Proceedings
of International Conference on Religion, Social and Humanities
Volume 4, 2025 | ISSN 3089-3356
Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab and Dakwah
Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.31958/proceedingsoficresh.v4i.93

Religion, Identity Politics, and Democracy in the Digital Era: A Constructivist Analysis of Indonesia's Buzzer Culture

Dikjiratmi[1,2]

[1]National Research and Innovation Agency, Jakarta, Indonesia
[2]Paramadina University, Jakarta, Indonesia
Correspondence: dikj001@brin.go.id

Abstract. The digital era in Indonesia is marked by a significant shift in the political and social landscape, where social media plays a central role in democratic discourse. This article analyzes the complex interaction between religion, identity politics, and democracy in contemporary Indonesia within the digital context, employing a constructivist framework from International Relations theory. Social media has both empowered citizen participation and become a fertile ground for polarization and the instrumentalization of religion-based identity politics. The phenomenon of organized political "buzzers" represents a systematic manipulation of public discourse through the social construction of political realities, identities, and norms. Analysis reveals that buzzer culture operates by creating false intersubjectivity, manipulating identity formation, and normalizing toxic political practices. The polarization of religious issues on digital platforms contributes to horizontal social conflict and threatens social harmony. In response, this study proposes a paradigm shift from content-based to process-based regulation, focusing on dismantling coordinated inauthentic behavior rather than merely removing individual content. This research highlights the urgency of building digital democratic resilience through multi-stakeholder collaboration, platform accountability, and critical digital literacy that enables citizens to recognize and resist social construction processes employed by manipulative actors.
Keywords: Digital Democracy, Identity Politics, Religion, Social Media, Constructivism

1. Introduction

The digital revolution has fundamentally transformed the landscape of political communication and participation globally, and Indonesia, as one of the world's largest democracies and most active social media populations, stands at the epicenter of this transformation. With over 200 million internet users and penetration rates exceeding 70 percent of the population, Indonesia has witnessed the rapid proliferation of digital platforms that have forged a new, vibrant, and often chaotic public sphere. This digital arena offers unprecedented opportunities for citizen engagement, political mobilization,

and democratic deliberation, creating what some scholars optimistically term a "digital public sphere" that could deepen democratic practice. However, this same digital ecosystem is fraught with profound challenges that test the resilience of Indonesia's democratic institutions and social fabric.

The rise of social media has coincided with a marked intensification of identity politics, particularly those rooted in religious sentiment, which has long been a powerful undercurrent in the nation's political dynamics. Indonesia's unique position as the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy makes the intersection of religion and politics particularly salient and complex. The digital era has not only amplified the visibility and impact of religious identity in the political arena but has also provided new tools for its manipulation and weaponization, leading to complex and often contradictory consequences for the country's democratic journey. Religious symbols, narratives, and identities are increasingly mobilized in digital spaces to create political divisions, delegitimize opponents, and consolidate power, raising fundamental questions about the compatibility of identity-based politics with democratic pluralism.

Recent scholarship has extensively documented the dual, paradoxical role of social media in Indonesian democracy. On one hand, it is celebrated as a tool for political empowerment and social change, enabling marginalized voices to be heard and facilitating grassroots movements for accountability and justice. Ilham and Pawane (2025) demonstrate how social media has emerged as a vital alternative and complementary channel for political participation, empowering ordinary citizens to monitor government performance, demand accountability, and organize for social change in real-time. On the other hand, social media is condemned as a vehicle for the dissemination of hate speech, disinformation, and the mobilization of intolerance, which has led to real-world violence and social fragmentation. Faizin et al. (2025) provide empirical evidence that religious issues are systematically instrumentalized on Indonesian Twitter to provoke polarization, with specific hashtags creating sharp "us versus them" dichotomies that contribute to horizontal social conflicts.

The emergence and normalization of "buzzer culture", the systematic use of paid social media operators to manipulate public opinion, has further contaminated the digital political landscape. This phenomenon, as documented by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS, 2024), raises grave concerns about the integrity of democratic processes, the authenticity of public opinion, and the erosion of trust in institutions. Buzzers are not merely spreaders of disinformation; they represent a sophisticated infrastructure of manipulation that has become normalized and even openly acknowledged by political actors. This normalization signals a deeper crisis in Indonesian democracy, where the boundaries between legitimate political communication and manipulative propaganda have become dangerously blurred.

