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Hermeneutics of social media debates on identity politics from the perspective of communicative action

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Abstract

Facebook is one of the three most widely used platforms for political communication in Indonesia. While this signifies the advent of a new era in which communication technology plays a pivotal role in democratic competition and garnering political support, it also introduces significant challenges. The widespread use of social media has led to political discourse becoming increasingly distorted, primarily due to the prevalence of hoaxes and hate speech. This research aims to uncover how debates on Facebook, particularly those surrounding ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA), are often marred by these distortions. Employing a critical hermeneutic approach, the study delves into the context, reconstruction, and analysis of the debate texts to identify the author's process of self-emancipation and the various validity claims embedded within. Through the lens of communicative action theory, the research reveals that political debates on social media often hinder the establishment of an intersubjective consensus between writers and readers. Texts dominated by hate speech—specifically those rooted in religious and ethnic tensions—fail to foster mutual understanding. These debates are shaped by language that reinforces psycho-religious collective solidarity, leaving little room for the kind of intersubjective dialogue necessary for shared understanding between participants.

Keywords: Communication Distortion; Hate Speech; Communicative Action; Collective Solidarity; Psycho-religious

Introduction

The rise of social media as a crucial tool in Indonesian political communication can be traced back to the post-1998 political reform. Behnke (2017) asserts that the evolutionary development of social media in Indonesia coincided with the post-Soeharto political transition. During the reform era, nearly all politicians adopted Facebook as a means to expand their communication networks. Facebook emerged as an alternative model for political outreach and publication. Johansson (2016) highlighted, Indonesian social media users exhibit a strong preference for three major international platforms: Facebook (Meta), Twitter, and WhatsApp, particularly when engaging in political discourse. This increasing reliance on social media underscores politicians' recognition of its necessity in contemporary politics. Notably, the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election marked the first instance of large-scale political communication via Facebook.

Johansson (2016) further identifies 2012 as a turning point for social media's role in Indonesian politics, beginning with the Jakarta gubernatorial election and extending into the 2014 legislative and presidential elections. Nyarwi and Ioan-Lucian Popa (Pătruț, 2014) argue that Joko Widodo-Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Jokowi-BTP) secured victory in the second electoral round due to their strategic use of candidate-based political marketing on Facebook. The 2012 gubernatorial election, which garnered global attention, became a milestone in the political application of social media (Pătruț, 2014).

This shift raises critical questions. On one hand, it signifies a new era in which communication technology plays a central role in mobilizing political support. On the other hand, it presents concerns regarding the ethical implications of contemporary digital communication in fostering societal cohesion. Since the 2012 gubernatorial and 2014 presidential elections, political discourse on Facebook has largely followed two predominant patterns: the proliferation of hate speech and misinformation. Research conducted by the Indonesian Anti-Defamation Society (Mafindo) mapped the prevalence of hoaxes in 2019, reporting a total of 1,221 cases, an increase of

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224 cases from 2018. This translates to an average of 101 hoaxes per month in 2019, up from 83 in 2018. More strikingly, daily occurrences of hoaxes rose from 2-3 cases per day in 2018 to 3-4 per day in 2019 (Mafindo, 2020). Political issues accounted for 52% (644 cases) of the hoaxes, followed by religious (8.4%), health (7%), crime (5.8%), and disaster-related hoaxes (2%). Notably, despite being categorized separately, religious hoaxes are often intertwined with political narratives, demonstrating their instrumentalization for political purposes (Kominfo, 2020). Facebook, alongside WhatsApp, remains the primary platform for the dissemination of political hoaxes and hate speech (Mafindo, 2020), contributing to societal polarization (Fensi, 2023).

This study seeks to deconstruct the linguistic distortion of hate speech on Facebook, which obstructs efforts to establish unity as an ideological foundation for societal cohesion. Hate speech on Facebook has direct consequences on polarization, making this research particularly significant. Political discourse and social media are now inextricably linked. While politics relies on digital language for dissemination, social media has become an essential conduit for political messaging. Numerous studies highlight the profound influence of social media language on political movements. Amaro La Rosa (2014) documents global instances where social media catalyzed political movements, including the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, where protesters leveraged digital tools for mobilization, and the Facebook-based activism of Oscar Morales, which sought to pacify demonstrations against guerrilla kidnappings in Colombia. Social media platforms also played pivotal roles in the 2009 Moldovan election protests, the 2010 Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia, and the broader Arab Spring uprisings. Kehinde et al. (2014) note that the 2011 Nigerian elections were unique in that politicians extensively utilized Facebook for political advertising. Similarly, Loureiro (2017) describes Facebook-driven political communication as an embodiment of digital democracy, citing Portugal's legislative elections, where 79.85% of voters were influenced by Facebook in their candidate selection.

