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The fragile upper subject: Gender, digital discourse, and superego collapse in contemporary Indonesian media

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Abstract: Studies have been exploring the processes of identity construction increasingly intertwined with the behaviors of netizens. The construction of self-identity is now entangled with global capitalism. The contribution of this article is the exploration of the Superego as a site of vulnerability in the age of social media. In the current media environment, this vulnerability of the Superego is observable through the figure of the prominent individual whose visibility, amplified by significant social capital, draws both admiration and hostility from followers. This paper introduces the concept of the Upper Subject to understand such figures. This study focuses on two political figures who can be categorized as Upper Subjects based on the number of followers they command on social media: Khofifah Indar Parawansa (the Governor of East Java) and Dedi Mulyadi (the Governor of West Java). Both serve as the primary subjects of this analysis. The study adopts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method to examine how these Upper Subjects are constructed and contested within digital discourse.

Abstrak: Banyak penelitian telah mengeksplorasi proses konstruksi identitas yang semakin terkait dengan perilaku netizen (warga virtual). Konstruksi identitas diri sekarang berkelindan dengan kapitalisme global. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada eksplorasi terhadap Superego yang semakin rentan di era media sosial masa kini. Kerentanan Superego ini dapat diamati melalui contoh analisis terhadap dua figur terkemuka yang visibilitasnya menarik kekaguman sekaligus permusuhan dari para netizen. Artikel ini memperkenalkan konsep the Upper Subjects untuk membingkai figur-figur tersebut. Penelitian ini berfokus pada dua tokoh politik yang dapat dikategorikan sebagai the Upper Subjects berdasarkan jumlah pengikut yang mereka miliki di media sosial, yakni Khofifah Indar Parawansa (Gubernur Jawa Timur) dan Dedi Mulyadi (Gubernur Jawa Barat). Keduanya berfungsi sebagai subjek utama penelitian ini. Penelitian ini mengadopsi metode Analisis Wacana Kritis yang digunakan untuk mengkaji bagaimana the Upper Subjects tersebut dibangun dan dikontestasikan dalam wacana digital.

INTRODUCTION

In June 2025, Indonesian media was stirred by a wave of online vitriol directed at a well-known female celebrity after a friend inadvertently posted her photograph on social media. The actress was ridiculed by netizens, who accused her of looking old for her age (Pungki, 2025). Many claimed she had aged rapidly after getting married and converting to a different religion, an act that remains highly controversial in Indonesian society, regardless of the direction of the conversion. In the same month, another case of online bullying went viral: this time, the target was a university student who had achieved an impressive GPA of 3.94. Despite his academic achievement, he was mocked online for his supposedly unattractive physical appearance (Ketik Kabar, 2025). Unlike the celebrity, the student had not previously been in the public eye; his appearance in the media was purely due to his success in a science competition. Yet, while both individuals were subjected to body shaming, the motivations differed: the actress was criticized in connection with specific personal choices, whereas the student became a target without any discernible justification.

The cases above point to several critical patterns. Some individuals become viral unintentionally, thrust into the spotlight by chance events. Others actively pursue virality, recognizing its potential to convert symbolic capital (such as fame) into financial capital through advertising, product endorsements, and sponsorships. In the twenty-first century, being "viral" has become a significant social achievement, made possible by the rise of media technologies, particularly social media, which now functions as a powerful new infrastructure of influence. In fact, the

desire for online visibility can grow so extreme that, in one notable case, a TikToker in the United States stormed the company's headquarters after her account was deleted. Although no reason was given for the account's removal, speculation arose that one of her videos had nearly cost another woman her life (Adarlo, 2025).

In the post-COVID-19 era, Indonesian media has entered a new phase. This shift was precipitated by the pandemic, during which prolonged periods of social distancing confined people to their homes, transforming the way they worked, socialized, and conducted their daily activities. The concept of 'Work from Home' emerged as a new standard in Indonesia's professional life. With nearly all aspects of interaction turning virtual, Indonesian citizens, especially those with digital literacy, began to engage more intensively with various media platforms. This marked a significant turning point, most clearly signaled by the dramatic rise in internet use, particularly the surge in social media engagement.

Social media in Indonesia has come to serve a wide array of purposes. Some users turn to these platforms to articulate political identities, aligning themselves with specific figures or political parties. Others use them for commercial activities, leisure, or a range of other personal and professional functions. While Instagram had already gained widespread popularity in Indonesia since its introduction on October 6, 2010 (Nursyecha, 2024), and TikTok had been in use since 2017 (Hatmanto, 2023; Rianto, 2025), it was during the COVID-19 pandemic that social media usage soared to unprecedented levels. According to Kaptenseo (2023), a digital marketing agency, the number of social media users in Indonesia stood at

approximately 150 million in 2019, just before the pandemic. This figure rose sharply to 160 million in 2020 and climbed even higher to 175 million in 2021. The trend began to taper off in 2022, when the pandemic started to recede, dropping to 169 million and declining slightly again to 167 million in 2023. The gradual decline in usage is attributed to the resumption of offline routines: people began returning to workplaces, and students went back to schools.

In this shifting landscape, social media has emerged as a new form of power, offering its users the potential to enhance their symbolic, cultural, and financial capital. The construction of self-identity is now inextricably entangled with global capitalism. Individuals are afforded unprecedented freedom to curate and perform their identities, yet those very identities are simultaneously commodified by global digital capitalism, which monetizes user-generated content through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Youtube, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and others.

