

Risks of Freedom of Speech and Democracy in Social Media: Case Study of Bima Content Creator Criticizing Lampung Government

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Abstract. Social media has become a new public space that allows users to express opinions, criticisms, and suggestions freely. This article captures the resistance of the content creator, Bima Yudho Saputro, a student from Lampung studying in Australia, in criticizing the damage to roads in Lampung Province, Indonesia, for decades. This study uses ethnography with a theoretical approach from Jurgen Habermas to photograph digital community relations in Indonesia's democratic climate on social media. The study findings show, first, the risk and vulnerability for content creators is very high to be criminalized in Indonesia. The sarcastic video with everyday Gen-Z diction sparked controversy, including the local government's formal response to the criticism. Second, public anger in defending Bima gave rise to new social movements on social media, which were able to encourage the President's sensitivity to rebuke the performance of the local government. Third, social movements born from social media are also very vulnerable when dealing with state structures that try to curb citizens' freedom of speech. This issue is of great concern to this article in reconstructing the role of civil society in strengthening democracy in Indonesia through social media.

Keywords: Social Media, Freedom of Speech, Democracy

1 Introduction

In the modern era, social media platforms and the internet have become significant communication conduits that are widely available. The term "social media" refers to a platform on the internet that allows individuals to engage with one another or share information in a fluid and continuous manner [1]. At the same time, the term "social media" can also refer to the internet platform that facilitates interactions between individuals. All online platforms, including Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, Snapchat,

and others, can be considered to be examples of social media. On the other hand, our case study is rather popular on TikTok, and because of this, we will be discussing TikTok in greater detail in this paper.

social media has developed into a new public arena that gives people the opportunity to freely express their opinions, criticisms, and suggestions. This newly emerging public forum has developed into a fresh form of communication between the government and its citizens, and it is playing an essential role in the development of the nation. On the other hand, the problem of freedom of speech on social media presents a conundrum for those who create content, especially those who advocate for various celebrities.

In the realm of human rights, freedom of speech is one of the rights that is acknowledged and safeguarded. It is possible to regulate, ensure, and safeguard the right to freedom of opinion and expression through the use of various tools and documents that are available on a national, regional, and international level. There are limitations to the right to freedom of speech and expression, one of which is the law on defamation [2]. However, the right to freedom of speech and expression is not an absolute right like other privileges. According to Ongku (2021), the freedom of speech in Indonesia is governed by a number of articles, including Article 28 of the Constitution of 1945, Law Number 9 of 1998, Law Number 39 of 1999, and other articles relating to this subject.

Bima Yudho Saputro, for the example, is one of the content creators that gained widespread social media attention for her criticism of the performance of the administration. By means of his TikTok account, Bima voiced his disapproval of a number of issues that remain unaddressed in Lampung Province. Lampung's progress has been stalled due to the challenges that have forced Bima to criticize the slow pace of development and the problems that occur. It is also demonstrated by the fact that the roads in Lampung are in a state of severe degradation and require restoration [3]. Soon after his video went viral, he was reported to the Lampung Regional Police on charges of breaking the ITE Law. Both of these charges were brought against him. In April of 2023, the case started to spread quickly. On reflection, the Bima reporting case demonstrates that there is a reduction in the amount of space available for freedom of speech in the realm of the internet. Even though social media is often referred to as a new public space, it should in fact serve as an alternative for members of the public who have either not had the opportunity to express their opinion through state institutions or do not have access to such formal organizations.

2 Method

In this study, a qualitative research methodology is utilized, more specifically, a netnographic approach is utilized. Netnography is a research approach that is used to investigate online communities and cultures. It involves the analysis of data acquired from online sources such as forums, social media, and blogs in order to get insights into the behaviors, attitudes, and interactions of individuals found within those communities [4]. Through the utilization of the netnographic approach, researchers have the ability to employ ethnography in conjunction with a theoretical framework devised by Jurgen Habermas in order to record and study the dynamics of digital community interactions that occur within the democratic setting of Indonesia on social media platforms.

