one of the platforms with the widest reach, reaching approximately 143 million users in Indonesia based on Google's ad reach data (Datareportal, 2025). This situation demonstrates that digital media, particularly video-based social media and public interaction platforms, have evolved into spaces for communication that enable the public not only to receive information, but also to form opinions, shape discourse, and participate openly in the process of social evaluation (Shabrina, 2025; Wafa, 2025; Yonatan, 2025).

These figures show that YouTube is no longer merely a video distribution platform but has become a large-scale public forum where issues relating to family, celebrities, religion, morality and collective emotions intersect intensely. At the same time, the Indonesian government has begun to take the risks posed by digital platforms seriously, including cyberbullying, internet addiction and the protection of vulnerable users, as evidenced by an official reprimand issued to YouTube for failing to comply with policies restricting children's access to social media. This phenomenon demonstrates that Indonesia's digital culture is navigating a tension between public participation, entertainment, social control and the risk of symbolic violence in comment sections. In this context, YouTube infotainment serves as a highly strategic space for analysing how the private lives of public figures are transformed into collective consumption. The video "[FULL] The Story Behind the Problems Between Ruben and His Ex-Wife! - BROWNIS (8/6/26)" on the TRANS TV Official channel not only presents a narrative of a celebrity family conflict but also opens a space for netizens to interpret, defend, blame and pass moral judgement through comments. The research dataset analysed contained 845 comments, comprising 653 main comments and 192 replies. Initial patterns in the comments revealed a predominance of empathy towards the figure perceived as the victim, defence of the father-child relationship, the use of religious language such as prayers and trials, and moral judgements against the party deemed at fault. From the perspective of Communication Privacy Management, this situation illustrates a shift in the boundaries of personal information: family conflicts, which were originally within the private sphere, have become information that appears to be jointly owned by the digital public. When ownership of information, privacy rules and the coordination of boundaries can no longer be controlled by the original owners of the information, privacy turmoil arises, enabling netizens to act as co-owners, interpreters and moral judges of the private lives of public figures. CPM itself emphasises that people manage privacy through rules, boundaries, ownership of information, and coordination with others; any disruption to this process creates tension in the management of privacy.

The issue becomes more complex when netizens' comments go beyond mere expressions of sympathy and develop into a form of digital vigilantism—that is, the practice of social punishment carried out by digital citizens through visibility, the dissemination of opinions, moral labelling, and collective pressure. Trottier describes digital vigilantism as a practice whereby citizens use digital technology to administer a form of 'parallel justice' through weaponised

visibility, thereby blurring the lines between surveillance, public participation and privacy violations. In the Indonesian context, international news reports have also noted the emergence of a trend towards an 'online court of public opinion', where netizens use social media to put pressure on public figures by circulating both old and new posts.

Research into digital vigilantism has expanded, but there remains very little that links it to privacy turbulence, Communication Privacy Management, and the culture of comments on Indonesian infotainment YouTube channels. Consequently, this article frames YouTube comment sections not merely as a space for audience responses, but as a digital moral court where the erosion of privacy gives rise to social judgement, parasocial solidarity, and symbolic punishment of public figures' private lives.

Research into digital vigilantism has evolved from the initial focus on online shaming as a form of community empowerment and civil vigilantism in Asia (Skoric et al., 2010), towards a more established conceptualisation of the 'weaponisation of visibility', namely the use of digital visibility to expose, humiliate, monitor and punish subjects deemed to be deviant (Favarel-Garrigues et al., 2020; Loveluck, 2020; Trottier, 2017, 2020). Thematically, the concepts or variables examined in this study cover public shaming, doxing, denunciation, civilian policing, mediated justice-seeking, moral policing, harassment, cancel culture and platformised justice; the context extends from cases of paedophile hunting to civil security (Campbell, 2016; Hadjimatheou, 2021; Ireland, 2023), migrants and minorities (Basturk, 2025; Gabdulhakov, 2019), journalism and mass censorship (Bhat & Chadha, 2023; Waisbord, 2020), nationalism and digital populism (Qian Huang, 2023; Q. Huang, 2021), digital feminism and sexual violence (Fan et al., 2026; Pandey & Chaudhuri, 2026; Wang & Whyke, 2025), to celebrity culture, YouTubers, TikTok and the attention economy (Demelius & Yoshida, 2025; Liu & Xu, 2025; Witmer, 2025; Yip, 2026).

In terms of research design, the majority of studies employed conceptual analysis, qualitative case studies, discourse analysis, media analysis, comment analysis, perception surveys, and a small number of netnographic studies; the use of netnographic designs remains limited, whilst quantitative approaches were more commonly found in the form of sentiment analysis, toxicity analysis, or modelling of perceptions regarding the effectiveness of online vigilantism (Aji et al., 2023; Kim & Kim, 2026). This mapping demonstrates that previous studies have thoroughly explained how the digital public engages in social punishment, how platforms amplify visibility, and how vigilantism intersects with politics, gender, law and morality; however, this body of work still leaves significant gaps as it has not explicitly linked digital vigilantism to the Communication Privacy Management theory, particularly the concepts of private information ownership, privacy rules, co-ownership, boundary coordination, and privacy turbulence. Furthermore, no study has yet specifically analysed Indonesian infotainment YouTube comments as an arena for the breakdown of privacy boundaries, the symbolic co-ownership of celebrities' private information, the religious framing of sympathy, and the moral judgements of netizens. Our study fills this gap by positioning YouTube comments not merely as audience responses, but as a netnographic space where private information that has been disclosed in the mass media is renegotiated by the digital public and transformed into mechanisms of social judgement, symbolic punishment, and digital vigilantism based on family morality.