This entanglement between identity construction and capital accumulation has given rise to new dilemmas. In the pursuit of monetization, the boundaries between good and bad, right and wrong, become increasingly fluid. The ethical imperative to speak, behave, and act with consideration for others is displaced by a more utilitarian concern: whether one's social media content will be endorsed—or, paradoxically, attacked—by a large number of netizens. Such reactions, regardless of their tone, contribute to the content creator's visibility and, ultimately, income. Positive and negative sentiment alike can be leveraged to position oneself as a powerful digital subject. Recognition—

whether rooted in admiration or outrage—confers visibility and influence, especially within the virtual public sphere governed by the attention economy of netizenship.

Studies exploring the processes of identity formation, reformation, and transformation are increasingly intertwined with the behaviors of netizens. A growing body of scholarship has attempted to address the complexities arising from these developments. To date, much of the literature has focused on the broader societal impact of social media. These discussions span disciplines such as business and management, where they intersect with concerns about public psychology (Berger et al., 2019). The Pew Research Center, a leading institution in global media studies, has produced quantitative research comparing the effects of social media across different countries (Wike et al., 2022). The psychological implications of social media on both individuals and communities have also drawn attention, especially in relation to mental health concerns such as addiction and anxiety (Marai, 2004; Ye, 2023; Raju, 2025). Additional studies have investigated how social media influences emotional regulation and mood management (Bengtsson et al., 2022; Allen, 2019). Meanwhile, debates surrounding the benefits and drawbacks of social media, particularly its power to reshape user behavior, have become a central theme in recent research (Dalomba, 2022; Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). Few studies are interested in exploring the role of Superego in social media.

The novelty of this article lies in its exploration of the Superego—a foundational concept in psychology—as a site of vulnerability in the age of social media. The Superego, one component of

Sigmund Freud's tripartite model of the psyche alongside the Id and the Ego, is a psychological function that governs internalized moral standards. The Id represents the unconscious reservoir of drives and impulses, what Freud referred to as libido, a form of psychic energy that encompasses not only sexual desire but also the instinct to survive and the appreciation of beauty or art (Freud, 1920, 1923, 1936; McLeod, 2025). The Ego, by contrast, is the rational mediator that operates at the conscious level, negotiating between the instinctual demands of the Id and the ethical imperatives of the Superego. The Superego itself functions as an internal moral compass, embodying socially embedded values, norms, and prohibitions. Although it is a well-established concept dating back to the early twentieth century, the Superego remains highly relevant in assessing shifting moral and ethical sensibilities, especially in the context of digital society. Superego, is defined as "the moral conscience representing societal and parental standards, striving for ideal behavior" (Freud, 1923: 27). Various studies have been conducted to contextualized the concept of the Superego today. Sofia de Jesus (2023), for example focused on the issues of freedom and anxiety that influence changes of the Superego in the postmodern era. The shift from modern to postmodern society, with the focus on individualization alters the Superego's mechanism both individually and socially. Another article related to the Superego was written by Žižek (1999), who explains how postmodernis with the role of media has experiences disruption. In postmodern era, the Superego is characterized by a sceptical and nihilistic attitude towards universal notions, such as the truth, reality and knowledge (Žižek, 1999; Bauman, 1998). There are tendencies for self-referentiality,

pluralism and irrelevance. The article that connect directly social media and Superego is quite rare in the contemporary researches.

In the empirical and current media environment, this vulnerability of the Superego is observable through the figure of the prominent individual whose visibility, amplified by significant social capital, draws both admiration and hostility from followers. The media has a normative fuction as a means of education and also public awareness regarding various issues that are considered to be beneficial to the society. This paper introduces the concept of the Upper Subject (Udasmoro, 2024) to frame such figures. This theoretical lens is posited as a counterpoint to Julia Kristeva's (1982) notion of 'the abject', introduced in *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur (Powers of Horror)*, which refers to the condition of being cast aside or subordinated due to one's inherent state. Using gender perspective, Kristeva employs metaphors such as menstruation and vomit to capture what is culturally coded as repulsive. The abject is thus commonly associated with those who are historically marginalized: Black and Brown bodies viewed through the lens of whiteness, or persons with disabilities perceived by those who identify as normatively abled. These subjects are consistently relegated to the periphery of society (Udasmoro, 2017).

In contrast, the Upper Subject (Udasmoro, 2024) refers to individuals who are elevated, or even celebrated, for their perceived presence and attributes. These subjects span genders and are admired for their wealth, beauty, intelligence, leadership, or other forms of symbolic capital. They are subjects who according to Bourdieu (1986) have accumulated different social capitals in order to get the maximum power in the

society, or to gain the position of the Upper subjects. In today's media, a defining marker of Upper Subject status is the accumulation of followers, likes, and engagement on social media platforms. However, a high level of digital engagement does not imply uniformly positive reception. Most social media figures contend with polarized responses: while some followers express adulation, others engage through critique, ridicule, or outright abuse.

This study investigates the relationship between the Upper Subject—conceived as an individual with considerable social capital (Bourdieu, 1986)—and the sentiments they attract from the broader online public (Udasmoro, 2024). It questions the extent to which this reverence is taken for granted, and how such figures become both the beneficiaries and victims of netizens' attention. The Superego functions here as an analytical tool to interpret the behavior of these digital publics, particularly in relation to the contradictory perceptions provoked by Upper Subjects through their online content. These contradictions reveal that figures occupying privileged digital positions are not shielded from attack; rather, they are often subjected to both praise and cyberbullying. The analysis also foregrounds gender as a critical axis: it interrogates how male and female Upper Subjects are treated differently in the eyes of netizens, highlighting the gendered dynamics that inform public judgment in virtual spaces.