This study delves into the complex interplay between religion, identity politics, and democracy within Indonesia's digital ecosystem. It seeks to understand how religious identities are constructed, contested, and instrumentalized in the digital

sphere, and how this dynamic process shapes, and is shaped by, the evolving contours of democratic politics. This article argues that a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon requires moving beyond conventional analyses of media effects or political sociology. It posits that the theoretical lens of constructivism from the field of International Relations offers a uniquely powerful framework for this purpose. While many studies have focused on the what (the content of disinformation) and the who (the actors involved), few have rigorously examined the how—the process through which digital interactions socially construct new political realities, identities, and norms.

By applying a constructivist approach, pioneered by scholars like Alexander Wendt, we can analyze how the intersubjective meanings of religion, nationhood, and citizenship are negotiated and contested on social media. This perspective allows us to see phenomena like buzzer culture not merely as information warfare, but as a fundamental process of social construction that actively shapes the identities and interests of political actors and redefines the normative fabric of Indonesian democracy itself. The research objective is therefore to analyze, through a constructivist lens, how digital platforms are transforming the relationship between religious identity and democratic practice in Indonesia, and to explore policy implications for building a more resilient and inclusive digital public sphere. This study contributes to the literature by providing a theoretically grounded analysis that bridges International Relations theory with digital politics, offering insights that are relevant not only for Indonesia but for other democracies grappling with similar challenges in the digital age.

2. Method

This research employs a qualitative methodology, primarily relying on a comprehensive literature review and an in-depth analysis of secondary data. The study synthesizes a wide range of academic publications, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference proceedings, alongside reports from credible research institutions and non-governmental organizations. The selection of literature was strategically focused on recent publications, primarily from 2020 to 2025, to ensure the analysis is grounded in the most current research, data, and case studies, particularly those covering the 2024 Indonesian general election and its digital campaign dynamics.

The analytical framework of this study is rooted in the principles of social constructivism, a prominent theoretical approach in International Relations. Pioneered by scholars like Alexander Wendt, constructivism posits that the social world, including the political world, is not a material given but is constructed through the interactions and shared understandings of actors (Wendt, 1999). It emphasizes the role of ideational factors—such as norms, identities, and intersubjective meanings—in shaping reality. As Wendt (1992) famously argued, "anarchy is what states make of it," suggesting that the structure of international politics is not determined by material capabilities alone but by the shared beliefs and understandings that actors bring to their interactions. This approach is particularly well-suited for analyzing the digital era, where reality is

increasingly mediated by technology and where online interactions play a crucial role in forming identities and collective beliefs.

In applying this framework to the study of digital politics in Indonesia, the research focuses on several core constructivist concepts. First, the social construction of reality allows us to analyze how digital platforms are not neutral conduits of information but are arenas where political realities are actively built through discourse and narrative. Second, treating identity as endogenous rather than exogenous means examining religious and political identities not as fixed, pre-existing variables, but as dynamic constructs that are shaped and reshaped through online interactions. Third, the concept of intersubjectivity helps us explore how buzzer culture and algorithmic echo chambers work to create "shared understandings" or intersubjective realities within specific online communities, which may be detached from empirical facts. Fourth, analyzing the co-constitution of agents and structures allows us to examine the recursive relationship between political actors (agents) and the digital environment (structure), understanding how actors like buzzers are shaped by the logic of social media platforms while simultaneously altering the normative structure of political discourse.