This study adopts Jürgen Habermas's communicative action theory to critically examine the implications of social media-driven political discourse. Habermas posits that reason serves not only instrumental purposes in work but also fosters intersubjective relationships through communicative action. Humans, he argues, function as both homo laborans, engaging in practical tasks, and homo communicatus, striving for mutual understanding through dialogue (Fensi, 2023). Instrumental action focuses on technical objectives, while communicative action seeks consensus and shared meaning. Habermas emphasizes that rational communication facilitates social coordination through collective understanding rather than individual self-interest (Habermas, 1984). Language functions as both a medium for comprehension and a tool for coordinating social interaction (Habermas, 1984).

In communicative action, social interactions are guided not by egocentric motives but by a shared commitment to mutual understanding. Participants prioritize collective success over personal gain, negotiating shared definitions of situations to foster consensus. According to Hardiman (2009), an ideal communicative society aspires to universal consensus and freedom from domination, foundational principles in human social relationships. Consensus emerges in intelligent societies that facilitate meaningful communication, wherein each participant strives to validate their claims through rational discourse.

Habermas outlines four fundamental validity claims in communicative action: (i) agreement on the objective world, signifying truth claims; (ii) agreement on social norms, representing claims of accuracy; (iii) agreement on the alignment between inner beliefs and outward expressions, constituting authenticity claims; and (iv) comprehensibility, achieved through transparent communication (Hardiman, 2009). A communicative society resolves conflicts not through coercion but through rational argumentation.

Critical discourse arises when communication breakdowns occur. In this context, critique functions as a means of questioning prevailing social norms and their alignment with human values. Bolton (2014) describes communicative action as a form of social engagement where actors seek consensus and cooperation through rational argumentation, eschewing personal ambition. This framework necessitates an inclusive and participatory exchange of information, ensuring deliberation through public dialogue, hearings, and information-sharing platforms. Effective

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communication demands mutual respect, which serves as the social capital necessary for fostering inclusivity and participant empowerment (Bolton, 2014).

Method

This research employs the critical hermeneutics method. The study follows a systematic process beginning with text observation, data collection, and selecting a text as the research object. During the observation phase, the researcher examines patterns of netizen discourse on Facebook. In the data collection phase, texts containing hoaxes and hate speech are categorized. Finally, a specific text is selected for analysis. The chosen text is examined using the following critical hermeneutic steps: (1) identifying and contextualizing the text; (2) reconstructing the text; (3) analyzing its structure and meaning; (4) uncovering the author's self-emancipation; (5) evaluating the validity claims within the text; and (6) linking the hermeneutic process to the principles of communicative action.

Hermeneutics, as a method for textual analysis, falls under the broader category of interpretation theory (Fensi, 2016). It encompasses both written and spoken language. This study specifically applies Jürgen Habermas's model of critical hermeneutics, which goes beyond understanding externally produced texts to include the self-interpretation of one's own texts as a form of self-reflection. According to Habermas, self-reflection is not merely an act of understanding one's own perspective but an emancipatory process that liberates texts from ideological distortions imposed by external power structures (Busacchi, 2016).

Habermas identifies two key techniques in critical hermeneutics. First, text reconstruction through an interpretive approach, which involves deciphering both private and public linguistic expressions and reinterpreting them to reveal psychological and social influences that may have shaped their meaning. Second, textual analysis is conducted to diagnose the underlying causes of distortion within a text. Habermas likens this analytical process to the work of an archaeologist who meticulously reconstructs fragmented ancient structures (Hardiman, 2015).

According to Habermas, textual meaning must be interpreted within the everyday sociocultural contexts of its users rather than being bound by rigid linguistic conventions. His critical hermeneutic approach seeks to bridge the gap between historical objectivity and the underlying motives of social actors. The ultimate goal is to create a space for emancipatory freedom by exposing suppressed motivations that have been concealed by historical narratives. Habermas asserts that a robust hermeneutic framework must account for both labor systems and structures of domination, positioning language as an objective context through which social actions are understood. When tradition is reduced to socio-economic functions, hermeneutics must serve as a critique of ideological control (Bleicher, 1980).

Habermas's critical hermeneutic perspective acknowledges that every discourse operates within a framework of mutually intelligible principles, including discursive rationality and communicative distortions. Miscommunication arises when these principles are compromised. From an ordinary language perspective, hermeneutic theory aims to uncover the fundamental rules governing clear and rational discourse (Bleicher, 1980). Habermas further argues that language can function as an instrument of social control, legitimizing power structures within society. When language is used to reinforce hierarchical power relations, it ceases to be a neutral medium of communication and becomes ideological (Thompson, 1995).