METHOD

This study focuses on two political figures who can be categorized as Upper Subjects based on the number of followers they command on social media: Khofifah

Indar Parawansa (hereafter referred to as Khofifah) and Dedi Mulyadi (referred to as KDM, short for Kang Dedi Mulyadi). Both serve as the primary subjects of this analysis. Khofifah is the Governor of East Java and has approximately 1.1 million Instagram followers, while KDM, the Governor of West Java, has amassed around 4.9 million followers. The choice of these to public figures is based on the consideration that both of them are the uppers subjects in the political context. They are also among the prominent political subjects who are active in the media contestations in Indonesia.

The study adopts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), using Norman Fairclough framework to examine how these Upper Subjects are constructed and contested within digital discourse. CDA is a method interested to explore the inequalities, injustice, imbalance of power and other imbalance relations in the social context. There are the aspects of linguistic practice, discursive practice and social practice in order to understand the texts. The corpus data for linguistic practice consist of posts and user comments from the Instagram accounts (dedimulyadi71) and (khofifah.ip) and youtube of the two political figures (Kang Dedi Mulyadi Chanel & Khofifah Indar Parawansa Channel)). However, given the widespread phenomenon of 'buzzers' in the Indonesian digital landscape—a term referring to paid engagement actors who systematically promote or attack specific figures to shape public opinion—the study intentionally broadens its data sources to include viral news coverage and third-party accounts (from Instagram and Youtube) that reference the public personas of Khofifah and KDM. The research data from news coverage was selected from the news which

had more than 50 thousands viewers. This approach helps capture a more nuanced spectrum of responses, avoiding an overreliance on potentially curated or manipulated comment sections. Priority is given to leadership-related themes that emerged prominently between January and June 2025, with particular attention to posts and comments during peak controversy period. There are 50 viral news coverage and third-party accounts as data collected. Although for CDA method the quantitative data is not the priority, however for this research, comments were selected from each viral post, prioritizing comments that received lot of responses, more than 30 responses. The objective is to indicate that these comments explain netizens' engagement.

Within the CDA framework, language is treated as the primary entry point for understanding the dynamics of discourse in both social and traditional media. Given that netizens' comments tend to be brief and often informal, the analysis focuses on lexical and syntactic units—words and sentences—as its core analytical tools. Particular attention is paid to 'wording', 'rewording', and 'overwording', as these linguistic strategies reveal how netizens articulate support, dissent, or ambiguity in their interactions with the content. The selection of diction—words charged with social, emotional, or moral undertones—is of central concern.

The analysis integrates three levels of discourse as articulated by Norman Fairclough (1989, 1992): the micro level (linguistic practices), the mezzo level (discursive practices), such as the intertextuality and the interdiscursivity and the macro level (social practices). This layered approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how language reflects, reproduces, or challenges the power relations and symbolic structures that

frame the digital reception of Upper Subjects in contemporary Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The two political figures examined in this study—Khofifah Indar Parawansa and Dedi Mulyadi (KDM)—enjoy substantial grassroots support, as demonstrated by their respective victories in the gubernatorial elections of East Java and West Java. Both hail from provinces with significant population sizes. As of 2025, West Java recorded a population of 50,759,003 (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Jawa Barat, 2025), while East Java had 42,089,300 residents (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Jawa Timur, 2025). Their popularity is well-established among their constituents. KDM was elected under the banner of Gerindra (The Great Indonesia Movement Party), the third-largest political party in the country, whereas Khofifah ran with the support of the National Awakening Party (PKB), the largest Islamic party in Indonesia and the fourth-largest overall. Notably, Khofifah is closely affiliated with Muallimat, the women's wing of Nahdlatul Ulama, which is institutionally linked to PKB. She currently serves as its chairperson.

In the offline sphere, KDM's governance has been marked by a series of controversial policies and actions, often prompting public backlash. His initiatives, frequently documented and disseminated through his own social media platforms, have triggered responses ranging from criticism to confrontation. One illustrative case involved a teenage boy whose family home was demolished under a policy that KDM had implemented, despite the house being built on land they did not own (Rubiah, 2025). Another high-profile conflict arose between KDM and GRIB Jaya (Gerakan Rakyat Indonesia Bersatu Jaya), a mass organization led by Hercules,

a former Timor-Leste combatant often associated with organized vigilantism and gang activity in Indonesia (Wahyuni, 2025). KDM's outspoken stance against *premanisme* (street thuggery) in West Java drew sharp reactions from this group and its sympathizers.

Khofifah, by contrast, remains a prominent and well-respected figure in East Java, particularly among women voters. However, her real-world activities attract far less public scrutiny than KDM's. Her engagements are predominantly ceremonial and institutional in nature, focusing on formal events related to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), local product promotion, and similar development-oriented initiatives. In this sense, her approach reflects a more conventional political style that eschews controversy.