The data for this study comes from multiple sources. Academic literature provides theoretical grounding and comparative insights from other contexts. Reports from organizations like CSIS, MAFINDO, and Setara Institut offer empirical data on buzzer networks, disinformation campaigns, and religious intolerance in Indonesia. Case studies of specific elections, particularly the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and the 2024 national elections, provide concrete examples of how identity politics and buzzer culture operate in practice. By triangulating these diverse sources and analyzing them through a constructivist lens, the study aims to provide a nuanced interpretation of the deep, structural changes occurring at the intersection of religion, technology, and democracy in Indonesia.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Double-Edged Sword of Digital Democracy

The advent of the digital era in Indonesia has been a story of profound paradoxes. On one hand, digital platforms have undeniably democratized the public sphere, creating what Jürgen Habermas might have recognized as a new, albeit fragmented, space for public reason and deliberation. Social media has broken the traditional monopoly of state and corporate media, providing citizens with powerful tools for political expression, information dissemination, and collective action. The Arab Spring and other digital movements globally demonstrated the potential of social media to challenge authoritarian regimes and empower civil society. In Indonesia, similar dynamics have been observed, where social media campaigns have successfully pressured government accountability, exposed corruption, and mobilized support for social causes.

As Ilham and Pawane (2025) observe in their comprehensive study, social media has emerged as a vital "alternative and complementary channel for political participation" in Indonesia. It has enhanced the quality of democracy by making political processes more inclusive, transparent, and responsive to public concerns. Citizens can now monitor government performance in real-time, share information instantaneously, and organize collective action with unprecedented speed and scale. The interactive and open nature of social media empowers citizens to not only consume information but also to produce and disseminate their own content, challenging official narratives and holding power to account. This represents a significant shift from the passive consumption model of traditional media to an active, participatory model of digital citizenship.

However, the very features that make social media a force for democratization—its speed, reach, virality, and low barrier to entry—also make it a potent vector for societal division and democratic erosion. The anonymity and algorithmic amplification inherent in these platforms can create echo chambers and filter bubbles, reinforcing pre-existing biases and insulating users from opposing viewpoints. This environment has proven to be a fertile ground for polarization and conflict. Algorithms designed to maximize engagement often prioritize sensational, emotional, and divisive content, as such content generates more clicks, shares, and comments. This creates a perverse incentive structure where the most extreme voices are amplified, while moderate and nuanced perspectives are drowned out.

A seminal study by Faizin et al. (2025) on Indonesian Twitter demonstrates how religious issues are systematically instrumentalized to provoke polarization. Their analysis of 23,433 tweets revealed that specific hashtags related to religious identity and ideology—such as #salafi, #syiah (Shia), #khilafah (caliphate), #radikal (radical), and #kafir (infidel)—are frequently deployed to create sharp "us versus them" dichotomies. These hashtags do not merely describe religious positions; they function as weapons in identity warfare, marking boundaries between in-groups and out-groups, and delegitimizing political opponents by associating them with religious deviance or extremism. The study found that 64.5 percent of respondents agreed that religious concerns can cause social strife, and 44 percent believed that debates over religious matters have little influence on their opinions, yet indicated that such debates contribute to horizontal conflicts. This digital polarization is not a harmless online debate; it has tangible real-world consequences, contributing to what the authors term "horizontal social conflicts" and a general erosion of social harmony and trust.

3.2. Constructing Threats and Enemies: A Constructivist Analysis of Buzzer Culture

The most pernicious development in Indonesia's digital landscape is the professionalization and normalization of "buzzer culture." This phenomenon, as meticulously documented by CSIS (2024), involves organized, often well-funded campaigns to manipulate public opinion through an army of paid social media operators and bot networks. The buzzer industry has evolved from informal groups of volunteers

during Jokowi's 2012 Jakarta campaign to sophisticated agencies offering professional services openly advertised on platforms like Instagram and e-commerce sites. By the 2024 elections, buzzer culture had become so normalized that politicians openly acknowledged using such services, and the practice was treated as a legitimate form of political marketing rather than a threat to democratic integrity.

From a constructivist perspective, the danger of buzzers lies not merely in the dissemination of "fake news" or disinformation, but in their role as powerful agents of social construction. They are actively engaged in the business of manufacturing reality, not just distorting it. Drawing on Wendt's (1992) foundational argument that "anarchy is what states make of it," we can posit that the digital public sphere is what its most effective actors make of it. Buzzer culture demonstrates a deliberate and systematic effort to construct a specific version of political reality through the manipulation of intersubjective meanings. They do this by creating and endlessly repeating narratives that frame certain individuals or groups as existential threats to the nation or religion, thereby constructing the identities of political actors in ways that serve their clients' interests.