Results and Discussion

Text and Contextual Analysis

The Facebook debate on hate speech related to ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup conflicts (SARA) examined in this study originates from a single source: a reaction to provocative comments posted by an account named "Indonesia Jaman Dulu." This initial provocation led to an extensive online debate, which subsequently escalated into expressions of SARA-based hostility. Below is an excerpt from the debate among Facebook netizens:

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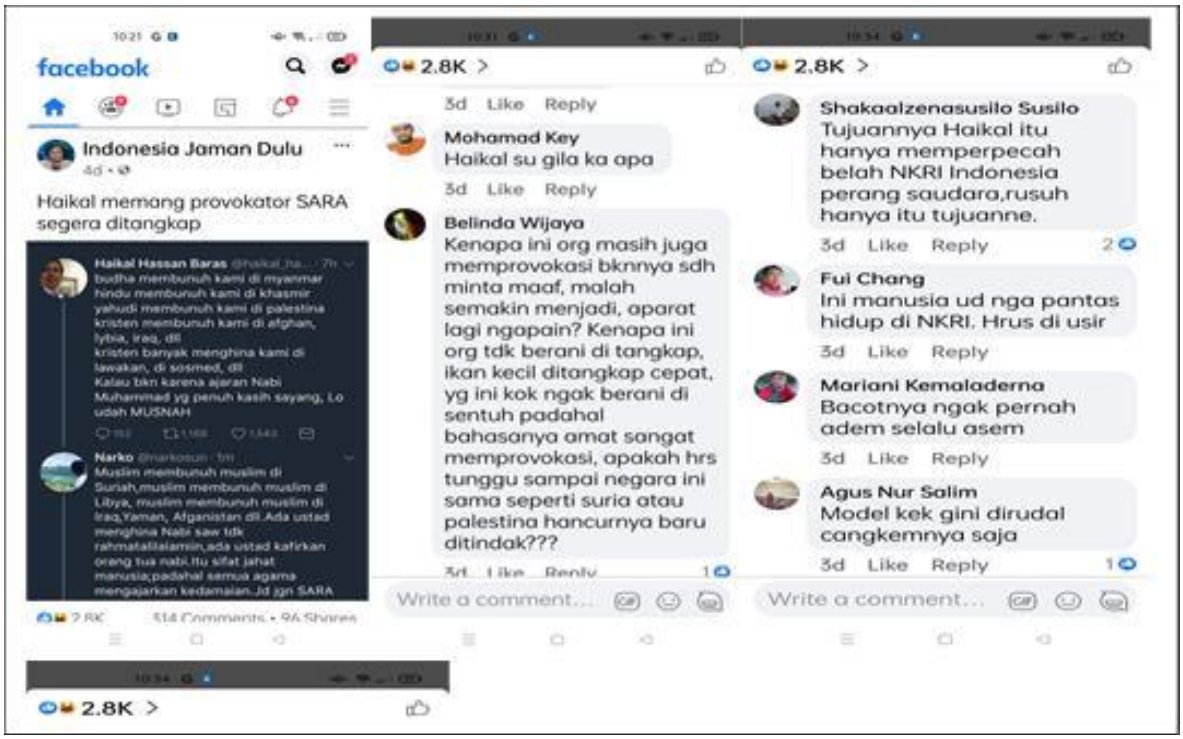

Figure 1. Facebook Netizen Debates
Source: Facebook (June 2021)

The debate is transcribed as follows:

Table 1. Netizen Debates

Account Name	Netizen Name	Conversation Content
Indonesia Jaman Dulu	Indonesia Jaman Dulu	"Haikal Hasan, indeed a SARA provocateur, was immediately arrested."
Haikal Hassan Baras	Haikal Hassan Baras	"Buddhists killed us in Myanmar. Hindus are killing us in Kashmir. Jews killed us in Palestine. Christians killed us in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, etc. Christians insult us in jokes, on social media, etc. If it weren't for the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who was full of love, you would have perished."
Narko	Narko	"Muslims kill Muslims in Syria, Muslims kill Muslims in Libya, Muslims kill Muslims in Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, etc. There is an ustad who insults the Prophet SAW as not Rahmatalamin; there is an ustad who disbelieves the Prophet's parents as being evil in humans, even though all religions teach peace. So don't be SARA."
Mohamad Key	Mohamad Key	"Haikal, what are you crazy about?"
Belinda Wijaya	Belinda Wijaya	"Why are people still provoking instead of apologizing? It's getting worse—what are the authorities doing? Why don't these people dare to be arrested? Small fish are caught quickly, but why don't you dare touch this one even though his language is very, very provocative? Are you waiting until this country is the same as Syria or Palestine and destroyed before taking action???"
Shakaalzenasusilo Susilo	Shakaalzenasusilo Susilo	"Haikal's goal is only to divide the Republic of Indonesia, spark a civil war, and cause chaos. That's his only objective."
Fui Chang	Fui Chang	"This person no longer deserves to live in the Republic of Indonesia. Must be expelled."
Mariani Kemaladema	Mariani Kemaladema	"His speech is never composed; it's always inciting."
Agus Nur Salim	Agus Nur Salim	"A person like this only has a missile in his mouth."