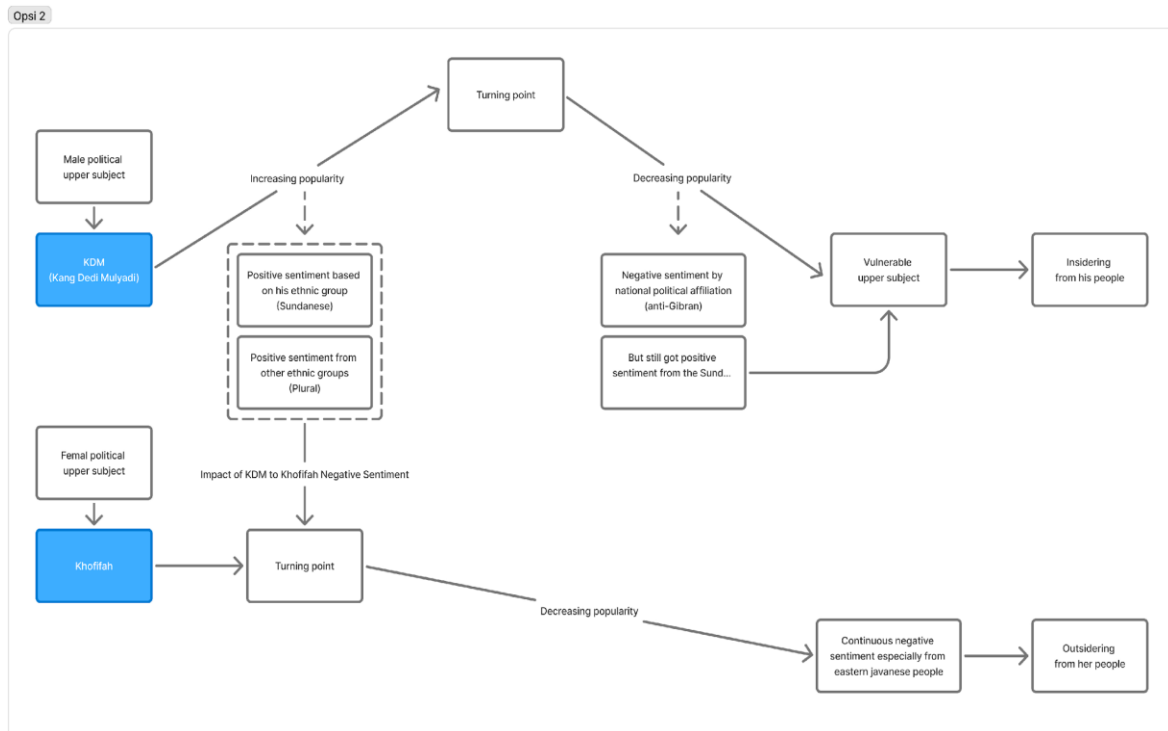
In the digital sphere, however, both leaders maintain significant visibility, albeit through markedly different strategies. KDM's online persona has evolved over time, having built a steady following during his two-term tenure as Regent of Purwakarta (2008–2018). He later served as Chair of the Regional Council of Golkar in West Java from 2016 to 2020. Yet it was only after his appointment as Governor of West Java on February 7, 2025, that his popularity on social media surged dramatically. His first major initiative—an expedited river-cleaning campaign aimed at flood mitigation—was executed swiftly and decisively, earning him widespread acclaim. The public began to regard him as a leader of action rather than rhetoric, someone who favored implementation over endless meetings and vague promises.

Another key driver of KDM's surge in popularity was his highly controversial policy to send so-called “troubled” youth—including those suspected of identifying as LGBT—to military barracks as part of a program called Gerbang Panca Waluya. In Indonesian social context, LGBT is becoming a big issues. The refusals of this gender orientation is growing stronger. LGBT is refused intitutionally and socially in many different areas in Indonesia. However, in the social context, the practice of this gender orientation is also mushrooming. People start to “coming out”, and ignore the social and religious refusal.

Unsurprisingly, the policy (intitutional level) sparked intense public debate. Some parents, objecting to the measure, filed complaints with Indonesia's National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM). A number of civil society actors and organizations also condemned the program. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) and Komnas HAM, for example, argued that KDM's actions constituted violations of both children's rights and broader human rights principles. Despite such criticisms, many of KDM's social media followers supported and praised the initiative. A considerable portion of his digital constituency framed the policy as a bold and necessary step to “save the nation.” Riding on this momentum, KDM was even touted by some online communities as a potential presidential candidate for 2029. Not all political figures, however, shared this enthusiasm. Legislator Ono Surono, among others, publicly denounced KDM's policy, leading to further backlash on social media. In order to understand the media contestation about those two political

leaders, below is the chart showing how social media portrayed them.

Figure 1
Chart of social media portraying KDM and Khofifah



Source: Result of data analysis

In the face of criticism, particularly from government agencies and political opponents, pro-KDM netizens took to various platforms to defend him with fervor. The following comments—gathered from YouTube—illustrate the tone and rhetorical style of these digital defenses:

“Yg sering koar-koar itu anggota DPR yang namanya Ono ama KPAI dipecat aja, ini msuruh mundur dari jabatannya, yang setuju boleh komen” (“That DPR member Ono and the KPAI folks who keep yapping—get them fired already, tell them to resign. Agree? Drop a

comment!”) (Source: Youtube, TribunTimur, May 2025).

“Mana ini anggota DPR yg menolak program baik seperti ini? DPR emang ga waras yah!!!” (“Where are those DPR members who oppose a good program like this? Seriously, DPR is truly insane!”) (Source: Youtube, Tribuntimur, May 2025).

“Klu Komnas HAM & KPAI nggak setuju, ya wis masuk penjara atau dihajar ramai-ramai saja” (“If Komnas HAM and KPAI don’t agree, then fine—get them (the kids) locked up or beaten up by a mob.”) (Source: Youtube, Tribuntimur, May 2025).