There are numerous unique steps that make up the netnographic approach that was utilized in this study. These stages include research design, content discovery and observation, data collecting, data categorization or coding, and interpretation of findings. Researchers are able to record and evaluate the dynamics of digital community interactions in Indonesia's democratic environment on social media platforms through the use of this approach. As a result, they are able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a certain phenomenon or research subject. In practice, we make an effort to track down conversations connected to the discourse that we are investigating, and then we transform those conversations into discussions of specific theme concerns in order to provide solutions to problem formulations on social media concerning the Bima issue and the controversy that surrounds it.

There are four primary stages that involve the application of netnography in the process of conducting a market study. In order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a specific phenomenon or research issue, the first stage entails selecting online communities that will be the subject of the analysis. This is followed by the collecting of data, the analysis of the data, and the interpretation of the findings. Netnography is an important part of modern research because it enables researchers to investigate, comprehend, and analyze data of online conversations and cultures. It also provides researchers with one-of-a-kind insights into human behavior, social interactions, and emerging trends, which makes it a valuable tool for researchers in a wide range of fields.

Theorizing Democracy

"Demos," which means "people," and "Kratos," which means "power," are the Greek terms that are the origin of the concept of democracy. The term "power of the people" can be used to describe democracy, which is a form of government that is based on the desire of the people [5]. Abraham Lincoln, a former U.S. president, defined democracy as a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." In theory, democracy operates on behalf of all people and reflects their will. Key features include citizen participation in decision-making and the protection of individual rights and freedoms. According to Rangkuti (2023), democracy is characterized by the preservation and respect of the rights of minority groups, which includes the rights of ethnic, religious, and cultural groups [8]. Etuk and Daramola (2020) say that, democracy ensures that all citizens have the right to freedom of speech and expression, even in this day and age of social media [2].

Indonesia is one of many democratic nations, the spirit of democracy continues to grow among its citizens. Since gaining independence, Indonesia's democratic system has evolved, currently embracing a reformed democracy. The 1997 Asian financial crisis contributed to the end of Soeharto's authoritarian era. During the latter half of the 20th century, it was ultimately responsible for the democratization of Indonesia, and since the end of the New Order Era, the process of reforming democracy has been underway [6], [7]. In the democratic system, the vote of the majority is only regarded as a basic prerequisite for democracy, which still requires widespread participation and agreement, human rights, civil society, and the idea of good government in order to struggle in the most effective manner. It has been said by Budiarjo (2012) that the democratic purpose of Indonesia is founded on the populist conference to create an agreement inside a family [7].

To build a nation with democratic values and respect for human rights, communication and the voice of the people are essential. This allows citizens to express opinions on government activities, checking governmental excesses, preventing power abuse, and curbing corruption. Public control and power-sharing, achieved through communication, are crucial for maintaining balance. According to Buhlmann et al. (2008), control is bidirectional: the government oversees the people, and the people monitor the government.

Freedom of Speech

According to Etuk and Daramola (2020), freedom of speech is closely linked to freedom of expression, whether verbal or written. Besides verbal and written communication, people express ideas, opinions, and feelings through posters, drawings, postures, tales, parodies, and satire. These diverse methods allow for a wide range of personal expression and criticism. Lovell (1937), argues that freedom of speech and expression refers to the right of an individual to believe in something, the freedom to have ideas and beliefs, and the freedom to freely express them and communicate them in a variety of ways, including verbally, by writing, printing, signs, and gestures, among other ways [2]. A great number of debates concerning the right to freedom of speech are connected to other rights or ideals that may be more fundamental in political principles, constitutions, or possibly both [9].