Creating False Intersubjectivity

One of the core insights of constructivism is that social structures are constituted by shared understandings, or what Wendt calls "intersubjective knowledge." This shared knowledge shapes how actors perceive themselves and others, and thus influences their behavior. Buzzers exploit this principle by creating what can be termed "false intersubjectivity"—an illusion of widespread social consensus that may not actually exist organically. Through the sheer volume of posts, likes, retweets, and trending hashtags, they create the appearance that a particular viewpoint is dominant or that a particular candidate has overwhelming popular support. This manufactured consensus exerts powerful normative pressure on other users. Social psychology research has long demonstrated that individuals are influenced by perceived majority opinions, even when those perceptions are inaccurate. When users see a hashtag trending or a narrative being repeated by hundreds of accounts, they may assume it reflects genuine public sentiment and adjust their own views accordingly, or at least remain silent for fear of being attacked by the buzzer swarm.

This process effectively distorts the deliberative process that is the lifeblood of a healthy democracy. Democratic deliberation requires that citizens have access to diverse perspectives and can form opinions based on reasoned debate rather than manufactured consensus. When buzzers create the illusion that "everyone" supports a particular position or opposes a particular candidate, they short-circuit this deliberative process. Users who might otherwise voice dissenting opinions may self-censor, believing themselves to be in a small minority. This creates a spiral of silence that reinforces the false consensus, making it increasingly difficult for alternative viewpoints to gain traction.

Constructing and Manipulating Identity

Constructivism teaches that identity is relational and formed through interaction with an "Other." As Wendt argues, identities are not fixed attributes but are produced and reproduced through social practices. Buzzer campaigns excel at this process of "othering," which is fundamental to identity construction. They do not simply appeal to pre-existing religious or ethnic identities; they actively frame and reframe these identities in oppositional terms, creating new boundaries and intensifying existing divisions. For example, by relentlessly labeling political opponents as "anti-Islam," "pro-asing" (pro-foreign), "komunis" (communist), or "antek asing" (foreign lackeys), they are not just describing; they are engaging in a performative speech act that constructs the identity of their target as an enemy of the collective "us."

This process was starkly evident in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, where Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), a Chinese Christian incumbent, faced Muslim opponents. A targeted disinformation campaign by an army of buzzers featured manipulated clips of a campaign speech by Ahok referencing verses from the Quran. The buzzers framed Ahok's identity not just as a political opponent but as a blasphemer and a threat to Islam itself. This construction of Ahok's identity as fundamentally incompatible with the Muslim majority's values was so effective that it led to massive street protests, his eventual defeat, and his imprisonment on blasphemy charges. The target's identity was thus socially constructed as illegitimate through coordinated digital manipulation, making political attacks seem not only permissible but necessary for the defense of the in-group's religious identity.

This identity manipulation was refined in subsequent elections. In the 2024 presidential campaign, buzzers were instrumental in rehabilitating the image of Prabowo Subianto, a former general with a controversial human rights record. Through viral videos of Prabowo dancing, AI-generated cartoon avatars portraying him as friendly and approachable, and historical retellings that downplayed his military past, buzzers reconstructed Prabowo's identity from that of an authoritarian figure to a grandfatherly, relatable leader. This demonstrates the constructivist principle that identities are not fixed but can be actively reshaped through sustained discursive practices.

The Co-constitution of Agents and Structures

A central tenet of constructivism is the co-constitutive relationship between agents and structures. Structures do not simply constrain agents, nor do agents simply create structures; rather, they mutually constitute each other through ongoing interaction. This dynamic reveals itself clearly in the relationship between buzzers (agents) and social media platforms (structures). The buzzers are certainly shaped by the technological architecture and algorithmic logic of social media platforms. They exploit features designed for engagement—such as the retweet function, trending algorithms, and recommendation systems—to spread their narratives. The platforms' business models, which prioritize user engagement over content quality, create an environment where sensational and polarizing content thrives.