Source: Researcher (2024)

From the transcription, it is evident that the debate's core context was not a direct statement by Haikal Hassan Baras but rather the provocative comment made by "Indonesia Jaman Dulu": *"Haikal Hasan is indeed a SARA provocateur, immediately arrested."* The racist remarks attributed

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to Haikal were initially posted on Twitter but later disseminated on Facebook, creating the impression that they were made on Facebook itself. This act of resharing provoked further heated debates among users, demonstrating how misinformation and the manipulation of digital platforms can fuel social polarization.

Text Reconstruction

The entire hermeneutic process—ranging from text reconstruction and analysis to identifying the author's self-emancipation and validating textual claims—is examined through the lens of Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action.

1. Identity Reconstruction

In the first stage of reconstruction, the identities of the authors were analyzed. Eight individuals openly disclosed their identities: (i) Haikal Hassan Baras, (ii) Narko, (iii) Mohammad Key, (iv) Belinda Wijaya, (v) Shakaalzenasusilo Susilo, (vi) Fui Chang, (vii) Mariani Kemaladerna, and (viii) Agus Nur Salim. However, one account, "Indonesia Jaman Dulu," remained anonymous. The use of anonymity suggests an intentional evasion of responsibility for textual distortion, as the anonymous author merely functions as a conduit for transferring content from Twitter to Facebook without accountability.

2. Language Reconstruction

The second reconstruction focuses on linguistic patterns, revealing a dominance of private over public language. Private language refers to expressions with meanings confined to specific individuals, groups, or contexts (Kuntarto, 2007: 100). These expressions are inaccessible to outsiders due to their reliance on shared group experiences (Bussman, 2006: 945). Conversely, public language is universally comprehensible in both grammatical structure and stylistic use (Department of National Education, 2008: 117).

The study identified fourteen instances of private language, including phrases such as (i) "immediately arrested," (ii) "Buddha killed us," (iii) "Hindus are killing us," (iv) "Jews killed us," (v) "Christians are killing us," (vi) "Christians insult us," (vii) "you have perished," and (viii) "Haikal is crazy." In contrast, only six instances of public language were noted, including (i) "SARA provocateurs," (ii) "The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad who were full of compassion," and (iii) "Long live the Republic of Indonesia."

3. Symbolism in Text

The third stage of reconstruction analyzes the use of symbols. Symbols serve as markers that convey meaning, reinforce narratives, or obscure the intended message (Sobur, 2013: 155). The presence of symbolic imagery, particularly in anonymous accounts, suggests an attempt to shift responsibility from the individual to a collective group. However, this strategy ultimately fails, as the author paradoxically reveals group identity through symbolic representations, inadvertently accepting accountability. This paradox highlights an unconscious contradiction in the author's intent.

4. Text Repetition

The fourth reconstruction focuses on textual repetition, which occurs across three dimensions:

1. **Repetition in Subject Position**: The phrase "Muslims kill Muslims" is repeated three times in different contexts (Syria, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan). This repetition undermines the romanticized notion of "us" as a unified private language and counters the opposing narrative: "Buddha killed us in Myanmar. Hindus killed us in Kashmir. Jews killed us in Palestine. Christians killed us in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, etc."
2. **Repetition in Object Position**: The object "us" is emphasized four times in statements such as "Buddha killed us in Myanmar," reinforcing collective solidarity. This strategic use of repetition seeks to evoke a sense of victimhood, fostering group cohesion. Conversely, the opposing narrative employs "Muslims" as an object three times, emphasizing internal contradictions within the supposed solidarity.

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3. **Repetition of Locus Factum**: The study identifies repeated references to specific locations—Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq—suggesting an attempt to validate claims through the emphasis of geographical consistency. By reiterating these locations, the author inadvertently affirms the occurrence of violence, highlighting the universal condemnation of murder as a barbaric act that disrupts both "us" (as collective solidarity) and "Muslims" (as a broader religious community).

Table 2. Summary of Findings

Types of Reconstruction	Findings
Author Identity	Eight authors disclosed their identities, while one remained anonymous.
Language Patterns	Private language dominates over public language, reinforcing group-based narratives.
Symbolism in Text	Anonymous accounts use symbols to deflect responsibility but paradoxically expose group identity.
Textual Repetition	Repeated phrases reinforce ideological positions, emphasizing either collective solidarity or internal contradictions.

