



Research Paper

Collective Emotional Expression as Digital Democracy: A Study of the "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" on Platform X

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Abstract

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The rapid development of digital spaces and social media has transformed public interaction, enabling new forms of democratic participation. This research investigates collective emotional expressions within the "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" on Platform X and their role in shaping public opinion and contributing to digital democracy, drawing on Jürgen Habermas's public sphere theory. A qualitative case study approach was employed, utilizing content analysis of community posts and in-depth interviews with seven active members. Data were triangulated from multiple sources to ensure validity. Findings reveal that the community primarily produces posts in three categories, criticism of government policies, socioeconomic grievances, and personal experiences sparking social reflection. While much of the discourse is emotionally charged and includes aggressive language, there are also evidence-based rational arguments. The community provides an accessible, equal space for voicing dissatisfaction, aligning with Habermas's ideal of open public discourse. However, structural domination persists through moderator enforced rules that limit open discussion, contradicting the ideal public sphere. Despite these limitations, the "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" functions as a counter-public, offering a platform for marginalized voices and informal digital democracy practices.

Keywords: Collective Emotions; Digital Democracy; Komunitas MARAH MARAH; Public Sphere; Habermas; Social Media

1. Introduction

The digital landscape has undergone increasingly rapid development, characterized by the integration of digital technologies into various aspects of human life. This integration has fundamentally transformed how people interact, work, learn, and access information. Social media platform is a key of the digital space. Social media facilitates online community interaction



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According to a survey conducted by Us Are Social (2025), the number of social media users in Indonesia has reached approximately 143 million.

Social media can be defined as a digital platform that facilitates social interaction with a broad audience reach. The interactions occurring on this platform include information exchange, public opinion, and discussion forums. Consequently, social media not only utilized for daily communication but also as a medium through which individuals can voice opinions or aspirations, express emotions, and engage in social discussions across various domains, including politics, thereby contributing to the development of digital democracy. This phenomenon indicates that social media functions as a modern public sphere, enabling broader public participation compared to traditional public spaces [1]. Within this sphere, all the members of society possess equal status, rights, and opportunities to express their opinions without limitations.

The rapid development of social media given rise to various phenomena relates to how individuals and groups express themselves. One distinctive phenomenon in the expression of opinions on social media involves collective emotions, wherein individuals or groups simultaneously convey their concerns, anger, frustration, or worries regarding social issues, including related to political. Such expressions communication patterns and can influence the perceptions of other community members as well as the broader public. Ultimately, they contribute to the formation of public opinion and may affect collective decision-making or shared perspectives.

“Komunitas MARAH MARAH” is an online community on the social media platform X. Members of this community use the platform to express frustration, anger, and disappointment from various forms of dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction related to social, political, and public policy issues. These structured emotional expressions can influenced public opinion and shape the perceptions of the broader community. In certain cases, particularly those involving crime or criminal incidents, issues that initially receive limited attention from authorities may gain significant visibility and traction after becoming viral on social media. As a result, such issues are more likely to prompt timely responses from relevant authorities once they attract widespread public attention.

Collective emotional expression within the “Komunitas MARAH MARAH” on platform X often serve as a mechanism of advocating for social change and mobilizing public opinion. However, such collective expressions may also give rise to polarization and the dominance of certain groups, thereby potentially hindering rational deliberation. This issue is particularly significant given that digital public spaces offer potential for inclusive deliberation. Another issue arising within the digital democratic space concerns the government's inability to respond to public criticism and anger, which is among the factors contributing to democratic weakness. Therefore, this research aims to analyze collective emotional expressions within the “Komunitas MARAH MARAH” on platform X in shaping public opinion that contributes to the creation of democracy in the digital space, as conceptualized by Jürgen Habermas's theoretical framework.

This research is grounded in the argument who argue that the public sphere has been transformed through social media [2]. The challenges to democracy in the digital space include disinformation and polarization. Additionally, this research conducted with the perspective of Sari & Wibowo (2025), who emphasize that a phenomenological study approach is appropriate for analyzing the “Komunitas MARAH MARAH” as a medium for emotional expression, focusing on how personal experiences construct social meaning and solidarity within virtual groups [3].