However, through their persistent practices, these agents are also transforming the structure itself. They are changing the normative structure of political discourse in Indonesia. The use of harsh, polarizing, and often fabricated identity-based attacks, once considered beyond the pale of acceptable political behavior, has become normalized. As politicians openly admit to using buzzer services and as major political parties allocate significant budgets for digital campaigns that include buzzer operations, the practice is legitimized. This normalization creates a new set of informal rules for the political game, where success is measured not by the quality of policy proposals or the integrity of candidates, but by the effectiveness of one's digital manipulation apparatus.

This new structure, in turn, socializes the next generation of voters and political actors into accepting this form of politics as normal. Young voters who have grown up with social media may not remember a time when political discourse was not dominated by buzzers and viral disinformation. They are being socialized into a political culture where truth is less important than virality, where identity-based attacks are standard practice, and where the loudest voice wins regardless of factual accuracy. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle of democratic erosion, where each election further entrenches the buzzer culture and makes it more difficult to restore norms of civil discourse and evidence-based debate.

3.3. Responding to the Challenge: Religious Moderation and Building Digital Resilience

In response to the rising tide of digital extremism and polarization, the Indonesian government, along with major civil society organizations, has championed the concept of "religious moderation" (moderasi beragama). This initiative, which gained prominence following Presidential Regulation Number 58 of 2023 on the Strengthening of Religious Moderation, aims to promote a tolerant, inclusive, and context-aware understanding of religion that is in harmony with Indonesia's national ideology of Pancasila. As Zaluchu et al. (2025) note in their comprehensive bibliometric analysis of research on religious moderation published between 2020 and 2024, the concept has become a central theme in academic and policy discourse. Their analysis reveals that religious moderation in Indonesia is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that integrates socio-religious, cultural, and implementation dimensions.

The religious moderation program focuses heavily on education, seeking to instill values of tolerance, multiculturalism, and national commitment from a young age. It involves curriculum development, training for religious leaders and educators, and public campaigns promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding. The program also addresses the root causes of radicalism, which Zaluchu et al. identify as including mental health factors, economic grievances, political constellations, and low religious commitment due to narrow interpretations of religious texts. By addressing these underlying factors, the program aims to build resilience against extremist narratives.

From a constructivist viewpoint, the religious moderation campaign can be understood as a counter-constructivist project. It is an attempt to build a competing

intersubjective reality—one where the dominant shared understanding of Indonesian Islam is one of peace, tolerance, and compatibility with democracy and pluralism. It is a struggle over the social construction of religious identity itself. The government and civil society organizations are trying to construct an alternative narrative that frames Indonesian Islam as inherently moderate, drawing on the traditions of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the country's two largest Islamic organizations, which have historically promoted a tolerant and inclusive interpretation of Islam. This counter-narrative seeks to delegitimize extremist interpretations by positioning them as foreign imports that are incompatible with Indonesian culture and values.

This effort is complemented by numerous grassroots initiatives focused on digital literacy and fact-checking. Organizations like MAFINDO (Masyarakat Anti Fitnah Indonesia) and networks like Cek Fakta, which comprises around 6,000 fact-checkers working with 25 media organizations, are engaged in identifying and debunking disinformation. Youth-led social media initiatives such as What Is Up Indonesia and Bijak Memilih encourage increased youth engagement in politics through clear, accurate, and timely information. These initiatives represent a bottom-up approach to building digital resilience, empowering citizens to become critical consumers of information.

However, while these efforts are essential, a purely technical approach to fact-checking is insufficient to counter the constructivist power of buzzer campaigns. A user who has been socialized into a particular identity-based worldview is often immune to factual correction. Research on motivated reasoning and confirmation bias demonstrates that individuals tend to reject information that contradicts their pre-existing beliefs, especially when those beliefs are tied to their sense of identity. When a buzzer campaign successfully constructs a political opponent as an enemy of Islam, presenting factual evidence to the contrary may not change minds, because the issue is not about facts but about identity. The disinformation serves to reinforce the user's socially constructed identity and sense of belonging to an in-group, making it psychologically costly to abandon the false narrative.