The three comments cited above employ notably expressive wording. Each features pointed lexical choices—“*koar-koar*” (yapping), “*dipecat*” (fired), “*gak waras*” (insane), and “*dihajar ramai-ramai*” (beaten up by a mob)—which all carry strong emotional and confrontational tones. Although the substance of each comment is unified in its rejection of the DPR member’s stance opposing KDM, the rhetorical strategies used to convey this rejection rely heavily on verbal aggression and, in some cases, implicit or explicit threats. From a psychoanalytic perspective, if the Superego is understood as a psychological mechanism tasked with regulating the impulsive drives of the Id, then the comments reflect the erosion—or at least the fragilization—of that internalized moral restraint in digital spaces. Online, insults, mockery, and threats are expressed with little to no filtering. In this atmosphere of unregulated expression, the impulsive energy of the Id is easily discharged. Within the framework of critical discourse analysis, the danger lies not merely in the coarse language itself, but in the broader social effects of language. Hate speech circulated on social media does not remain confined to virtual space; it often produces tangible psychological harm in real life for those targeted. If referring to the concept of Superego as the moral component of personality usually passing through a process of internalization by parents and societal values (Freud, 2023), the hate speech normalized in social media shows that guild for wrongdoing and creating ideal behavior are not always followed by the netizen.

The attacks extended to the Indonesian Child Protection Commission

(KPAI) as well, largely due to its opposition to KDM’s policy of sending “problematic” youth to military camps. One particularly vitriolic comment in support of KDM reads:

“Setelah KPAI, sekarang Komnas HAM yang ngomong soal KDM sudah mengambil hak anak. Halo oo ibu Komnas... lu kemana aja? Anak-anak nakal dibiarkan saja. Anak-anak terlantar lu abaikan saja, turun coba ke lapangan, jangan duduk manja terus, dan baru Gerak kalau udah VIRAL. TAI emang lu itu bu. Setuju gak?” (“After KPAI, now Komnas HAM is whining that KDM has violated children’s rights. Helloo Komnas lady... where have you been? Naughty kids are left to roam, neglected children ignored. Try getting out and doing some fieldwork instead of sitting around pampered, only acting when things go VIRAL. You really are SHIT, ma’am. Agree or not?”) (Source: KDM’s Instagram account. May 2025)

The comment is saturated with emotional outbursts, visible through its diction and sentence structure. The extended form “*halooo*” amplifies sarcasm and impatience, functioning as a rhetorical marker of frustration. The use of “*lu*”—a colloquial and informal second-person pronoun typically reserved for peers or subordinates—signals a lack of deference and a breakdown of social distance, especially problematic given that the commenter presumably does not know the Komnas HAM official personally. This deliberate linguistic informality underscores the anger and disdain behind the message. The final sentence, “*TAI emang lu itu bu*” (“You really are SHIT, ma’am”), is an outright insult, intensified by the use of all caps, signaling unfiltered

rage. These patterns of verbal aggression reflect a broader phenomenon in which the traditional Indonesian Superego—historically grounded in values of respect, hierarchy, and social harmony—appears increasingly unable to regulate impulsive digital expression. Further examples illustrate a growing call to collective aggression:

“Kekuatan Netizen memang Top.. Ayo budayakan serangan netizen kepada akun-akun pejabat yang suka mengkritik Kinerja Bang Dedy (KDM)..” (“Netizens’ power is legit. Let’s normalize netizens’ attacks on the social media accounts of officials who criticize Bang Dedy’s (KDM’s) performance.”) (Source: Youtube, @elfrancanews, May 2025).
“Senggol KDM... hajaaaar” (“Mess with KDM... and get smashed”) (Source: Youtube, @elfrancanews, May 2025).

“Retno jangan banyak bacot, ada yang bertindak baik malah lu repot” (“Retno, quit running your mouth. Someone does something good and suddenly you have a problem with it.”) (Source: Youtube @elfrancanews Mei, 2025).

The three comments directed at Retno Listyarti, Chair of the National Commission on Violence Against Women, mirror the antagonistic lexical patterns previously used against DPR member Ono Surono. The phrase *“Ayo budayakan serangan netizen”* (“Let’s normalize netizens’ attacks”) functions as a persuasive call to collective action, inciting targeted hostility against those who disagree with KDM. The word *“hajar”* (to strike or attack) is deliberately stretched to *“hajaaaar”*—a typographic intensification that signals both heightened emotion and an underlying threat. Similarly, the term

“bacot”, while denoting speech, carries a coarse and contemptuous undertone. These lexical choices form a discourse of assault, one where disagreement is met not with debate but with digital aggression. From the above examples of the hate speech, it is argued that the morality principles as the main poin of Superego that influence the Ego to adhere to social ideals, usually resulting in feeling of guilt (Freud, 2023) is no longer a concern of certain netizens.

The fragility of the Superego in online spaces, precisely because ethical boundaries are frequently suspended, poses a new kind of challenge for contemporary Indonesian society. Similar dynamics can be observed in other parts of the world. While it is often argued that online behavior does not always reflect one's conduct in the physical world, the intensity of digital outrage directed at individuals, especially when both attacker and target have never met in real life, raises critical concerns about the declining functionality of the Superego. That such vehemence is exercised in defense of someone equally unknown to the commenter underlines the complexity of this moral erosion. It compels renewed scrutiny into how the Superego might be reactivated in digital environments, and how shared norms of ethical discourse might be renegotiated in an era defined by viral judgment.

Notably, many of KDM’s most vocal defenders appear to be residents of West Java. This is evident in the frequent use of Sundanese language and explicit claims of local affiliation. In contrast, those who criticize KDM are often identified—or marked—as outsiders. Ethnic identity becomes a salient axis of differentiation, sharpening the rhetorical boundary between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’.