Source: Researcher (2024)

Text Analysis

Based on the text reconstruction, it was found that distortion occurs across multiple layers, including symbolism, linguistic behavior, and structural composition. This raises several critical questions: Why does the text manifest in such a manner? What motivates the writer? Why do authors struggle to liberate themselves from the ideological hegemony embedded in the text? Are they even aware of this hegemony? This analysis examines three instances of textual distortion.

1. The Call to Arrest SARA Provocateurs

The phrase, *"Haikal Hasan is indeed a SARA provocateur, immediately arrested"* functions as a discourse trigger. However, the author strategically disguises the provocative intent of this statement by embedding it within a shared tweet. Haikal Hassan Baras's tweet was deliberately constructed to serve as the catalyst for heated netizen debates.

The use of the word *"indeed"* in *"Haikal Hasan was indeed a SARA provocateur who was immediately arrested"* serves as a rhetorical reinforcement, subtly justifying the assumption of his role as a provocateur. Without the inclusion of *"indeed,"* the phrase would simply read: *"Haikal Hasan is a SARA provocateur, immediately arrested."* The latter presents a more neutral, informative, and imperative tone. However, the presence of *"indeed"* imbues the statement with an implicit bias, reinforcing the author's preconceived historical assumptions about Haikal Hassan Baras as a provocative figure. While appearing neutral on the surface, this linguistic structure manipulates the reader's perception, reinforcing antipathy toward the subject.

2. The Framing of Religious Groups as Perpetrators

The author presents a sequence of six statements that frame specific religious groups as aggressors: (i) *Buddha killed us in Myanmar.* (ii) *Hindus killed us in Kashmir.* (iii) *Jews killed us in Palestine.* (iv) *Christians killed us in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, etc.* (v) *Christians insult us frequently in jokes, on social media, etc.* (vi) *If it weren't for the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who was full of love, you would have perished.*

Structurally, these sentences share a common predicate (*"killed"*) and object (*"us"*), uniting the subjects and victims within a singular accusatory framework. The placement of full stops between sentences is not merely a grammatical convention but a strategic device to amplify psychological impact. By compartmentalizing these statements, the author reinforces a sense of victimhood, fostering collective solidarity.

This section could be rewritten as a single sentence: *"Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and Christians killed us in Myanmar, Kashmir, Palestine, Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq."* This structural transformation would alter the rhetorical effect, reducing the psychological intensity of individual accusations. However, the author deliberately separates each statement to heighten emotional resonance.

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The subsequent sentences (*"Christians insult us frequently in jokes, on social media, etc."* and *"If it weren't for the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who was full of love, you would have perished"*) appear to function as an antithesis. However, rather than mitigating the impact of the previous accusations, they reinforce the overarching narrative, anchoring the text within a framework of pseudo-collective solidarity. The author's attempt at self-reflection remains constrained within the hegemonic discourse, failing to achieve genuine critical detachment.

3. The Counter-Narrative: *Muslims Kill Muslims*

The phrase *"Muslims kill Muslims"* emerges as a counter-response to the accusations leveled against non-Muslim groups. This phrase mirrors the structure of the original accusations, following three key patterns: (i) The use of three sentences to describe instances of killing. (ii) The formulation of an antithesis. (iii) The incorporation of self-reflection. However, the primary distinction between these narratives lies in punctuation. The accusation *"Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and Christians killed us in Myanmar, Kashmir, Palestine, Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq"* employs full stops, reinforcing definitive and absolute assertions. In contrast, *"Muslims kill Muslims in Syria, Muslims kill Muslims in Libya, Muslims kill Muslims in Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, etc."* employs commas, creating a fluid and less confrontational narrative.

This subtle punctuation shift signals a key difference in intent. The counter-narrative is not structured as an outright opposition but as a means of self-reflection. The use of commas softens the claim, transforming it into an introspective commentary rather than a direct accusation. By doing so, the writer seeks to transcend psycho-religious sensitivities and engage in public reasoning, positioning *"Muslims"* within a broader framework of rational discourse rather than exclusive identity-based victimhood.

Table 3. Summary of Findings

Distorted Text	Interpretation
Call to Arrest SARA Provocateurs	The tweet was deliberately framed to provoke reactions, reinforcing unconscious biases.
Framing of Religious Groups as Perpetrators	The author's attempt at self-reflection is overshadowed by the dominance of pseudo-collective solidarity.
Muslims Kill Muslims	The author attempts to counterbalance identity-based accusations with public reasoning, demonstrating a shift toward rational critique.