In this section, we will discuss four fundamental concepts of freedom of expression, with reference to Eric Barendt's book released in 2007 titled "Freedom of Speech." Despite the fact that freedom of opinion is crucial for human dignity and self-fulfillment, everyone should be free from government regulation based on certain speech ideals. This right should be guaranteed to everyone. (1) truth-seeking, open discussion is essential for uncovering truth, which is believed to be independent and reasonably based. (2) self-fulfillment, freedom of speech is vital for personal development to express themselves and this supports societal development. (3) democratic participation, all citizens, including minorities, should participate in public discourse and speech should not be limited as speech serves democracy. (4) government skepticism, free speech enables truth discovery, essential for democracy. There is a reason to distrust government regulation of speech, highlighting its negative rather than positive aspects. However, in certain situations, restrictions should only apply when there is a high probability of imminent violence.

3 Findings and Discussion

The study highlights critical factors in the landscape of content creation in Indonesia, particularly the alarming vulnerability of content creators to criminalization. One key issue is the controversy surrounding specific content. For example, a film using language typical of Generation Z sparked public outcry and formal responses from local government, further complicating matters for content creators. The controversy surrounding the picture highlights broader issues of artistic freedom and free speech in Indonesia. The clash between modern language and traditional values has heightened tensions, exposing content creators to legal and social penalties. This study underscores the precarious situation content creators face, navigating a landscape fraught with potential dangers and legal pitfalls.

The research identifies a significant phenomenon where public outrage consolidates into

social movements to protect content creators and advocate for their rights. In Bima, online community support led to concrete actions and the formation of new social movements across various social media platforms. These movements pressured the President to address local government performance, providing a forum for complaints and compelling government action. This convergence of social media activism and government response highlights the evolving dynamics of public discourse and political engagement in the digital era. Social media platforms enable individuals to transcend geographical barriers and mobilize collective action, becoming powerful tools for advocacy. However, the study also underscores the vulnerability of such movements when confronted by state efforts to suppress dissent and restrict free speech.

This research highlights the precarious nature of social movements originating from social media, particularly when facing government repression. The ongoing struggle for civil liberties and democratic rights in Indonesia's changing sociopolitical landscape is underscored by the conflict between online activism and state measures. The study emphasizes the importance of protecting digital rights and ensuring content creators are shielded from arbitrary restrictions and prosecution. This study also underscores the complexities of managing the intersection of digital media, freedom of expression, and state power by examining the link between contentious content, social movements, and governmental responses. Moving forward, it is crucial to advocate for digital rights protection and foster an environment that supports the exchange of new ideas and promotes free speech.

Our findings align with other studies, such as Praptiningsih and Kurnia's (2020) research on the dangers of hoaxes in the public sphere, which contributes to declining digital literacy [10], and Handayani's (2021) critique of the implications of massive reporting through communication channels [11]. They also resonate with Endro's (2022) emphasis on the importance of ethics in communication, particularly within educational contexts [12]. In summary, this research provides valuable insights into the challenges facing content creators in Indonesia, particularly regarding the risk of prosecution and the dynamics of social activism in the digital realm.

3.1 Analyzing Risks of Freedom of Speech and Expression in Social Media

This investigation started on April 7th, 2023. Bima published a video on TikTok under the handle @awbimaxreborn. The title of the video was "Reasons Why Lampung Does not Progress" [13]. Four items were criticized by Bima in the film that lasted for three minutes and twenty-eight seconds: inadequate infrastructure and roads that were extremely seriously damaged. Roads, which are among the most important infrastructures, are useful for mobilization and are also important.

"I often discuss roads because roads are like the most common infrastructure and for economic mobilization in Lampung. But the roads in Lampung are like 1 kilometer good, 1 kilometer damaged, then the roads are just patched," said Bima in his video.