This research was conducted based on research gap identified in two previous studies. The phenomenological approach employed in prior research is unable to connect the internal

dynamics of the community with the formation of broader public opinion or deliberative democracy. Furthermore, previous studies have not explained the specific role of collective emotions in supporting democratic processes in the digital space. This research focuses on analyzing collective emotional expressions among members of the “Komunitas MARAH MARAH” as a bridging mechanism for public opinion that can contribute to the realization of democracy. To achieve the research goals, this research did not adopt the phenomenological approach. This research used Jürgen Habermas’s theoretical framework because it explains how public digital space contribute to democracy through rational communication in shaping public opinion.

2. Method

This research examines the relationship among “Komunitas MARAH MARAH” on platform X, collective emotions (particularly anger), and the formation of public opinion that contributes to digital democracy, employing the public sphere theory proposed by Jürgen Habermas. According to this theoretical framework, public discourse consists of three main components, such as communication, participation, and consensus [4]. From this perspective, social media as a digital public space, provides opportunities to contribute to democratic discourse that can influence public policy.

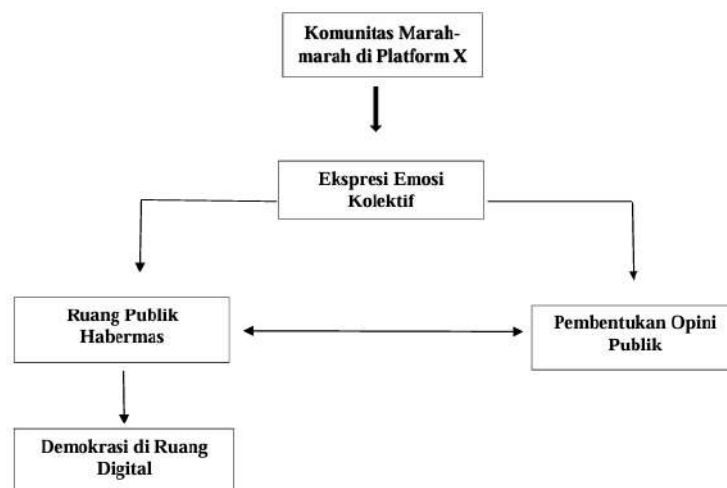


Figure 1. Research Framework

The relevance of Jürgen Habermas Public Sphere Theory in this research involves several key concepts [4]. Habermas conceptualizes the public sphere as a space where individuals can discuss, criticize, and develop critical opinions. Habermas argues that public policy must undergo a discursive process and public consultation. Deliberative democracy allows for active citizen participation in policy formation through dialogue and discussion. Habermas emphasizes the importance of reaching consensus through a process of rational discussion. Consensus achieved through public discourse provides a basis of legitimacy for public policy.

Based on this framework, this research aims to explore how collective anger in “Komunitas MARAH MARAH” influences the process of public opinion formation in the digital space, as well as its impact on the quality of democracy. Additionally, the research analyzes the relationship between Habermas’s public sphere theory and the phenomenon of collective anger manifested by the community. This research seeks to fill a gap in the study of digital democracy and to offer a new perspective on how collective anger can function within the public sphere.

This research employs a qualitative approach using a case study method to explore social phenomena occurring the “Komunitas MARAH MARAH” on platform X, specifically related to collective emotional patterns that influence public opinion formation and democratic processes in the digital public sphere.

The data sources used in this research consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with members who actively participate in the Angry Community. Secondary data were obtained from other sources, including articles, official documents, reports, and published official data. Data collection techniques were conducted through content analysis and in-depth interviews. Content analysis is a systematic method for evaluating and interpreting communication in various forms, such as written, visual, and audio. In this research, content analysis included analyzing comments, posts, retweets, and other interactions within the “Komunitas MARAH MARAH” on platform X related to the expression of collective emotions. In-depth interviews are a qualitative research technique used to conduct detailed individual interviews with a small number of participants [5]. Accordingly, in-depth interviews involved several members of the “Komunitas MARAH MARAH” who actively participated in emotional discourse on platform X.