This study aims to analyse how the breakdown of privacy boundaries in YouTube infotainment programmes triggers the emergence of digital vigilantism through the social judgement practised by Indonesian netizens. Using a netnographic approach to comments on YouTube infotainment videos, this study seeks to explain the process by which celebrities' private information shifts from the realm of personal ownership to that of shared symbolic ownership in the digital public sphere, and how this shift gives rise to responses such as parasocial empathy, moral defence, negative labelling, the religious framing of suffering, and symbolic punishment of those deemed guilty. The main argument of this study is that digital vigilantism does not arise solely from the spontaneous anger of netizens, but rather from a failure to coordinate privacy boundaries, as explained in the theory of Communication Privacy

Management, when family information that has been disclosed through the mass media loses control from its original owner and is subsequently renegotiated by the public through comments, 'likes' and replies. Within the context of Indonesian digital culture, the comment sections of infotainment YouTube videos function as a 'moral court' where netizens are not merely an audience, but also act as witnesses, defenders, interpreters and meters of social sanctions.

II. Research Methodology

A. Research Design and Approach

The netnographic approach was chosen because the research subjects comprised traces of conversations, expressions of opinion, emotional responses and netizens' practices of social judgement in the digital space, particularly in YouTube comment sections. Netnography enables the researcher to interpret comments not merely as text, but as a digital cultural practice that represents the ways in which Indonesian netizens interpret the private conflicts of public figures, build parasocial solidarity, disseminate moral judgements, and establish mechanisms of symbolic punishment. Consequently, this study is not aimed at statistically testing relationships between variables, but at understanding the process by which digital vigilantism emerges following the collapse of privacy within the culture of comments on Indonesian infotainment YouTube channels.

This study follows the interpretative-constructivist tradition, as netizens' comments are understood as constructions of social meaning arising from the interaction between media coverage, cultural experiences, moral norms, public emotions and digital participation. The primary focus of the research is not on the factual truth of celebrity family conflicts, but rather on how netizens interpret, frame, defend, blame and pass moral judgement on such conflicts. Within this framework, the theory of Communication Privacy Management is used to analyse how private information that has been exposed in the mass media undergoes an expansion of symbolic ownership in the digital sphere, whilst the concept of digital vigilantism is used to explain the practice of social punishment through comments, 'likes', replies, moral labelling and public opinion pressure.

B. Data Sources

The data source for this study was netizens' comments on a YouTube video entitled "[FULL] The Story Behind the Problems Between Ruben and His Ex-Wife! – BROWNIS (8/6/26)", which was broadcast on the TRANS TV Official channel. The video link is: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtPcyVIK10w>). The primary data consists of public comments available in the YouTube comments section, including main comments and replies. The unit of analysis in this study is every comment containing expressions of opinion, support, criticism, defence, judgement, emotion, religious narratives, assessments of family relationships, and responses to issues concerning the privacy of public figures.

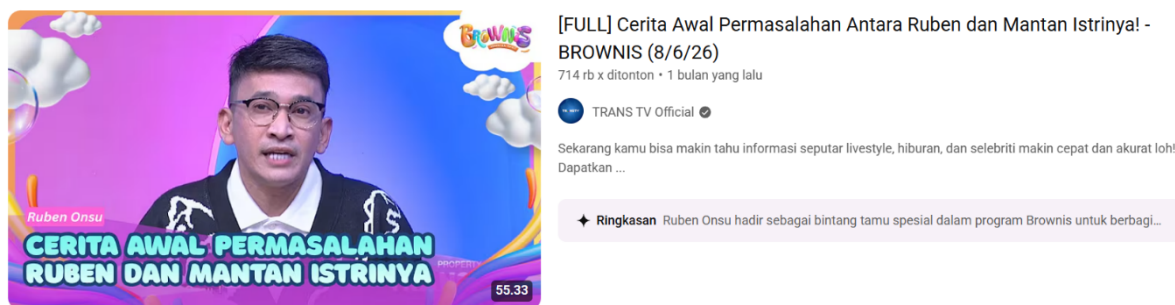


Fig. 1. Figure 1. Thumbnail of the research subject's video

Fig. 2. Source: Screenshot taken by the researcher, 2026

C. Data Collection Methods

Data collection was carried out by crawling YouTube comments using Google Colab. The crawling process was conducted to extract the text of the comments, the date of the comments, the number of likes, and the structure of the comments where replies were present. The data obtained from the crawling was then saved in CSV format so that it could be read, selected and processed systematically. As the data originates from the digital public sphere, this research adheres to the principles of digital research ethics by not revealing users' personal identities, not citing sensitive information excessively, and treating comments as digital cultural data rather than as factual statements intended to prove the right or wrong of private celebrity disputes.