Not only did Bima attack the state of the roads in Lampung, which were destroyed, but he also blasted the numerous government projects in Lampung that had been neglected, such as

the Kota Baru project. The next point that became a criticism of Bima's feelings about education was that, according to him, there was a lot of fraud, such as the leak of the answers to the questions on the National Examination (UN) before the exam started. In addition to that, there were many instances of corruption practices carried out by educators while they were applying for school for their children. In addition, Bima was plagued by a bureaucracy that was neither effective nor efficient, corruption and bribery, and laws that needed to be enforced in a fair manner. It was the final point that he brought up in his video, and it was concerning the province of Lampung, which is extremely reliant on the agricultural industry, despite the fact that, according to him, the agricultural sector is fragile.

The video that was uploaded by Bima soon gathered traction on TikTok, capturing the attention of users all around the platform and causing a rush of reactions to be posted. A significant majority of the responses expressed unshakable support for Bima and praised his resiliency in the face of adversity. This was among the diversity of answers that were received. The potential of social media as a tool for organizing community support and amplifying individual voices was brought into sharper focus by the outpouring of solidarity that occurred. LBH Lampung, a local group that provides legal help, emerged as an important ally in Bima's pursuit of justice that occurred in the middle of this wave of support. As a gesture of solidarity, LBH Lampung made the offer to provide legal aid to Bima. They are prepared to guide him through the complexities of the legal system on his behalf. The significance of community cooperation in protecting individuals from unjust persecution was brought to light by this gesture, which not only strengthened Bima's determination but also highlighted the significance of the action.

Amid widespread support, attorney Gindha Ansori Wayka's unexpected intervention introduced discord. Several days after Bima's video went viral, Gindha filed a report expressing concern over the use of the term "dajjal" in Bima's content, fearing public misunderstanding. This added complexity to the narrative surrounding Bima's actions, contrasting with the majority's support for his efforts. Gindha's report under the ITE Law, a controversial regulation governing online content, underscores the complex balance between freedom of expression and legal constraints in the digital realm. Critics argue that the ITE Law, often criticized for its broad and ambiguous provisions, can be misused to suppress dissent and limit online expression.

Bima's strategic maneuvering within the legal landscape, particularly his reference to the ITE Law in his reporting, demonstrates his proactive stance in asserting his rights as a content creator and addressing perceived injustices through legal channels. This approach underscores his efforts to protect his interests and seek redress for grievances using legal means. The ongoing controversy surrounding Bima's film highlights broader societal issues in Indonesia regarding the boundaries of free speech, the impact of social media activism, and the accountability of legal institutions. The complex interplay of interests and ideologies shaping current discourse is evident in the conflicting viewpoints—from staunch support to legal criticisms.

In sparking widespread discussion, Bima's viral TikTok video has become a focal point for debates on social activism, legal accountability, and freedom of expression. His story encapsulates larger societal tensions surrounding the balance between these freedoms and legal constraints in the digital age. As Bima navigates legal challenges and public scrutiny,

the outcome of his case will not only influence his individual rights as a content creator but also set precedents for digital rights and civil liberties in Indonesia.

Gindha described the reason for reporting Bima. According to Gindah, the content that was developed by Bima is not based on particular data, and as a result, the content is deemed to mislead public opinion without any substantial proof to support it. Following the video's widespread dissemination, Bima disclosed that members of his family had been subjected to threats and harassment at the hands of law enforcement officials and personnel. yet, the arrival of the police was warranted; yet, the fact that the police arrived was solely for the purpose of verifying the well-being of Bima's family after the film achieved widespread dissemination. The family of Bima asserted that they had been subjected to verbal abuse at the hands of the governor of Lampung, who was unable to instruct them to enroll their children in school. On the other hand, the governor of Lampung took issue with this assertion and stated that it was not accurate. There is no indication that the governor of Lampung used a curse, and there was no evidence. In spite of this, the investigation that the police carried out resulted in the termination of the report that had been filed against Bima. On the basis of the criticism that was presented in his video, it was not demonstrated that Bima had committed a crime.