“Baca komen, setiap orang Jawa, Cina, Jakarta, Sumatera, Kalimantan, Timor, Sulawesi, Bali, Papua, Batak, dan semua non Sunda, lebih baik meninggalkan Jabar. Tau diri. Pindah aja ke Semarang, Surabaya atau Solo. Pokoknya jangan di wilayah Jabar. Baca itu komen-komen keinginan setiap orang Sunda, dan tahu diri!” (“Read the comments: every Javanese, Chinese, Jakartan, Sumatran, Kalimantanese, Timorese, Sulawesi, Balinese, Papuan, Batak—anyone who’s not Sundanese—should leave West Java. Know your place. Just move to Semarang, Surabaya, or Solo. Just don’t stay in West Java. Read what Sundanese people are saying, and learn your place!”) (Source: Banjarmasin Post News, Mei 2025).

Identity politics was deployed by the netizen quoted above to localize support for KDM, asserting that Sundanese people (marked through deliberate ethnic lexical choice) are his legitimate base, thereby delegitimizing criticism from outsiders. The phrase *“tau diri”* (“know your place”) was used to suggest that those residing in West Java who disagree with KDM should simply leave. Such language demonstrates how identity politics on social media can be weaponized to draw symbolic boundaries, reinforcing exclusion and amplifying processes of *outsidering* against dissenters.

In the Indonesian context, national unity and anti-SARA (an acronym referring to ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations) values have long been embedded in the educational system. These values historically function as components of the Indonesian Superego, a collective moral compass internalized over generations. Yet in the digital era, this Superego appears

increasingly vulnerable, as spontaneous and unfiltered expression overrides long-standing social restraints (McLeod, 2025).

Interestingly, KDM—once buoyed by fervent support—also became the target of netizens’ backlash after publicly defending Vice President Gibran Rakabuming. Gibran, who has amassed a significant number of detractors across the country, is widely seen as a symbol of democratic decline. His rise to the vice presidency was mired in controversy due to allegations of nepotism involving his uncle, Anwar Usman, then Chief Justice of Indonesia’s Constitutional Court. The court controversially ruled that individuals under 40 years of age could run for vice president if they had previously served as regional leaders.

KDM’s defense of Gibran marked a turning point. It triggered a reversal in public sentiment, particularly among those who had previously championed him. Online commentators began to associate KDM with the very power structures they opposed, branding him “Mulyono II”—a derogatory nickname that references Gibran’s father, Joko Widodo or Jokowi (known colloquially as “Mulyono”), Indonesia’s seventh president. Jokowi has been heavily criticized for allegedly enabling nepotism and consolidating power by positioning both his son and son-in-law within the country’s ruling elite. In this view, KDM’s praise of Gibran was seen not merely as political miscalculation but as moral betrayal, aligning him with the very oligarchic tendencies many hoped he would resist.

“Saya ge suka ka KDM, tp ketika KDM mengatakan dan memuji-muji Gibran itu cerdas, suhu bukan cupu, saat itu juga akal warasku

rungkaaadddd ... bestie” (“I used to like KDM, but when he started praising Gibran, saying he was adept and not clueless, my rational mind just... dislodged, bestie.”) (Source: DJ Cuks YouTube, June 2025)

“Betul banget... ternyata KDM ternak Jkw. Pokoknya aku jadi gak mau liat lagi tentang KDM” (“Exactly... turns out KDM is just another JKW livestock. I’m done following anything about him.”) (Source: DJ Cuks YouTube, Juni 2025).

“KDM antek Oligarki gorong-gorong Jilid 2” (“KDM is a lackey of the Sewer Oligarchy, Volume 2.”) (Source: DJ Cuks, June 2025).
“KDM kaaan antek KimPlus...!!!” (“KDM is clearly a KIMPlus stooge!”) (Source: DJ Cuks, Juni 2025).

The four comments directed at KDM above are overtly political in tone and content. The language choices employed by commenters make their shift in allegiance explicitly clear. Consider the statement: “*Saya ge suka ka KDM, tp ketika KDM mengatakan dan memuji-muji Gibran itu cerdas, suhu bukan cupu, saat itu juga akal warasku rungkaaadddd ... bestie*” (“I used to like KDM, but when he started praising Gibran, saying he was adept and not clueless, my rational mind just... dislodged, bestie”). The phrase “*akal waras*” (“rational mind”) functions as a rhetorical pivot: it implies that prior to learning of KDM’s affiliation with Gibran, the commenter was under an illusion. The moment that affiliation was revealed, reason was (supposedly) restored.

Other lexical choices reflect pointed political critique and ideological disillusionment. The phrase “*ternak JKW*” (“Jokowi’s livestock”) functions as a

derogatory label for those perceived as blind followers of the former president, while “*oligarki gorong-gorong*” (“sewer oligarchy”) alludes to the populist optics of Jokowi’s early leadership, during which he was frequently filmed entering sewage drains to solve hyper-local urban issues. What began as a symbol of grounded leadership is reframed here as a tool of mass manipulation, now synonymous with cronyism and oligarchic consolidation. The resentment directed toward Jokowi and his son Gibran is thus extended to KDM, who is cast as their proxy.