Data processing was carried out through data cleaning in Microsoft Excel. The cleaning stages included checking for empty data, removing duplicates, filtering out irrelevant comments, adjusting text formatting, standardising metadata columns, and separating main comments from replies where necessary. Comments containing only meaningless symbols, spam, promotional content, or text unrelated to the research topic were excluded from the analysis corpus. Meanwhile, emotional expressions such as crying, laughing, or praying emojis were retained as they form an important part of netizens' affective meaning in expressing sympathy, judgement, or moral support.

D. Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out in two main stages: thematic analysis using the RIPPES model and sentiment analysis using Commanalytic.org. Thematic analysis was used to identify the structure of meaning, narrative patterns and key themes in netizens' comments. Meanwhile, sentiment analysis was used as a supporting analysis to identify the emotional tendencies of the comments, whether positive, negative or neutral—thereby reinforcing the results of the qualitative interpretation through computational mapping.

The RIPPES thematic analysis model is applied in five stages. Firstly, Reflexivity, whereby the researcher critically examines their own position, assumptions and potential biases whilst reading netizens' comments. At this stage, the researcher does not treat the comments as factual truths about celebrity family conflicts, but rather as expressions of netizens' perceptions, emotions and social constructions. Second, Interpretation, whereby the researcher reads the comments repeatedly to identify patterns of meaning, such as empathy towards certain figures, defence of the father-child relationship, the religious framing of suffering, criticism of the party deemed at fault, and forms of symbolic punishment. Thirdly, Procedural Consistency, whereby the entire coding process is carried out systematically through the development of categories, the grouping of themes, and the tracing of inter-thematic relationships to ensure the analysis is neither random nor selective.

The research data were analysed using thematic analysis, drawing on the approach of (Braun et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006) which frames the analytical process as a systematic set of stages for identifying, organising and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. In this study, RIPPES (Responsibility, Information ownership, Privacy regulation, Ethical consideration, and Social consequence) is not positioned as an established analytical model in the methodological literature, but rather as an analytical categorisation framework developed by the researcher through a synthesis of the principles of thematic analysis and Petronio's Communication Privacy Management (CPM) perspective (Petronio & Child, 2020). The RIPPES model is used as an interpretative tool to organise the empirical themes emerging from the interview data, particularly in understanding how individuals and communities manage private information, determine the limits of information disclosure, and consider the social consequences of disclosing information. The development of the RIPPES categories was carried out through a process of inductive and deductive coding, namely by identifying patterns in the field data whilst linking them to the theoretical concepts of CPM.

Fourthly, Evaluation, whereby the researcher reassesses the strength of themes by considering their frequency of occurrence, linguistic intensity, the number of 'likes', and the relevance of the

themes to the research focus. Fifthly, Context, whereby the findings are situated within Indonesian digital culture, specifically infotainment culture, YouTube comments, family morality, popular religiosity, and the tendency of netizens to form a public court in the digital sphere.

III. Data Presentation and Analysis

A. The Breakdown of Coordination on Privacy Boundaries: Family Conflicts as Public Information

Table 1. Thematic Mapping of Public Responses in the Negotiation of Privacy Boundaries

Thematic Code	Key Indicators	Number of Unique Comments Coded (n)	Percentage of Code Occurrences (%)	Analytical Interpretation
Media transparency and clarification	Podcast, clarification, statements, explanations, narratives from related parties	32	3.5%	Public interprets media clarification as an attempt to establish truth and justify certain narratives within the conflict.
Digital footprint and children's future implications	References to children, future consequences, digital traces, concerns about lasting online records	41	4.6%	Netizens perceive digital exposure as having long-term consequences, particularly for children involved in family conflicts.
Family conflicts becoming public interest	Family disputes, divorce, children, former partners, parental responsibilities	253	28.3%	The dominant theme indicates that private family conflicts have been transformed into matters considered worthy of public discussion.
Public's right to know and judge	Claims of public curiosity, truth-seeking, moral judgement, demands for accountability	209	23.4%	Comments demonstrate that audiences construct a perceived right to evaluate and judge private conflicts involving public figures.
Awareness of privacy boundaries	Privacy concerns, personal matters, limits of disclosure, criticism of excessive exposure	23	2.6%	Although less frequent, this theme reflects public awareness that certain personal information requires protection.
Total code occurrences		558	100%	One comment may contain more than one thematic code; therefore, percentages represent code occurrences rather than exclusive comment categories.

^a. Source: Researchers' analysis, 2026

The analysis was conducted on a corpus of 845 YouTube comments (N = 845). After data cleaning and thematic coding, 845 unique comments were included in the analysis. Because thematic analysis allows overlapping coding, a single comment could be assigned to more than one thematic category. Therefore, the percentages presented in this table are calculated based on total code occurrences rather than mutually exclusive comment frequencies. The total number of code occurrences was higher than the number of unique comments because some comments contained multiple meanings related to privacy, public judgement, digital footprints, and family conflicts.