The data for this study will be obtained through the use of commentary supplied by members of the general public. The content that is available to the general public on the TikTok account @awbimaxreborn0 is not the content that was originally uploaded by Bima under that account. Bima shows his dislike of a number of elements surrounding the status of Lampung in his film. These characteristics include a lack of progress in areas such as education, road conditions, and government initiatives, amongst other areas. Bima is not pleased with these features. On the 25th of April, 2023, this video was submitted to the social media network that is known as Tiktok. The following is a screenshot that was taken from the video that Bima created, which is the source of the information in this post



Fig. 1. Screenshot of the Bima's account and its viral video content.
(Source: tiktok account content @awbimaxreborn0)
(<https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSLbMY6Ky/>)

An examination of the public feedback that was provided on the Bima movie that went viral is carried out with the help of the image that is displayed in Figure 1. In order to facilitate the research being conducted, these are presented as several types of findings. Following the widespread dissemination of his video across various social media platforms, the case of Bima was taken into consideration for a variety of conclusions. In the context of public participation, social media can be regarded as a platform that makes it easier for individuals to engage with one another. The comments that were made by members of the general public and internet users in the Tiktok video that went viral are the reason for this. Before the discovery of this result, a number of public remarks that are quite concerning or prevalent on Tiktok were submitted to theme classification. These remarks were the topic of the classification. The findings from these comments led to the emergence of four distinct categories of remarks, each of which was distinct from the others. Aspirations, admiration, encouragement, mockery, apathy, and sympathy were some of the emotions that were expressed in these comments. There is a selection of these remarks included in the table that is presented below, which states as follows:

Table 1. Comments classification. This table shows public comments on Bima's video.

Sentiment Tone	Netizen Comments
Aspiration	<i>bisa bantu kak Bima gk diterima jalur afirmasi alasannya zonasi padahal kami sangat memerlukan</i> (Bima, can you help us not to be accepted through the affirmative channel, the reason for zoning the school is because we really need it (in the context of education considering that Bima is considered to have the ability to voice public issues))
Compliment	<i>keren berani speak up</i> (cool, dare to speak up) <i>statement yang bagus dan punya impact yg besar, gini comtoh penggunaan media yang baik untuk menyampaikan keresahan</i> (a good statement and has a big impact, this is an example of good use of media to convey public problems)
Support	<i>smangat trus bang buat kmajuan indonesia</i> (support for you for the progress of Indonesia) <i>setuju banget kak, semangat kak, q jg orang lampung</i> (totally agree, I support you, I am also a Lampung person)
Satire	<i>dr dulu Lampung bgitu mknya saya org lmpung da minggat dr Lampung sejak taon 1998</i> (from the past, road problems, I was in Lampung, so I chose to leave it since 1998) <i>kayaknya itu bukan hanya di lampung deh, di setiap provinsi</i> (it looks like it's not only in Lampung, but throughout the province)
Apathy	<i>mulut perempuan, mukanya tengil</i> (female mouth, annoying face)

Sympathy	<i>Indonesia butuh banyak orang yg berani seperti ini... semoga selalu dilindungi... seluruh keluargamu AAMIN</i> (Indonesia needs a lot of brave people like this, hopefully it will always be protected, your whole family. Amen)
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Within the framework of six different types of public input, it is possible to successfully capture the variations that were contained within the comments that were being supplied earlier. Having said that, it is of the utmost importance to keep in mind that the categories that have been listed above are simply a surface level reflection of the vast array of comments that have been made up to this point. The professionals who are in charge of conducting this study are of the opinion that each comment is a valuable data point that may be meticulously studied and compared with hypotheses that are already in existence within the subject matter that they are investigating.

It becomes abundantly clear that the remarks that were prompted by the revelation that the owner of the Bima Tiktok account made about Lampung's status are more than just the opinions of a few individuals; rather, they constitute a collective response from the general population. This realization comes about as one delves further into the discussion. As a result of the fact that it is complicated, this response incorporates a wide variety of emotions, points of view, and underlying reasons. Every comment, whether it be a declaration of support and solidarity, skepticism, or criticism, adds a thread to the tapestry of public opinion, revealing insights into the complexities of social ideas and attitudes. This is true regardless of whether the comment is a compliment or a critique.