Source: Researcher (2024)

Writer Self-Emancipation

Do the writers perceive their texts as a praxis of self-emancipation from ideological hegemony? Broadly, three texts demonstrate elements of self-emancipation—one within the production text and two within the counter-text. The first instance appears in the statement: *"If it weren't for the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who was full of compassion, you would have perished."* The second is: *"Human nature is evil, even though all religions teach peace. So don't be SARA."* The third states: *"The aim is only to divide the Republic of Indonesia, incite civil war, and create chaos."*

Although these instances of self-reflection arise within the context of justifying collective solidarity, they simultaneously carve out a conceptual space for freedom from divisive discourses that challenge the unity of the *Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia* (NKRI). Consider the statement: *"If it weren't for the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who was full of compassion, you would have perished."* By explicitly acknowledging *"the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad are full of compassion,"* the writer unconsciously negates their own prior motivations to establish an antagonistic "other."

Self-reflective texts mark the culmination of critical consciousness, enabling the writer to extricate themselves from the unconscious structural repression of previous texts. By asserting *"the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad are full of compassion,"* the author inadvertently acknowledges that prior claims such as *"Buddha killed us in Myanmar. Hindus killed us in Kashmir, etc."* are self-deceptive, as they stem from manipulative collective narratives. Emancipatory

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realization emerges through this acknowledgment, as the universal value of compassion fosters mutual understanding between author and reader.

A similar phenomenon occurs within the counter-text: *"Human nature is evil, even though all religions teach peace. So don't be SARA."* While written in resistance to preceding texts, the universal assertion—*"all religions teach peace"*—positions the author at a pivotal moment of self-reflection. The additional imperative, *"so don't be SARA,"* transcends mere moral guidance; it signifies a deeper expression of existential and social freedom. By stating *"all religions teach peace,"* the author not only affirms the universality of religious teachings but also demonstrates liberation from the constraints of psycho-religious textual determinism. This statement functions as an emancipatory text, as all debates rooted in SARA discourse ultimately dissolve when both writer and reader reach a shared understanding.

The same interpretive approach applies to the statement: *"The goal is only to divide the Republic of Indonesia."* The emphasis on *"dividing the Republic of Indonesia," "inciting civil war,"* and *"creating chaos"* signifies an act of social recognition. Expressions such as *"must be expelled from the Republic of Indonesia"* or *"just have their mouths fired"* must be understood within the framework of collective acknowledgment. Much like *"all religions teach peace,"* the assertion *"Haikal's goal is only to divide the Republic of Indonesia"* not only rationalizes Indonesia's national integrity as a crystallization of collective consciousness but also signifies the author's emancipation from the textual hegemony of psycho-religious narratives.

Text Validity Claims

The validity of the text in SARA-related issues is established through three primary claims.

1. Validity from the Perspective of Psycho-Religious Solidarity

Although the author attempts to free themselves from the ideological constraints of the text—*"Buddha killed us in Myanmar. Hindus killed us in Kashmir, etc."*—by incorporating self-reflective statements such as *"the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who was full of compassion,"* the process of total emancipatory healing remains incomplete. The recurring use of the term *"us"* as the object of the sentence unconsciously binds the writer within the framework of collective identity. Here, *"us"* is no longer merely an empathetic expression aligning with fellow victims but also a rhetorical device that justifies the exclusion or even vilification of those who are not part of *"us."* Furthermore, *"us"* is inherently positioned against *"you,"* reinforcing a binary opposition that sustains socio-religious protectionism.

Consequently, the phrase *"you have perished"* can be considered a valid statement, not because it reflects objective truth but because it emerges from the author's internalized self-deception, shaped by the pressures of collective solidarity. In this context, *"the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who was full of compassion"* cannot be claimed as a universally valid truth because it primarily functions as a rhetorical tool to nullify any perceived intent of exclusion toward the *"you"* group. The principle of text validity, therefore, is not based on universality but on a claim rooted in collective solidarity centered around *"us."* As a result, consensus between the author and reader fails to materialize, as universal validity is subordinated to the narrower validation of group identity.

2. Validity from the Perspective of Public Reason

A similar pattern is observed in the counter-text: *"Muslims killed Muslims in Syria, Muslims killed Muslims in Libya, Muslims killed Muslims in Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan."* Here, the author integrates self-reflection as an expression of emancipation from the constraints of prior discourse. The conclusive statement, *"all religions teach peace. So don't be SARA,"* marks a significant shift. Unlike the production text, the counter-text concludes with a moral imperative—*"So don't be SARA."*

What validity can the author claim in this instance? Unlike the private language of *"us"* in the production text, the counter-text positions *"Muslims"* as a term of public discourse, aligning it with universal reasoning rather than exclusive identity politics. In this context, *"Muslims kill Muslims"* is

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not framed as an emotionally charged or factionalized statement but rather as an assertion of universal applicability that can be rationally understood by all.