Table 1 shows that the issue of the breakdown in the coordination of privacy boundaries does not arise solely through explicit terms such as 'privacy', 'shame' or 'private matters', but primarily through the way netizens discuss family conflicts as a subject of public discourse. The most dominant theme was family conflicts becoming public consumption, accounting for 253 comments or 29.9 per cent. This finding is significant as it indicates that netizens' attention does not stop at the content of the programme, but extends into domestic spheres such as children, divorce, former partners, household matters and family relationships. This implies that private

conflicts have undergone a shift in meaning, evolving from personal events into topics of social conversation that are deemed legitimate for collective interpretation.

The second prominent theme was the public's claim to the right to judge or be informed, accounting for 209 comments or 24.7 per cent. This theme indicates a shift in the audience's position: netizens are no longer merely spectators but present themselves as parties who feel they possess the moral authority to judge the right and wrong of a conflict. Phrases such as 'listen first', 'don't be hasty', 'facts', 'right' and 'wrong' show that netizens position themselves as truth-checkers. Critically, this reveals the emergence of a kind of epistemic entitlement—that is, a sense of entitlement to know about and judge the private lives of public figures because such information has appeared in the media.

Meanwhile, comments relating to transparency and clarification in the media totalled 32, or 3.8 per cent, whilst those concerning awareness of and negotiation around privacy boundaries amounted to just 23, or 2.7 per cent. These low figures do not imply that privacy issues are unimportant; rather, they indicate that privacy is rarely discussed directly by netizens. Most netizens are more concerned with assessing the substance of the conflict than with questioning whether it is fit for public consumption. Critically, this situation suggests that digital commenting culture tends to normalise the exposure of celebrities' private lives, whilst ethical reflection on the boundaries of privacy remains relatively marginal.

References to 'digital footprints' and 'future impacts' appeared in only four comments, or 0.5 per cent, but were of high analytical significance. Comments referring to the "digital footprint" indicate an awareness that family conflicts publicised in the media do not disappear once the broadcast has ended but are stored as a digital archive that can be accessed again by children, family members and the public in the future. Thus, although rare in frequency, this code broadens the analysis to show that the erosion of privacy does not only occur at the time the comment is written but also has long-term temporal consequences.

Table 1 shows that 361 comments, or 42.7 per cent, contained indications of the expansion, negotiation or breakdown of privacy boundaries. This figure is substantial enough to conclude that family conflicts in infotainment programmes are no longer understood as private matters, but rather as social information whose meaning is contested by the digital public. However, it must be critically emphasised that these codes overlap, so the frequencies should not be interpreted as entirely separate categories. A single comment may simultaneously contain family issues, claims of truth, moral defences and privacy concerns.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis of the RIPES Model

RIPES Stage	Analysis Procedure	Data Findings and Comments	Summary of Results
Reflexivity	The researchers regarded comments as expressions of public perception, rather than as factual evidence regarding the right or wrong of family conflicts. Usernames were not the focus of the analysis. Emotional, offensive or defensive comments were still interpreted as digital cultural constructs of netizens.	Many comments show support for a particular figure. Some netizens believe that this figure simply wants to meet their child, rather than expose any scandals. Other comments cite the podcast, clarifications and accounts as grounds for justifying their support or criticism.	Reflexivity suggests that the breakdown of privacy boundaries should not be interpreted as a conflict, but as a social process in which the digital public feels justified in entering the private sphere of public figures.
Interpretasi	The comments were read repeatedly to identify patterns of meaning relating to the openness of conflicts, claims to the truth, children's rights, fathers' rights, the media, digital footprints and the boundaries of private matters.	A total of 253 comments were found that turned the family dispute into a matter of public interest, and 209 comments that reflected the public's desire to pass judgement or find out more. Some comments urged others to "listen first" to the full story before passing judgement, whilst others pointed out that the child	An analysis of the data suggests that the comments section has become a space where the boundaries of privacy are being pushed. Family conflicts are no longer viewed as private matters, but as public information

		would see this “digital footprint” in the future.	subject to negotiation by netizens.
Procedural Consistency	The coding was carried out by grouping the comments into five categories: media transparency/clarification, digital footprints, family conflicts as public spectacle, claims to public rights, and awareness of privacy boundaries. A single comment may fall under more than one category.	The most dominant theme was family conflicts becoming a matter of public interest, with 253 comments, followed by claims regarding the public’s right to judge or be informed, with 209 comments. The explicit theme of privacy was less prominent, with 23 comments, but in terms of meaning it reinforced the existence of boundary negotiations.	Procedurally speaking, this sub-result is valid because the pattern of privacy expansion arises not from a single type of comment, but from several interrelated code groups.
Evaluation	The strength of a theme is assessed based on code frequency, linguistic intensity, the number of ‘likes’, and the position of comments within the conversation. Comments with high levels of support are treated as indicators of social validation, rather than as evidence of truth.	The comments posted under this sub-post received a total of 2,858 likes, with the most popular comment receiving 725 likes. The most notable comments were in defence of the figure, who was perceived as simply wanting to see their child, and criticised the accusation that they issued clarifications too frequently.	The evaluation shows that the breakdown in coordination regarding privacy boundaries is reinforced by collective validation. Netizens not only comment, but also provide social support for the narrative they consider to be the most accurate.
Context	The findings are situated within the context of Indonesian digital culture, specifically infotainment, YouTube, celebrity families, father-child relationships, popular religiosity, and netizens’ habit of commenting on the lives of public figures.	Infotainment videos originating from television have become a space for digital discussion on YouTube. Comments have broadened the scope of the issue from a family story to matters concerning fathers’ rights, children’s rights, the responsibilities of former partners, maintenance payments and digital footprints.	The context suggests that the comments section functions as a ‘shared space’ for private information. It is here that family conflicts become part of the digital public sphere and form the basis for social judgement.