The data validity checking technique employed in this study is data triangulation. Data triangulation is a technique used to verify findings obtained from various data sources to ensure the consistency and credibility of the research results. In this research, data triangulation was conducted using multiple data sources, including content analysis, in-depth interviews, and secondary data sources. The data analysis technique involves analyzing and comparing findings with existing theory to determine similar patterns from the two different data sources. Furthermore, data analysis is conducted through verification and validation meetings to confirm the consistency of the findings and compiles a report to interpret the data obtained.

3. Results

Results

Informant Data

Table 1. Respondents' Answers

No	Initial	Gender	Age (Years)	Occupation	Involvement Level	Participation Motive
1	V.A.S.	Female	20	University Student	Reader & Commenter	Empathy for a caregiver's struggles
2	M.F.	Female	21	University Student	Passive Reader (Lurker)	Finding entertainment and social care
3	S.	Female	26	Job Seeker	Active Poster	Finding resonance with shared emotions
4	M.A.	Female	24	Private Employee	Commenter & Retweeter	Seeking a safe space without judgment
5	F.A.	Female	22	Unemployed	Occasional Participant	Seeking temporary emotional release
6	I.N.	Female	20	University Student	Frequent Reader	Venting without revealing identity
7	N.A.	Male	21	University Student	Active Poster	Exploring diverse policy perspectives

Source: Primary Data, 2026.

Based on in-depth interviews, the informants were aged between 20 and 26 years. The majority were students. Meanwhile, to were either seeking employment or unemployed. Overall, their level of involvement within the community varied, some were passive readers (lucrkers), including commenters and content uploaders.

Komunitas MARAH MARAH" Description



Figure 2. "Komunitas MARAH MARAH"

"Komunitas MARAH MARAH" was established in August 2022 by @musyihab. This community is oriented toward its members' freedom to express grievances, anger, or dissatisfaction with life's challenges, including discontent with government policies. By 2025, the community's membership had reached one million. The written rules for members of the Angry Community are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Rules of "Komunitas MARAH MARAH"

No	Rules
1	Member are advised to think before posting their anger, as the post risks being widely disseminated outside the community.
2	Refrain from asking excessive questions or seeking attention.
3	Posting content related to commercial sales, NSFW (Not Safe for Work), gore, violence, or gambling is prohibited.
4	Posting expressions of anger that offend SARA is prohibited.
5	Selling sad stories for personal gain is prohibited.
6	Posting hoax news is prohibited.
7	Posting content suspected of being from buzzers is prohibited. (Buzzer will be removed from the community)
8	Sharing others' private information is prohibited, except exposing fraud perpetrators.
9	Attacking between fandoms is prohibited.
10	Posting fraud cases which the victims is also suspected having committed an error is prohibited.
11	Posting self-harm is prohibited.

Source: Secondary Data, 2026.

Content Type

Text Status Post

Many of the posts identified consisted of text that directly expressed anger or social criticism. These texts were often accompanied by hashtags or calls for discussion. For instance, post 1 written by @monhyura criticized the government regarding scholarships awards and used textual expression to convey anger related to the perceived unfairness of the scholarship system.



Figure 3. The post by @monhyura contains text that criticizes the government in an emotional manner regarding the provision of scholarships.

Posts in the Form of Images

Some posts include images or photographs that serve as socio-political satire, providing visual evidence of criticism toward government policies. Examples of such posts are shown in Figure 4.