Thus, the final statement, *"So don't be SARA,"* transcends normative instruction and emerges as a rational validity claim. This imperative carries the same level of rational legitimacy as the overarching claim: *"All religions teach peace."* The phrase *"all religions teach peace"* functions as a universal text, its validity derived from public reason rather than group-based ideological constructs.

3. Validity from the Perspective of Public Recognition

A third validity claim arises from the perspective of public recognition. Consider the statement: *"These people no longer deserve to live in the Republic of Indonesia. They must be expelled."* Such assertions should not be interpreted solely as exclusionary rhetoric but also within the broader context of defending state unity as a rational construct.

The Republic of Indonesia is not merely a symbolic entity that unites diversity; it also embodies an implicit acceptance of truth claims that reinforce social cohesion. Within this framework, seemingly extreme statements such as *"not fit to live"* and *"must be expelled from the Republic of Indonesia"* can be understood as operationalized defenses of national integrity. In essence, these statements do not solely serve as expressions of exclusion but also function as mechanisms for upholding the validity of truth within the sociopolitical order.

Table 4. Summary of Validity Claims

Claim Type	Justification
Validity from Psycho-Religious Solidarity	The principle of validity is not universal but rather based on collective solidarity centered on *"us."* Universal truth claims are subordinated to the validation of in-group identity.
Validity from Public Reason	The rational legitimacy of the imperative *"So don't be SARA"* is as rational as the primary validity claim: *"All religions teach peace."* This claim is based on public reasoning and universal applicability.
Validity from Public Recognition	The Republic of Indonesia is not merely a unifying concept but also a framework for the acceptance of truth claims that uphold national unity.

Source: Researcher (2024)

Implications of Communicative Action Theory for Text Debates

According to Habermas, communicative action relies on three fundamental claims to establish agreement: the claim to truth, the claim to normative rightness, and the claim to sincerity. Truth claims describe reality, normative claims establish moral and ethical obligations, and sincerity claims express subjective emotions and intentions. These claims are independent of one another and cannot be reduced to a singular dimension (Habermas, 1984).

On one hand, SARA-related texts debated on social media are often dominated by collective psycho-religious solidarity, shaping discourse through deeply entrenched ideological narratives. On the other hand, the terminology of NKRI (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia) embodies reason and public recognition, even though its claim to truth is frequently reactive to the discourse centered on collective psycho-religious solidarity. This raises key questions: How do Habermas's truth claims apply to texts that advance conflicting narratives? Can a text rooted in psycho-religious solidarity be universally accepted as truth within the framework of communicative action?

A truth claim based on private solidarity—centered on *"us"*—never produces a universally accepted consensus. Habermas (1985) asserts that communicative action assumes shared understanding in a discourse community, which requires mutual responsibility between writers and readers. Intersubjective self-understanding must be motivated by truth claims that all communicative participants can justify. However, can consensus emerge when truth claims are built on competing foundations—one rooted in collective psycho-religious solidarity and the other in reason and public recognition?

A critical stance must be taken here: Even when truth claims are established through reason and public recognition, rationality alone may not guarantee intersubjective agreement. This is because the rationality of public reason is often formed in opposition to the irrational tendencies of truth claims driven by egocentric collective motives. According to Habermas (1992),

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communicative action is fundamentally based on coordinated interaction—not on calculating egocentric truth claims but on achieving mutual understanding. Each participant may advance their individual claims, but these claims must align with broadly accepted principles. Consensus, in this framework, becomes a foundational element in constructing shared meaning (Habermas, 1992).

Normative Accuracy and Sincerity in SARA Texts

Habermas (1984) posits that language within normative claims operates as a regulatory force, shaping social interaction within ethical frameworks. The core principle behind normative claims, according to Habermas, is that speakers must invite engagement in ways that foster respectful dialogue. The validity of speech acts, therefore, depends on whether they maintain the integrity of social relationships and uphold shared moral values (Fultner, 2014).

An explicit normative claim can be found in the statement: *"The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who were full of compassion."* However, because this phrase is positioned within a text that distinguishes *"us"* from *"you"*—and where the implicit failure of this moral imperative leads to the destruction of the *"you"* group—this normative claim loses its validity.

The phrase *"The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad are full of compassion"* would only function as a valid normative claim if it were presented unconditionally, as a categorical imperative. However, in the text's current form, the statement is conditional, contingent on the survival of the *"you"* group. Communicative action, as a process of mutual understanding, cannot be built on conditional agreements. Shared meaning and consensus must emerge independently of external contingencies. Thus, while *"The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad are full of compassion"* appears to be a universal moral statement, it fails to serve as a genuine normative claim because it does not fulfill Habermas's criteria for securing interpersonal relationships based on shared experiences (Habermas, 1981: 308).