^b Source: Researchers’ analysis, 2026

Table 2 illustrates how the RIPES model functions as an analytical procedure that not only categorises comments but also examines the researcher’s position, the meaning of the data, the consistency of the codes, the validity of the findings, and the socio-cultural context. At the Reflexivity stage, this table emphasises that netizens’ comments are not treated as factual truths about celebrity family conflicts. This is important because YouTube comments often contain assumptions, bias, emotions, speculation and judgements. By treating comments as expressions of public perception, the research avoids the methodological pitfall of equating netizens’ opinions with objective social facts.

During the Interpretation stage, the table shows that netizens’ comments formed strong patterns of meaning centred on the right to know, the right to judge, children’s rights, fathers’ rights, clarification, the media, and digital footprints. The finding that 253 comments turned family conflicts into public spectacle and 209 comments reflected the public’s claim to pass judgement demonstrates that comment sections have become spaces to produce meaning. Critically, this interpretation suggests that the disclosure of information in the media is never neutral. Once a family conflict enters the digital public sphere, its meaning is no longer entirely controlled by the parties involved but is reproduced by the audience.

The Procedural Consistency stage strengthens the credibility of the analysis because the comments are grouped into clear categories: media openness, digital footprints, public consumption, claims to public rights, and awareness of privacy boundaries. The strength of this table lies in its assertion that privacy turbulence does not necessarily have to manifest through the word ‘privacy’. It can also be detected through conversations about children, family, the household, the right to meet, clarification and truth. Methodologically, this demonstrates that

thematic analysis does not rely solely on literal keywords, but also on the conceptual meanings contained within the comments.

In the Evaluation stage, the table focuses on ‘likes’ as a form of social validation. Comments in this sub-result received a total of 2,858 ‘likes’, with the highest number being 725. This data shows that certain comments do not merely represent individual opinions but have garnered collective support. However, it is important to note that ‘likes’ should not be directly interpreted as representing the majority view. ‘Likes’ are more accurately understood as indicators of visibility, emotional resonance and limited social legitimacy within the platform’s ecosystem. This means that comments with a high number of ‘likes’ have the potential to reinforce certain narratives, but do not automatically represent the entire audience.

The Context stage is an important part as it situates the findings within Indonesia’s digital culture, specifically infotainment, YouTube, family values, and netizens’ habits of commenting on the lives of public figures. This table shows that television videos redistributed via YouTube create a hybrid media space. Within this space, infotainment programmes provide the initial narrative, whilst YouTube comments expand it into a public discussion. Crucially, this context reveals that the erosion of privacy is caused not only by individuals who disclose their stories, but also by media infrastructure, platform algorithms, celebrity culture and the affective participation of netizens.

Table 2 shows that the RITES model can produce a systematic analysis, rather than merely a descriptive one. This table links comment data to broader social processes: how private information is disclosed, interpreted, validated and disseminated through the culture of digital commenting. Theoretically, this table also reinforces the use of Communication Privacy Management, as it highlights failures in the coordination of boundaries between information owners, the media and the digital public.

Table 3. Summary of Sub-results

CPM Aspects	Findings in the Comments	Forms of Privacy Breaches	Implications for Digital Vigilantism
Ownership of private information	Information about family, children, ex-partners, maintenance and divorce is discussed openly by netizens.	Ownership of information is shifting from families to the digital public.	Netizens feel entitled to defend, criticise and take a moral stance.
Privacy control	Public figures are not considered to have complete control over how stories appearing in the media are interpreted.	Control over the interpretation of the conflict has shifted to the comments section.	The public forms its own narrative about who the victims are and who is at fault.
Privacy rules	Some comments discuss the boundaries of what is appropriate to reveal and what should not be disclosed.	Privacy rules are no longer uniform, as they are interpreted differently by internet users.	Differences in interpretation give rise to debate, defence and moral attacks.
Co-ownership	Netizens act as recipients of information who feel they share a moral responsibility for the conflict.	Private information becomes a form of shared symbolic ownership.	Comments have turned into a practice of policing, defending and social condemnation.
Boundary coordination	There is no direct coordination between the owners of the information and the public regarding the limits of interpretation.	Restrictions on access, dissemination and interpretation have spiralled out of control.	The comments section has become a space for unrestrained negotiation over the meaning of the conflict.
Privacy turbulence	Comments have emerged regarding clarifications, digital footprints, children’s rights, domestic matters and moral accusations.	Privacy breaches occur when private disputes enter the media sphere and are taken up by the public.	Privacy turmoil provides a gateway to social judgement and digital vigilantism.