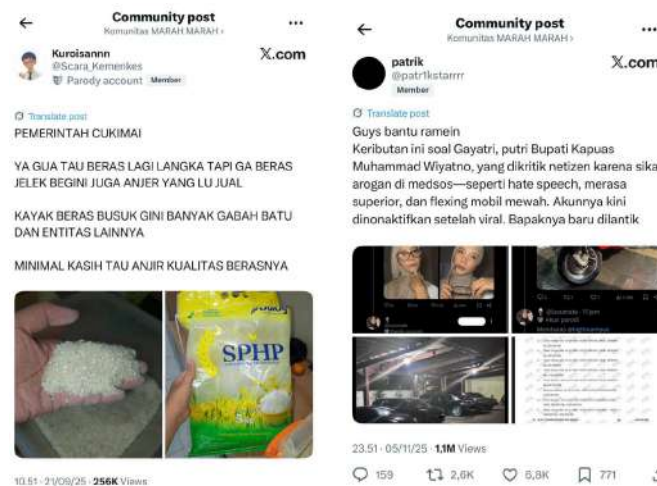


Figure 4. Image Posts Related to Criticism of the Government

Content Theme

Criticism of Government Policy

This theme was particularly dominant across several posts, as observed in those addressing government policies, including resource management and economic policies that were perceived as unfavorable to the public. Posts criticizing the government expressed dissatisfaction with policies deemed ineffective in achieving their stated objectives. Examples of such posts are presented in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Posts Criticizing of Government Policy

Socioeconomic Grievances as Drivers of Discussion

Socioeconomic grievances refer to individual frustrations with the economic and social situations that individuals face. Such grievances can stimulate broader public conversation regarding government policies and social inequality. Examples of these posts are presented in Figure 6.



Figure 6. Social Economic Complaints Posts

Personal Experiences as a Catalyst for Social Reflection

Personal experiences trigger social reflection, particularly when individuals encounter discomfort linked to broader societal issues. During fieldwork within the "Komunitas MARAH MARAH", identified two examples of posts expressing anger about personal experiences, along with the community's responses to them. These examples illustrate that such issues are not confined to a single individual but rather reflect widespread dissatisfaction with the behavior of other community members. Examples of these posts are presented in Figure 7.



Figure 7. Personal Experience Posts as Triggers for Social Reflection

4. Discussion

"Komunitas MARAH MARAH" functions as a digital space for dialogue in which members have the freedom to discuss their personal problems, including situations that trigger anger or events carrying deep emotional impact. Members can express dissatisfaction with government policies through criticism that may be conveyed in the form of angry expressions. The emotions exhibited by members of the "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" tend to be aggressive, often employing profane language that reflects profound emotional states [6]. Based on in-depth interviews with seven informants, the majority expressed interest in joining "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" because they found it to be a safe and free space to express their emotions without fear of being recognized or judged. The tweets disseminated within the community varied widely, ranging from expressions of anger toward injustice, sadness, personal frustration, to fatigue experienced in daily life. The collective emotions expressed in the "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" emerged from posts that served as initial triggers for emotionally connected interactions. Collective emotions within the "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" are manifested in the form of meme posts, discussion threads, or emotional exchanges that foster a sense of solidarity among members [3].

This finding is also supported by recent research on collective validation in digital contexts. Traversa, Tian, and Wright found that online collective responses can validate the emotions of groups experiencing harm, particularly anger and contempt, and that such validation may strengthen collective action intentions [16]. In this sense, the emotional exchanges within "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" can be understood not merely as spontaneous expressions of anger, but as a form of collective emotional validation. When members respond to one another's anger, frustration, or disappointment, they help confirm that these emotions are socially understandable and shared. Therefore, the community functions as an affective digital space where personal emotions are transformed into collective emotional experiences, creating feelings of recognition, solidarity, and shared belonging among its members.

The participation patterns of members of the "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" consist of active uploaders, who initiate expressions of grievance or criticism, commenters, who provide responses, and readers, who expand the reach of initial posts through quotes or retweets. This process generates a distinctive circulation of ideas, when a post critiques a specific policy or a common social experience, the responses from other members add to the narrative, broaden perspectives, or share similar experiences. Public opinion emerging within the "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" reflects dissatisfaction with government policies, frustration with public

services, or exhaustion stemming from perceived personal burdens that remain unaddressed. Collective emotional states can be created and managed through online communication, and that emotional expression sustains the viability of certain digital communities [16].

The involvement of community members in the interaction process is a key factor that can reinforce public opinion on a given issue. This implies that the opinions expressed are not merely subjective to a single individual but receive collective validation. For instance, an angry post criticizing a government policy perceived as unfair may be met with comments from other members who contribute similar data or personal experiences. This observation aligns with Schroeder (2023), who emphasize that an individual's emotional attitude within a digital discussion space can influence the direction or tendency of online public opinion [7].