Two other statements also function as normative claims: (i) *"All religions teach peace. So don't be SARA!"* and (ii) *"Humans no longer deserve to live in the Republic of Indonesia. They must be expelled."* The first statement—*"All religions teach peace"*—represents a universal ethical principle within a pluralistic society. Its validity is not only grounded in objective propositions but also in collective social norms that uphold interfaith harmony. Conversely, the second statement—*"They must be expelled"*—operates within a framework of state protection, justifying exclusion as a mechanism for maintaining national unity.

However, the phrase *"All religions teach peace. So don't be SARA!"* is complicated by its textual context. It appears in response to accusations that *"There is an Ustadz insulting the Prophet Muhammad."* This creates a contradiction in terms (*contradictio in terminis*), as the claim for religious peace is juxtaposed against a text that reinforces religious conflict.

Sincerity Claims and Communicative Trust

Habermas argues that communicative success depends not only on rational discourse but also on the sincerity and credibility of the speaker (Brunkhorst, 2018). According to Lafont (2018), communicative action should allow participants to express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences in ways that align with reality. When sincerity is distorted, meaningful discourse breaks down.

In the case of SARA-related texts, the statement *"The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad are full of compassion"* could serve as a sincerity claim—if not for its association with *"Buddha killed us in Myanmar. Hindus are killing us in Kashmir. Jews killed us in Palestine, etc."* The placement of this statement within a framework of collective solidarity distorts its sincerity, as it is not a neutral expression but rather a conditional justification for inclusion and exclusion.

Linguistic expressions within communicative action must be coordinated through illocutionary acts—where the meaning of speech is explicitly understood within the shared reality of participants (Habermas, 1984). Habermas (1998) emphasizes that communicative exchange is only effective when participants recognize the reasons behind each other's speech acts and engage in reciprocal argumentation. In everyday communication, both speakers and writers must be committed to evaluating their statements through mutual recognition.

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According to Habermas (1985), communicative action plays a dual role: (i) it fulfills the normative expression of social contexts, and (ii) it fosters internal regulation of social behavior and personal identity. When texts contain inherent contradictions or conflict-laden discourse, achieving mutual understanding becomes significantly more difficult. In this context, neither truth claims, normative claims, nor sincerity claims can serve as universally valid foundations for agreement. Habermas reminds us that in every effort to build consensus, there is an underlying tension between understanding and misunderstanding, cooperation and conflict. However, at the grammatical level, even contentious speech acts must aim toward communicative consensus—where disagreement remains a part of discourse but is mediated by shared meaning.

Conclusion

Writers engaged in identity politics discourse on social media in Indonesia face significant challenges in emancipating themselves from the texts they produce. The constraints imposed by these texts hinder their ability to cultivate a shared understanding within a communicative society. Public reason struggles to create space for consensus, as identity politics compels discourse to revolve around validity claims rooted in psycho-religious justification and collective solidarity. Instead of being evaluated based on intersubjective rationality within a pluralistic society, these validity claims are anchored in an exclusive *"us."* Consequently, universal truths within the text—such as *"the loving teachings of the Prophet Muhammad"*—become subordinate to psycho-religious interpretations that reinforce group solidarity rather than fostering broader consensus. Social media discourse on identity politics, therefore, remains trapped in reinforcing exclusive collective identities, limiting the possibility of mutual recognition and sincere normative engagement.

Even when truth claims are framed through reason and public recognition, rationality alone fails to bridge the divide between writers and readers. This failure occurs because rationality and public recognition are often shaped by instrumental rationality, designed to counteract the perceived irrationality of truth claims grounded in psycho-religious solidarity or egocentric collectivism. The production and counter-production of such texts tend to operate as competing instruments of ideological opposition rather than as mechanisms for fostering deliberative-consultative engagement. Consequently, digital and analog social groups remain unable to establish discursive spaces that promote reciprocal deliberation. Intersubjective rational consensus can only emerge when participants engage with full sincerity, free from the historical burden of conflicting narratives. Egocentric truth claims can only be rationally accepted when they are coordinated within a framework of collective agreement rather than ideological confrontation. To address this challenge, it is imperative to foster public reasoning and promote education that strengthens public recognition of Indonesia's national values, cultural heritage, and ideological foundations. The nation was built upon fundamental virtues such as tolerance, acceptance, mutual consideration, and empathy—values that discourage actions or speech that offend or harm others. Communication patterns that align with these principles should be recognized as universal rational, ethical, and normative standards for Indonesian society. Such principles accommodate the diverse cultural customs and traditions that have long been acknowledged as integral to Indonesia's national identity.

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