These rhetorical strategies illustrate how KDM—as an Upper Subject who had long occupied a position of prestige due to his publicly visible, results-driven leadership—can undergo a dramatic reversal in public perception in a matter of weeks. The Upper Subjects as privileged subjects (Udasmoro, 2024) have to face challenges from the netizens, the other (mostly unknown) powerful subjects. Despite years of positive sentiment generated by his documented activities, one resurfaced video in which he praised Gibran served as a catalyst for widespread disapproval. This moment of rupture did not emerge in a vacuum. At the time the video reappeared, public animosity toward Gibran had reached a boiling point, fueled by perceptions of nepotism and institutional manipulation. The case of KDM underscores the temporal fragility of digital admiration. A single piece of dated content—once inert—can be recontextualized under current conditions and recharged with new political meaning. As the sentiment toward Gibran darkened, KDM’s prior association with him became a liability. What followed was a swift anticlimax. Although KDM continued to receive adulation from loyal followers on his official social media platforms, a wave of new detractors emerged across

alternative accounts, launching coordinated attacks and reframing his image.

This volatility in digital perception affects not only controversial figures like KDM, but also more conventional political leaders. Khofifah Indar Parawansa's experience illustrates how even Upper Subjects who maintain traditional, ceremonial approaches to governance can become vulnerable to netizens' shifting expectations and comparative judgments in the social media era. Khofifah—who, unlike KDM, maintains a minimal and largely ceremonial presence on social media—began to receive a significant wave of negative sentiment following KDM's surge in digital popularity after his inauguration as governor. Although she does not actively engage in online platforms, Khofifah's visibility in the digital public sphere was nonetheless affected. Residents of East Java, her own constituency, began to publicly question her leadership. Some of the negative comments related to Khofifah leadership is the slow development of economic situation in East Jawa. Comparisons between her and KDM became increasingly frequent, with many claiming that she had accomplished little in contrast to KDM's programs, which were perceived as pragmatic, socially responsive, and impactful, particularly among lower-income communities.

As an *Upper Subject* whose authority was previously rooted in real-world institutions and public service, Khofifah began to experience a kind of symbolic decline in the virtual arena. The Upper Subjects as the privilege can experience a declination of reputation in the era where media is contested by people or netizens coming from different social

background. The Upper Subjects are the privileged subjects but their position is always vulnerable (Udasmoro, 2024). Much of the online criticism revolved around the perception that she had failed to improve the welfare of East Javanese citizens. Her social media content—largely composed of ceremonial appearances and promotional campaigns for local produce—was widely mocked as superficial and ineffectual. Some commenters even suggested that KDM should take her place as Governor of East Java. Additional criticism emerged when Khofifah departed for the Hajj pilgrimage; many netizens accused her of abandoning her responsibilities. Typical comments included:

“Putus uda urat malunya gubernur ini...” (“This governor has lost all sense of shame...”).

“Gaes ada KBR baru gubernur Jatim ibu kofifah uda krasan di ARAB jadi udah gak mau balik ke Jatim, gubernur Jatim punya profesi baru rencana nguliti Onta. Jadi mohon maafyaa warga Jatim” (“Guys, there's breaking news: the East Java Governor, Ms. Khofifah, has decided she's settled in ARABIA and doesn't want to return to East Java. The East Java Governor has a new career plan: skinning camels. So sorry, East Java residents!”).

“Wow tamu khusus undangan raja Arab lho, Masya Allah tabarokallah, semoga disana terus ya ga usah balik ke Jatim” (“Wow, a special guest of the Arabian king! Masha Allah, tabarakallah. Please stay there forever, don't bother coming back to East Java.”).

“Lebih baik jd tukang buah aja gubernur Jatim lebih ahli untuk buah-buah” (“Better off selling fruit—seems that’s what the East Java Governor is most skilled at.”) (Source: YouTube account ‘no-reply’, June 2025).

Across these comments, a common sentiment emerges: that Khofifah should not return to East Java. This is clearest in statements such as *“udah krasan di ARAB jadi udah gak mau balik ke Jatim”* (“she’s settled in Arabia and doesn’t want to return to East Java”) and *“semoga disana terus ya ga usah balik ke Jatim”* (“please stay there forever, don’t bother coming back to East Java”). These remarks are deeply sarcastic, functioning as coded rejections of her leadership. Phrases like *“gak usah balik”* (“don’t bother coming back”) and *“gak mau balik”* (doesn’t want to return) express a broader symbolic expulsion—she is no longer seen as belonging in the role of governor.

In addition to sarcasm, the comments are laced with ridicule and insult. For example, *“putus uda urat malunya”* suggests that Khofifah “has lost all sense of shame”—a scathing criticism within Javanese cultural norms, where *rasa malu* (the capacity for shame) is a core social value. This echoes idioms such as *“rai gedhèg”* (literally, “a face like a bamboo wall”) or *“bermuka tembok”* in broader Indonesian usage—phrases that denote someone who is shameless or insensitive to public censure.

Mockery continues in references like *“gubernur Jatim punya profesi baru rencana nguliti Onta”* (“the East Java Governor has a new career plan: skinning camels”) and *“lebih baik jd tukang buah aja”* (“better off selling fruit”). The verb *“menguliti”* (to skin or peel) is used here as a satirical jab, referencing videos in which Khofifah promoted local fruits, such as

mangoes, pineapples, and durians, by personally peeling and showcasing them on social media. What was intended as a gesture of support for local agriculture was reinterpreted as frivolous and lacking political gravitas.