Therefore, building true digital resilience requires a more profound approach. It necessitates fostering a critical digital literacy that goes beyond identifying hoaxes and fact-checking individual claims. It must equip citizens with the ability to recognize the process of social construction itself—to understand how narratives are framed, how identities are manipulated, how false consensus is manufactured, and how algorithms amplify certain voices while silencing others. This is about deconstructing the techniques of the buzzers and empowering citizens to become more conscious and critical participants in the digital public sphere. It requires teaching media literacy not just as a technical skill but as a form of critical thinking that enables citizens to question the sources, motivations, and effects of the information they encounter online.

3.4. Policy Recommendations: Shifting from Content-Based to Process-Based Regulation

Based on the constructivist analysis of the challenges facing Indonesian democracy in the digital age, this study proposes a fundamental paradigm shift in digital regulation: moving from content-based regulation to process-based regulation. Current Indonesian regulations, particularly the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE) and Ministry of Communication and Informatics Regulation No. 5/2020, focus primarily on removing illegal or harmful content. This approach is reactive and suffers from the "whack-a-mole" problem—new content appears faster than it can be moderated, and removing individual pieces of content does not address the infrastructure that produces them. Moreover, content-based regulation carries significant risks of censorship and can be used to silence legitimate criticism.

Process-based regulation, by contrast, targets the mechanisms of manipulation rather than just the output. It focuses on dismantling coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB), increasing platform transparency and accountability, and empowering citizens with the tools to recognize and resist manipulation. This approach is informed by international best practices, including the European Union's Digital Services Act and Meta's policies on coordinated inauthentic behavior.

Key Policy Recommendations:

a. Legal Definition and Prohibition of Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior

Indonesia should revise UU ITE or incorporate into the upcoming Cyber Security and Resilience Bill (RUU KKS) a clear legal definition of CIB and explicit prohibitions against it. CIB should be defined as coordinated actions using fake accounts, duplicate accounts, or accounts that conceal their true identity to create an illusion of public support, manipulate platform algorithms, conduct mass harassment campaigns, or spread misleading information about democratic processes. Penalties should be substantial, including imprisonment and significant fines, to deter such behavior. Importantly, the law should protect legitimate uses of pseudonyms for privacy and security, and should require transparency for paid political content.

b. Mandate Platform Transparency and Accountability

Major social media platforms operating in Indonesia should be required to provide quarterly transparency reports detailing their detection and removal of CIB networks, including the number of networks removed, the number of accounts involved, the topics or narratives promoted, and the methodologies used for detection. Platforms should also provide a public ad library where all political advertisements are archived with information about sponsors, spending, reach, and targeting criteria. Additionally, platforms should provide limited data access to verified academic researchers through a Research API, enabling independent audits of platform policies and algorithmic impacts.

c. Establish a Multi-Stakeholder Governance Framework

A formal multi-stakeholder body should be established, comprising government agencies (BSSN, Kominfo), platform representatives, academic researchers, civil society organizations, and ethical hacker communities. This body would co-develop policy, share threat intelligence, oversee implementation of digital resilience strategies, and provide oversight to prevent government overreach. This Public-Private Dialogue approach ensures that regulation is informed by diverse perspectives and technical expertise.

d. Implement a Trusted Flagger Program

Following the EU Digital Services Act model, Indonesia should establish a "Trusted Flagger" program that grants special status to verified fact-checking organizations, academic institutions, and NGOs focused on digital rights. Trusted flaggers would have priority review for their reports, access to special dashboards to track report status, and the ability to report entire networks rather than just individual content. This leverages the expertise of civil society while reducing the burden on government agencies.

e. Mandate Disclosure for Paid Political Content

All political content that is paid for or sponsored should be clearly labeled as such, with information about who paid for it and how much was spent. This should be enforced through regulations from the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), with penalties for non-compliance including fines and potential candidate disqualification.

f. Pilot Project: "Clean Election Districts"

Before full national implementation, conduct pilot projects in 3-5 districts with upcoming local elections. These pilots would feature enhanced monitoring by BSSN and platforms, rapid response teams to address CIB, intensive public education campaigns on digital literacy, and real-time transparency dashboards showing detected and removed CIB networks. Independent evaluation of these pilots would inform national rollout.