Digital media function as arenas where public opinion is negotiated through interactive, multi-voiced, and networked communication processes [17]. In this context, public opinion is not formed simply through isolated personal expressions, but through continuous responses, evaluations, agreements, and contestations among participants. Therefore, when members of "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" respond to an angry post with similar experiences, supporting comments, or additional arguments, they participate in a process of digital public opinion negotiation. Such interaction transforms individual emotional expression into a socially reinforced opinion, where anger becomes collectively recognized, validated, and potentially influential in shaping the direction of public discourse.

The dissemination of public opinion within "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" does not cease at the community's boundaries rather mechanisms exist that extend the scale of its impact. The process of information dissemination shape's public opinion, encompassing both support for and opposition to policies [8]. This dynamic can lead to polarization of emotions and opinions regarding posts that address sensitive issues, such as government policies, family conflicts, or experiences of discrimination. Such polarization of public opinion may contribute to the marginalization of certain groups using profanity, insults, and defamation [9].

Based on this description, "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" serves as a space that affords its members freedom of expression, including voicing opinions, interacting, mobilizing emotions, and constructing collective narratives. This form of interaction generates a dynamic of collective mobilization, wherein a single post acts as a trigger, subsequent comments build upon it, and the discussion ultimately evolves into a broader pattern of interaction. This represents one manifestation of informal digital democracy. Digital democracy refers to a process by which digital technology and social media open spaces for public participation and political communication [10]. One factor that reinforces digital democracy is social validation, that is, when individuals feel heard, responded to, or accepted within a community.

One relevant study also supports this argument by showing that social media plays an important role in political mediatization because it enables political communication, public participation, and the circulation of public responses in digital spaces [19]. In the context of "Komunitas MARAH MARAH", social validation emerges when emotional expressions are not left as isolated posts, but are responded to, amplified, and negotiated by other members. Thus, the practice of digital democracy in this community is not only reflected in the freedom to speak, but also in the reciprocal process through which members recognize, affirm, and extend one another's concerns. This process allows individual emotional claims to develop into shared public narratives within the community [19].

There remain limitations in the quality of participation, plurality of voices, and deliberative processes within the digital democracy practices carried out by "Komunitas MARAH MARAH". These limitations stem from the disparity between the number of active users who express their aspirations and the number of passive community members. Although digital media opens

democratic space, constraints persist in terms of digital literacy and the spread of disinformation to manipulate public opinion [11]. Based on the research conducted, the posts fall into four main categories, such as criticism of government policy, socioeconomic grievances, personal experiences, and sociopolitical satire. The content selected for analysis employed purposive sampling to explore how emotional expression within this community contributes to the creation of democracy in the digital space.

Posts related to criticism of government policy are evident in discussions concerning government policies, including resource management and economic policies perceived as ineffective for the public. Such posts document dissatisfaction with policies deemed unable to achieve their stated objectives. Conveyed in the form of criticism, these posts strengthen the collective voice within the community, ultimately encouraging further conversation about government policies and their impact on citizens' lives. Posts related to socioeconomic grievances point to individual frustration with the economic and social situations members face. Social inequality and adverse economic conditions hinder individuals who lack access to adequate resources or support for advancement. These posts demonstrate how dissatisfaction stemming from personal issues can lead to broader criticism of government policies. Posts related to personal experiences often trigger social reflection, particularly when individuals feel discomfort linked to broader issues. Responses from other members, such as sharing similar experiences or offering suggestions for resolving problems demonstrate that the issue raised is part of a larger social problem. Posts discussing criticism of government policies, socioeconomic grievances, personal experiences, and sociopolitical satire have generated supportive comments, reflecting the collective sentiment shared by many members. These interactions illustrate how individuals exercise freedom of expression to share their feelings about injustice or social disharmony they experience. Habermas's public sphere theory offers a perspective on how public spaces should enable rational discourse free from domination by the state and market economics [12]. Habermas proposed that the ideal public sphere is an arena in which individuals can discuss rationally, thereby forming a shared public opinion capable of checking state and economic power. In the context of this research, "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" on the digital platform X has become an alternative public space where many users' express anger against government policies or other social injustices, and where rational arguments supported by empirical evidence underpin their criticism.