The fruit-based derision persisted through comments such as: *“Hidup Gubernur Dureen”* (“Long live the Durian Governor!”); *“Mau cari duda keren...”* (“[She’s] seeking a desirable widower” (Source: YouTube, Bang Indo, June 2025). These remarks synthesize ridicule with gendered implications. The epithet *“Gubernur Duren”* (“Durian Governor”) diminishes her public identity to that of a mere fruit promoter, while *“mau cari duda keren”* (“seeking a desirable widower”) constitutes personal attack, exploiting Khofifah’s widowed status. “Duren”—an alternative orthography for “durian”—functions as linguistic wordplay, serving as abbreviated form of *“duda keren”* (“desirable widower”). This latter mockery represents particularly acute gendered stigmatization, positioning her not simply as incompetent but as socially transgressive or desperate. Consequently, digital discourse simultaneously undermines her political legitimacy while instrumentalizing her gender and marital circumstances as vectors of symbolic vulnerability.

Harsh language also features prominently in the commentary, as seen in statements like *“Rakyatmu akeh sing nganggur kehuwen awakmu malah badokan wae”* (“Your people are unemployed and starving, and all you do is eat”), where the act of eating is described using *badokan*—a coarse Javanese term. The term appears repeatedly across posts, such as *“Gak mikirno rakyat, badokan yang diutamakan”* (“No thought for the people—just prioritizing gluttony”) or *“mbadhog troos”* (“just keeps on stuffing

her face”) (Source: YouTube @masyantopinginsukses9027, January 2025).

“*Badok*” (or more properly “*badhog*”) translates to “eat,” but it is one of the harshest possible terms for eating in Javanese—connoting animalistic consumption, gluttony, and a lack of self-restraint. The repeated use of this word is particularly telling when juxtaposed with references to “*rakyat*” (“the people”) who are described as “*nganggur*” (“unemployed”) and “*keluwen*” (“hungry”). In this rhetorical pairing, the image of a governor indulging in food becomes a symbolic affront to those struggling with poverty. These comments were directed at Khofifah in response to the many videos on her social media accounts showing her eating fruit—part of an effort to promote local produce from East Java farmers. While her intention was agricultural advocacy, netizens perceived the frequency and repetitiveness of these posts as tone-deaf and disconnected from the material hardships of her constituents. In contrast, the Governor of West Java was perceived as more attuned to urgent economic and moral issues, further sharpening the digital comparison.

The normalization of mockery and derision reflects a broader pattern of familiarized ridicule. The repeated use of crass language in social media comments, as well as its rapid uptake by other users, signals a process of verbal violence reproduction in online discourse. This shift marks a significant cultural departure: the traditional Javanese Superego, which has long emphasized *rasa* (empathy, emotional sensitivity) and *unggah-ungguh* (refined manners, decorum), appears to be in decline in the era of social media. These long-standing values, once considered

pillars of Javanese pride and social harmony, are now routinely overridden by the impulsive, emotionally driven expressions of the digital crowd. In such an environment, the Superego not only falters—it is actively sidelined by the performative immediacy of online outrage.

The process of denigrating others, a rejected aspect of Superego (Freud, 2023), is actually becoming increasingly prevalent in contemporary media. The goal is on the one hand, to vent emotions (which in Superego is usually controlled), and on the other hand, simply to express a different opinion to gain engagement and likes from netizens.

CONCLUSION

The Superego has grown increasingly fragile in the era of social media’s ascendancy. Where once the Id—the source of libidinal drives—was largely expressed through physical behavior, it now operates in a virtual realm, unleashing impulses with unprecedented immediacy. Anger and emotional outbursts are now freely discharged, often without the moderating influence of the Superego. In this climate, not only is the Superego weakened, but the Upper Subject—a figure elevated by public admiration—is rendered equally vulnerable. Someone positioned as an Upper Subject can be exalted with extraordinary fervor, only to be condemned en masse shortly thereafter. This shift from reverence to ridicule is often triggered by circumstances beyond the individual’s control, such as the resurfacing of old material or the sudden recontextualization of past behavior in a new socio-political moment.

Upper Subjects are especially susceptible to mockery, derision, and bullying from netizens with whom they

share no personal connection. These attacks are often carried out by individuals who also have no direct relationship with the person they are defending, further amplifying the abstraction of digital allegiance. The victims of this breakdown in Superego regulation are both male and female Upper Subjects, but the treatment they receive is often distinctly gendered.

It is evident that when the Superego ceases to function effectively, its consequences are unevenly distributed. In the case of the West Java Governor, the male Upper Subject capitalized on a key moment, one in which public office was strategically used to craft a persona that resonated with popular sentiment. His actions appeared to give voice to collective frustrations, allowing him to present himself as aligned with the netizenry. This earned him widespread support, particularly from members of his own ethnic community. Nonetheless, even this alignment proved precarious; when his actions entered more complex political terrain, especially those involving controversial figures or alliances, public support quickly deteriorated.

Conversely, the female governor in this study struggled to synchronize her public image with the expectations of her digital audience. Her content, largely conventional and ceremonial in nature, was perceived as irrelevant or ineffective in addressing the lived concerns of the population. As a result, she became the target of ridicule, often from within her own constituency. Her decline was not only the result of her own perceived inadequacies, but also of the contrasting presence of a male governor from another region, whose style of leadership and digital engagement were deemed more in tune with the social and political climate of her province.

Thus, the vulnerabilities of the Upper Subject in the social media era are shaped not only by the erosion of ethical restraint (Superego) but also by the intersection of timing, affect, and gender. In a digital environment where moral judgment is performed publicly, impulsively, and without mediation, the question is no longer simply whether the Superego is eroding, but who pays the price when it does.

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