These recommendations recognize that technical solutions alone are insufficient. Building digital democratic resilience requires a comprehensive approach that combines smart regulation, platform accountability, civil society engagement, and public education. It requires treating the digital public sphere not as a purely technical domain but as a social and political space where the future of Indonesian democracy is being contested and constructed.

4. Conclusion

The intersection of religion, identity politics, and democracy in Indonesia's digital era presents a formidable challenge to the nation's future. The digital public sphere, once hailed as a harbinger of democratic deepening, has also become a battleground where identities are weaponized, realities are manufactured, and the very foundations of social trust are eroded. The phenomenon of buzzer culture, in particular,

represents a sophisticated and normalized form of political manipulation that threatens the integrity of the democratic process and the fabric of Indonesian society.

This article has argued that a constructivist lens from International Relations theory provides a crucial analytical tool for understanding this complex dynamic. It allows us to see beyond the surface of disinformation and to recognize the deeper processes of social construction at play. Buzzer culture is not merely about spreading lies; it is about fundamentally reshaping the shared understandings, identities, and norms that constitute Indonesia's political reality. Buzzers are agents of normative change, pushing the political culture towards greater polarization, intolerance, and the erosion of democratic norms. They create false intersubjectivity, manipulate identity formation through othering and framing, and through their practices, co-constitute a new, more toxic structure of political discourse.

The religious moderation initiative represents an important counter-constructivist project, attempting to build an alternative intersubjective reality based on tolerance, pluralism, and the compatibility of Islam with democracy. However, this effort must be complemented by more robust regulatory frameworks and digital literacy programs that go beyond fact-checking to teach citizens how to recognize and resist the social construction processes employed by manipulative actors. In response, efforts to build digital democratic resilience must be equally sophisticated. They must move beyond reactive content moderation and simple fact-checking to engage in a proactive project of re-construction. This involves a multi-pronged strategy of regulatory reform focused on process rather than content, platform accountability through transparency and data access, and most importantly, the cultivation of a critical citizenry capable of deconstructing manipulative narratives and participating in the co-creation of a more inclusive and tolerant digital public sphere. The struggle for the soul of Indonesian democracy will be won or lost not just in the polling booths, but in the daily, contested construction of meaning on the nation's digital platforms. The choices that Indonesia makes today, in its laws, its educational curricula, its platform regulations, and its civic culture, will determine whether the digital era becomes a tool for democratic deepening or democratic decay.

References

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge. Anchor Books.

Center for Strategic and International Studies. (2024, December 17). Democracy in the digital age: How buzzer culture is stinging Indonesia's democracy. https://www.csis.org/blogs/new-perspectives-asia/democracy-digital-age-how-buzzer-culture-stinging-indonesias-democracy

European Commission. (2022, October 27). The digital services act: Ensuring a safe and accountable online environment. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act_en

Faizin, B., Fitri, S. A., AS, E., Maylawati, D. S., Rizqullah, N., & Ramdhani, M. A. (2025). Polarization of religious issues in Indonesia's social media society and its impact on social conflict. Journal of Applied Data Sciences, 6(1), 426–442. https://bright-journal.org/Journal/index.php/JADS/article/download/447/336

Ilham, I., & Pawane, A. R. (2025). The role of social media as a medium of democracy in Indonesia. Journal of Contemporary Local Politics, 4(1), 43–54. https://www.journal.ppishk.org/index.php/jclp/article/download/719/169

Meta. (2023). Community standards: Inauthentic behavior. Meta Transparency Center. https://transparency.meta.com/policies/community-standards/inauthentic-behavior/

Murero, M., Bresciani, S., Cantoni, F., Paoloni, P., & Sarti, D. (2023). Coordinated inauthentic behavior: An innovative manipulation tactic during the COVID-19 pandemic. PLOS ONE, 18(3), Article e0283541. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0283541

Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics. International Organization, 46(2), 391–425. https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081830002722X

Wendt, A. (1999). Social theory of international politics. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511612183

Zaluchu, S. E., Widodo, P., & Kriswanto, A. (2025). Conceptual reconstruction of religious moderation in the Indonesian context based on previous research: Bibliometric analysis. Social Sciences & Humanities Open, 11, Article 101552. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.101552