This discussion is being driven by the dynamic interaction that takes place between the person who is responsible for disseminating knowledge and the individuals who are the recipients of that knowledge. The individual who is the owner of the Bima Tiktok account serves as a catalyst for debate, sparking discourse and encouraging participation from the users of the platform. People have been prompted to express their opinions, share their experiences, and participate in conversation with one another as a result of their disclosure regarding Lampung's status, which has generated a ripple effect. Also, individuals have been prompted to share their experiences with one another.

Furthermore, beyond the superficial inspection of individual remarks, there is a rich vein of socio-cultural, psychological, and linguistic dynamics that are just waiting to be examined. This is something that needs to be done. Each and every comment has the potential to be viewed as a window into the mind of the person who wrote it, revealing their worldview, their prejudices, and the experiences they have had throughout their life. Scholars have the opportunity to get a more thorough understanding of the underlying dynamics that are driving public discourse in the digital era if they pay great attention to the nuances that are being discussed here.

Furthermore, the act of commenting itself can be regarded as a sort of performative expression and should be considered as such. The reason for this is that it gives people the opportunity to define their identity, express their thoughts, and negotiate their social standing within the community that exists online. Within the framework of this conversation, the comments that were left in response to the statement that was made by the proprietor of the

Bima Tiktok account on Lampung's viewpoint represent a form of digital performance art. Every individual who takes part in the activity contributes to the formation of the story and the production of meaning within the virtual world.

Additionally, it is vital to take into consideration the more far-reaching repercussions of this occurrence in connection to the framework of modern society. The dynamics of public discourse are constantly shifting from one moment to the next throughout this age, which is characterized by rapid technological innovation and communication on a scale that has never been seen before. The dissemination of information has become more accessible to the general public as a result of the rise of social media platforms such as Tiktok. individuals who come from a wide variety of backgrounds are now able to participate in conversations that are taking place all over the world and to influence public opinion in ways that were before entirely inconceivable. This has made it feasible for individuals to have meaningful talks in social media.

In conclusion, the comments that were generated in reaction to the announcement regarding Lampung's status that was made by the owner of the Bima Tiktok account suggest that the ideas that were expressed were not simply a random selection of people's thoughts. Academics are able to get critical insights into the intricate network of public discourse and the dynamics that lay behind it by deconstructing these remarks and studying them through a variety of theoretical lenses. This method allows them to acquire these insights.

4 Conclusion

Everyone is able to use social media since it has evolved into a new public place that serves as a forum for discussion that is easily accessible. This social media platform needs to be linked to the activities that individuals engage in on a regular basis, particularly the online community. A type of active engagement by the community in the growth of the nation can be accomplished through the use of social media as a means of communication. The public can also utilize social media as a channel for transmitting criticism, recommendations, and comments during this process. In this day and age of digital technology, it is also a new arena for individuals to express themselves. Using social media as an alternative means of expressing criticism of the performance of the government can make it simpler to be heard and attract the attention of the targeted party. This is similar to the message that President Joko Widodo conveyed, which stated that the public should actively submit complaints and ideas to the government. The predicament that arises with relation to the right to freedom of speech is that freedom is contingent on who will be criticized. Due to the protection of the right to freedom of speech, this resulted in a controversy in society. When we criticize the government on social media, we are confronted with the conundrum of the ITE Law in the context of the Indonesian state. We must come to terms with the fact that the right to privacy is not an absolute right, as demonstrated by the Bima case study, which questioned the performance of the Lampung regional government. Following the viral success of his video on TikTok, in which he voiced his disapproval of the Lampung provincial government, his family was reportedly subjected to intimidation, as reported to the police.

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