© Source: Researchers’ analysis, 2026

Table 3 presents a theoretical synthesis linking the empirical findings from YouTube comments to six key concepts in Communication Privacy Management, namely private information ownership, privacy control, privacy rules, co-ownership, boundary coordination, and privacy turbulence. The strength of this table lies in its ability to demonstrate that conflicts within celebrity families are not merely the subject of comments but undergo a transformation in status: from private information to information that is symbolically treated as public property.

Regarding the ownership of private information, the table shows that information about family, children, former partners, divorce and maintenance is discussed openly by netizens. Theoretically, this indicates a shift in the ownership of information. Information that ought to remain under the control of the family has become subject to public scrutiny. Critically, this shift is not merely the result of media coverage but also stems from the cultural assumption that public figures must be prepared to open their private lives to the public. It is here that the boundary between the public's right to know and the individual's right to privacy becomes blurred.

Regarding privacy control, the table shows that public figures are not entirely able to control the interpretation of information that has appeared in the media. Once a story is posted on YouTube, control lies not only with the source or the media but shifts to the comments section. Netizens then construct their own narratives about who the victim is, who the perpetrator is, who is sincere, and who is at fault. Crucially, this situation demonstrates that privacy control within the digital ecosystem is not only related to the decision to disclose information, but also to the ability to control its circulation, interpretation and public sentiment once the information has been disseminated.

Regarding privacy rules, the table illustrates differing interpretations of which information is appropriate to disclose, and which is considered a disgrace. Some netizens support the clarification, viewing it as necessary to refute the allegations, whilst a small minority believe that family matters should not be made public. This demonstrates that privacy rules in the digital sphere are fluid, contentious and not universally agreed upon. In the context of CPM, the failure to agree on privacy rules is one of the main sources of turbulence.

The aspect of co-ownership is one of the most significant contributions of this table. Netizens appear to act as recipients of information who feel a moral responsibility towards the conflict. They do not merely receive stories, but also uphold certain narratives, defend figures deemed to be in the right, and attack those deemed to be in the wrong. Critically, this demonstrates a form of shared symbolic ownership of private information. However, this ownership is problematic because it is not established through an ethical agreement with the owner of the information, but rather through media exposure and uncontrolled public participation.

Regarding boundary coordination, the table shows that there is no direct coordination between the information owner and the public concerning the boundaries of access, dissemination and interpretation. This is a critical point in the breakdown of privacy. Once information enters the hybrid media sphere, its boundaries are no longer determined by individuals or families, but by the dynamics of the platform, comments, 'likes', replies and virality. Crucially, this failure of coordination highlights a fundamental weakness of private communication in the digital age: information may be disclosed by one party, but its meaning can be appropriated by many. The concept of 'privacy turbulence' encapsulates this entire process. Turbulence occurs when private information is not only disseminated but also experiences disruption in terms of ownership, control, rules, coordination and interpretation. This table shows that comments regarding clarifications, digital footprints, children's rights, domestic matters and moral accusations are signs that privacy has been socially compromised. The implications for digital vigilantism are clear: when privacy breaks down, the digital public gains the space to act as moral judges. They offer defence, correction, accusations, labelling and symbolic punishment.

Table 3 shows that digital vigilantism does not arise in isolation from the breakdown of privacy. Rather, it emerges from a process whereby private information is transformed into a shared symbolic asset, ceases to be under the control of its original owner, and is subject to

unrestrained negotiation by the digital public. Thus, this table reinforces the article's central argument that the comment sections of infotainment YouTube videos serve as an arena where 'privacy turbulence' is transformed into 'social judgement' and subsequently evolves into digital vigilantism.

Table 4. Sentiment Distribution

No.	Kategori Sentimen	Jumlah Data	Persentase (%)
1	Negatif	444	52,54%
2	Positif	394	46,63%
3	Netral	7	0,83%
Total		845	100%

^d Sumber: Hasil analisis sentimen menggunakan model DistilBERT dari Communalytic.org

The results of the sentiment analysis using the DistilBERT model on 845 text data points show that digital conversations were dominated by negative sentiment in 444 data points (52.54 per cent), followed by positive sentiment in 394 data points (46.63 per cent), whilst neutral sentiment was found in only 7 data points (0.83 per cent). The predominance of negative sentiment indicates that most users expressed criticism, disagreement or negative evaluations regarding the issues under discussion. However, the high proportion of positive sentiment suggests that this digital discourse is not entirely characterised by rejection but rather reflects the dynamics of a fragmented public opinion. The low proportion of neutral sentiment reinforces the finding that user communication in the digital sphere tends to be argumentative and evaluative, with users expressing attitudes rather than merely providing descriptive information.