"Komunitas MARAH MARAH" is consistently active with tweets concerning socioeconomic issues. This demonstrates open access for all users, as well as relevant accessibility and participation within the community, thereby constituting an equitable public space. This finding aligns with Habermas's theory, which emphasizes that an ideal public sphere must be discursively inclusive and egalitarian, meaning that each participant has an equal opportunity to express their opinions regardless of their social status [13]. Posts criticizing the government, accompanied by concrete evidence, exemplify empirically grounded criticism. Comments on such issues tend to be more structured and supported by in-depth reasoning, such as ineffective budget calculations or critiques of government policies deemed inadequate. This indicates that, while much of the discussion within "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" is emotionally charged, there are also attempts at rational, evidence-based discourse. This aligns with Habermas's theory, which considers rational deliberation to be the core of the public sphere, where citizens exchange evidence-based arguments aimed at reaching a rational consensus [14]. "Komunitas MARAH MARAH" also creates a discussion space that still reflects structural domination. This is evident in the rules established by the community moderator, which restrict open discussion to some extent. This contradicts Habermas's theory, which asserts that the public sphere functions as an arena where individuals and groups participate in public discourse, organizing recreational

activities, establishing academic venues, developing social and cultural activities, initiating thought patterns in the form of opinions, ideas, discussions, and collectively building consensus without structural domination [14].

This argument is further supported by previous research showing that social media can function as a democratic space for freedom of expression, but the opinions expressed within it do not always meet the standard of rational and ethical communication [18]. In the context of “Komunitas MARAH MARAH”, this finding helps explain the ambivalent character of the community. On the one hand, the community enables inclusive participation, emotional expression, and criticism of public issues. On the other hand, the presence of emotional, profane, or moderator-controlled interactions shows that the digital public sphere does not fully reflect Habermas’s ideal of rational, egalitarian, and domination-free deliberation. Therefore, “Komunitas MARAH MARAH” can be understood as a hybrid digital public space: it allows public participation and collective criticism, yet remains shaped by emotional intensity, communicative ethics, and internal rules that influence the direction of discussion [20].

“Komunitas MARAH MARAH” plays a significant role in social control by criticizing government policies and voicing social dissatisfaction. This community not only voices dissatisfaction but also provides analysis of government policies and alternative solutions. This demonstrates that “Komunitas MARAH MARAH” fulfills one of Habermas’s public sphere roles, shaping public opinion and controlling policy. Furthermore, “Komunitas MARAH MARAH” represents a form of counter-public, where users who feel unrepresented by policies or dominant voices in society use the community as a space to express their frustrations. Discussions of larger social issues, such as social injustice, age-based employment restrictions, and perceptions of government policies demonstrate that the “Komunitas MARAH MARAH” functions as an alternative space giving voice to those who feel marginalized. This research aligns with Arditama (2016), who argue that Habermas’s theory discusses alternative public spaces which can be used to discuss anything related to the public. This suggests that such communities have the potential to serve as spaces for social critique and to foster solidarity among individuals who feel unrepresented [15].

5. Conclusion

“Komunitas MARAH MARAH” represents a digital space that reflects the dynamics of contemporary democracy, built not on formal institutions but on everyday experiences and the collective emotions of society. The emotions that emerge within this community fuel public participation, political energy, solidarity as a means of connection, and the use of comments and retweets as instruments of informal advocacy. Although not entirely aligned with Habermas’s classical concept of the public sphere, this community serves as an important alternative space in strengthening digital democracy.

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Authors' contributions and responsibilities

Ida Dwi Lestari Br Purba: conceptualization, methodology, writing – original draft, supervision. Rizki Setiawan: supervision, writing – review & editing.

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Availability of data and materials

All data are available from the authors.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interest.

Additional information

No additional information from the authors.

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