Based on the results of a sentiment analysis of 845 texts, it is evident that users' perceptions were dominated by negative sentiment, accounting for 444 data points (52.54 per cent). The predominance of negative sentiment indicates that most of the responses or conversations analysed contained expressions of disagreement, criticism, rejection, disappointment or negative evaluations regarding the issue under discussion. The high proportion of negative sentiment indicates that the digital space has become an arena for the articulation of public criticism, where users actively express evaluative views on current phenomena. On the other hand, positive sentiment also accounts for a relatively large proportion, totalling 394 data points (46.63 per cent). This percentage shows that, although there is a dominant trend towards criticism, nearly half of the conversations demonstrate responses that are supportive, accepting, or appreciative of the issue under discussion. The relatively balanced composition of negative and positive sentiment indicates a contestation of public opinion in the digital space, where the public does not hold a single viewpoint, but rather constructs diverse interpretations based on their respective experiences, values, and interests.

Meanwhile, the neutral category was found in only 7 data points (0.83 per cent). The low number of neutral sentiments suggests that most users do not merely convey information objectively but tend to offer emotional judgements or specific attitudes towards the issues being commented on. Thus, the characteristics of digital communication in this dataset reveal a pattern of communication that is opinionated and evaluative, rather than merely the conveyance of information. Overall, the analysis results show that the digital discourse in this study exhibits a slightly more dominant negative sentiment than positive sentiment. However, the presence of an almost equal proportion of positive sentiment indicates that the digital space functions as an arena for the negotiation of meaning, where various social groups express both support for and opposition to emerging issues. These findings demonstrate that sentiment analysis can be used to

understand how the public constructs emotional responses and social attitudes through communication via digital platforms.

IV. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the comment sections of infotainment YouTube videos do not function as neutral spaces for spontaneous responses, but rather as arenas for the collective production of meaning when celebrities' private conflicts lead to the breakdown of privacy boundaries. The most prominent pattern is a shift from family information as a personal domain towards information treated as part of the digital public domain. Within the framework of Communication Privacy Management, this situation reveals a failure in the coordination of privacy boundaries: information originally owned by an individual or family, once it appears in the media, loses interpretative control and becomes an object of collective judgement. Netizens do not merely consume the narrative; they assume the roles of interpreters, defenders, fact-checkers and arbiters of moral boundaries. The key implication of this pattern is that privacy in the digital sphere does not collapse merely because someone speaks out in the media, but because the public feels it has the legitimacy to expand upon, comment on and determine the meaning of such private information. Thus, the erosion of privacy in this case is not a technical event, but rather a social process produced through audience engagement, platform logic, and an infotainment culture that normalises the domestic lives of public figures as a collective spectacle.

The second pattern shows that digital vigilantism in this case did not primarily stem from overt hatred, but rather from sympathy legitimised on emotional, familial and religious grounds. Netizens' comments often began with feelings of sadness, pity, prayers and support for the figure perceived to be wronged, before evolving into moral defence and judgement of the party deemed at fault. This demonstrates that parasocial sympathy can transform into an ambivalent social force: on the one hand, it fosters digital solidarity; on the other, it creates space for one-sided judgement. The religious framing of suffering reinforces this process, as the suffering of public figures is interpreted as a test of endurance, patience, sincerity and a sign of genuine devotion. Consequently, defence of one party appears more morally legitimate, whilst criticism of the other becomes more readily accepted as a form of social justice. Crucially, digital vigilantism does not always appear crude or aggressive; it can operate through language that appears empathetic, religious and supportive, yet still results in symbolic pressure, negative labelling and the formation of public verdicts.

What is both intriguing and anomalous is the scarcity of comments that explicitly address privacy, digital footprints, or the ethical boundaries of netizens' involvement, even though almost the entire conversation is, in fact, taking place against a backdrop of eroded privacy. This highlights a paradox of digital culture: the public is highly active in interpreting the private lives of public figures, yet relatively few reflect on the ethical consequences of judging, disseminating and validating such judgements. Another anomaly is evident in the form of vigilantism, which is not explicitly dominant through calls to vilify, boycott or attack, but is in fact more potent in its softer forms: 'likes', prayers, defences, public corrections and moral labelling. In other words, the power of condemnation does not lie in a few extreme comments, but in the accumulation of sympathetic comments that collectively create a specific moral atmosphere. These findings expand our understanding of digital vigilantism by demonstrating that, within Indonesian netizen culture, symbolic punishment can emerge through a combination of the erosion of privacy, parasocial closeness, family morality, popular religiosity, and algorithmic validation in YouTube comment sections.

CPM's assumption (Petronio, 2013; Petronio & Child, 2020; Petronio & Durham, 2008) regarding the ownership of private information is borne out by the fact that conflicts within celebrity families were initially private information pertaining to the individuals and their families; however, once this information was made public via YouTube infotainment, the boundaries of ownership shifted towards symbolic co-ownership, as netizens felt they shared a moral right to know, interpret, defend and judge. Assumptions regarding privacy control and

privacy rules also appear to have been disrupted: the owners of the information are no longer fully able to control who accesses it, how it is interpreted, and the extent to which public commentary develops. This is where a failure of boundary coordination occurs, as there is no ethical consensus between public figures, the media, and the digital audience regarding the limits of interpretation concerning private conflicts. This finding simultaneously expands the scope of CPM, as privacy turbulence arises not only from direct breaches by trusted parties but can also emerge from mass participation, 'likes', replies, the religious framing of suffering, parasocial empathy, and family morality operating within the platform's ecosystem. Thus, this research demonstrates that, in practice, the collapse of privacy in digital media can produce broader social consequences: private information is transformed into material for collective judgement, whilst netizens act as 'co-owners' who exercise informal social control.

The findings of this study are consistent with Trottier (2017), who views digital vigilantism as the 'weaponisation of visibility' that is, the use of digital visibility to expose and punish subjects deemed deviant; however, this study expands upon that argument by demonstrating that visibility is not only 'weaponised' through doxing or the disclosure of identity, but also through expressions of sympathy, prayers, 'likes', and moral labelling in the comments sections of infotainment YouTube videos. These findings also align with those of Skoric et al. (2010), Kasra (2017), Oravec (2020) and Loveluck (2020), who frame online shaming as a practice of social control and informal punishment; however, this study adds that, in the context of Indonesian netizens, punishment does not always manifest as direct humiliation, but rather often operates subtly through family morality, the religious framing of suffering, and the defence of figures constructed as victims.

Unlike Trottier (Trottier, 2020) and (Cheung et al., 2020), who place greater emphasis on denunciation and doxing as the primary mechanisms of digital vigilantism, this study finds that YouTube infotainment comments give rise to vigilantism without the need to disclose new personal data; it is sufficient to reinterpret the meaning of private information already featured in the media and use this as the basis for social judgement. This finding also builds upon the studies by (Qian Huang, 2023; S. Huang et al., 2021), Wang and Whyke (2025), (Zheng et al., 2026), and Witmer (2025)—which demonstrate the relationship between digital vigilantism, the pursuit of justice, gender, sexual violence, TikTok, and moral politics—as this research positions celebrity family conflicts, father-child relationships, and popular religiosity as new arenas for the formation of public verdicts. Thus, the main contribution of this research is to fill a gap that has not yet been adequately addressed in the existing body of literature: linking digital vigilantism to Communication Privacy Management, specifically co-ownership, boundary coordination failure and privacy turbulence, so that digital vigilantism is understood not merely as a practice of public punishment, but as a social consequence of the breakdown of privacy when the private information of public figures becomes a form of shared symbolic ownership within the culture of Indonesian netizen commentary.

The practical implications of this research suggest that infotainment media, content creators, YouTube channel managers and public figures need to treat the disclosure of private conflicts as a high-risk form of communication, as once domestic information is published, control over its meaning, the limits of its interpretation and the circulation of its emotional impact may shift to the digital public. These findings underscore the importance of content production ethics, comment moderation, the protection of children and vulnerable groups, and digital privacy literacy to ensure that comment sections do not become arenas of social judgement that normalise symbolic punishment. Theoretically, this research enriches the literature on digital vigilantism by demonstrating that digital vigilantism does not always manifest through doxing, boycotts or overt attacks, but can operate subtly through sympathy, prayers, family morality, 'likes' and moral labelling; whilst simultaneously expanding the theory of Communication Privacy Management by positioning 'privacy turbulence' as a process produced by the platform ecosystem, mass participation, and shared symbolic ownership of private information.

V. Conclusion

Digital vigilantism in the comments sections of Indonesian infotainment YouTube videos cannot be understood merely as a spontaneous expression by netizens, but as a social consequence of the breakdown of privacy boundaries when the family conflicts of public figures are publicised and collectively consumed. Based on a netnographic analysis of 845 comments, three main findings emerged. Firstly, there is a breakdown in the coordination of privacy boundaries, as domestic information concerning family, children, divorce and emotional relationships becomes the subject of public discourse—debated, validated and reinterpreted by netizens. Secondly, parasocial sympathy and the religious framing of suffering form the basis of social judgement; netizens not only demonstrate empathy but also frame the suffering of certain figures as a test of patience and sincerity worthy of defence. Thirdly, emotional support evolves into a form of soft digital vigilantism through the defence of victims, public correction, claims to truth, moral labelling, symbolic pressure, and collective validation via ‘likes. The significance of these findings lies in their contribution to expanding the theory of Communication Privacy Management, particularly the concepts of co-ownership, boundary coordination failure, and privacy turbulence within the digital platform ecosystem.

This study demonstrates that privacy turbulence does not only occur within interpersonal relationships but can also be generated by mass audiences who feel they have a moral right to private information that has been published in the media. In practical terms, this research underscores the need for ethical infotainment production, comment moderation, digital privacy literacy, and the protection of children or vulnerable parties in family conflicts involving public figures. Theoretically, this article demonstrates that digital vigilantism can operate subtly through the language of sympathy, religion, family and morality, rather than solely through doxing, boycotts or direct attacks. The limitations of this study lie in its focus on a single video, a single platform and a single celebrity case; consequently, the findings are not intended to be generalised across the board. Further research is recommended to compare cross-platform cases, utilise longitudinal data, and combine netnography with audience interviews to understand the motivations behind digital judgement and its impact on the ethics of public communication.

VI. References

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