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Digital citizenship's ambiguity in cancel culture: from moral activism to cyberbullying

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Abstract This study analysed critical discourse on digital citizens' comments regarding the Ridwan Kamil-Lisa Mariana case and interprets the concept of digital citizenship. This study used a qualitative approach with Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (text, discourse practice, and socio-cultural practice). Data was collected using netnography techniques from 4,289 comments on the YouTube platform from six news and entertainment channels. The data was processed with NVivo 15 and visualised through matrix coding queries and word clouds. The results of the study show: 1. Critical discourse analysis on the text dimension shows that digital citizens' comments often use religious and moral diction such as 'adultery', 'sin', 'mistress', 'cheap', which function as labelling and symbolic punishment. The discourse practice dimension shows that comments easily spread following viral trends, so that emotional opinions are more quickly accepted than clarifications, resulting in moral activism turning into collective surveillance. The socio-cultural dimension is related to religious culture and social control in Indonesia, but in the digital space, these values have changed into mass pressure and digital vigilantism. 2. The shift from activism to bullying occurs due to virality, accompanied by negative labelling and religious undertones. Digital citizens tend to ignore four crucial elements related to digital citizenship, such as ethics, law, literacy, and rights and responsibilities. Therefore, these four elements need to be strengthened so that online participation does not turn into bullying.

Keywords: activism; cancel culture; digital citizenship; digital bullying

INTRODUCTION

Bullying cases are becoming increasingly common as access to information through digital devices becomes easier. *The Centre for Digital Society* (CfDS) has recorded that 1,895 students aged 13-18 years in 34 provinces have experienced *cyberbullying* (Herliana, A., & Muawiyah, 2024). Data from UNICEF found that 45% of 2,777 respondents aged 14-24 years had been victims (Nusamara & Putra, 2024), and Ditch the Label reported that 42% of respondents had experienced similar incidents. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) also noted 51 cases of child abuse in the digital world in its 2024 report referenced by the House of Representatives, although these figures does not necessarily reflect the actual situation. Therefore, technological advances need to be balanced with the strengthening of ethical values and awareness of digital citizenship, such as the ability of individuals to behave responsibly and ethically in the digital space. A report from Microsoft's *Digital Civility Index* (DCI) shows that Indonesia has the lowest level of digital civility in Southeast Asia with a score of 76, and data from the Indonesian National Police in 2022 recorded 1,082 reports *of cyberbullying* (Martha., 2024); (CNN Indonesia, 2021).

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Research by Damanik & Djuwita (2019) found that bullying in Indonesian high schools is quite prevalent. The most common form is verbal bullying, usually occurring in class and during breaks. Victims and witnesses tend to remain silent, while perpetrators consider such behaviour normal, citing reasons related to the victim's character. This trend highlights the importance of strengthening ethical values and digital citizenship, namely the ability to act responsibly and ethically in the digital space. Furthermore, this pattern indicates that digital activities are increasingly blurring the line between community involvement and online harassment, requiring society to rethink how it understands responsible digital behaviour.

The weak protection of victims in the digital space also opens the door to the emergence of a more subtle but widespread form of mass-based violence, namely, *cancel culture*. The phenomenon of *cancel culture* on social media facilitates the exchange of information and changes the way users interact with each other (Amalia, Untari, & Arafah, 2023), as well as creating a culture of cancellation towards individuals or brands that are considered inappropriate (Costa & Azevedo, 2024). This study uses the cases of RK (Ridwan Kamil) and LM (Lisa Mariana) as public cases that have been widely reported, making them ethically suitable for discourse analysis. In Indonesia, this phenomenon has turned the space for public participation in the digital realm into an arena for mass judgement, as in the case of Ridwan Kamil, who was accused of having a child from a relationship with Lisa Mariana. The accusation spread rapidly and sparked criticism of his integrity, even though RK had undergone a DNA test proving that the child was not his biological child. Ridwan Kamil rejected the offer of a settlement and continued with the legal process until Lisa Mariana was named a suspect. This case has shown that the digital space is not only a place for citizen participation but is also prone to misinterpretation of the meaning of posts and comments, thereby violating public morality (CNN Indonesia, 2025).

Research by Yanuar et al. (2023) views *cancel culture* as social control on Twitter, while Waani & Wempi (2021), emphasise its effectiveness as a social movement. Meanwhile, Altungy et al. (2025) found a shift in the purpose of *cancel culture*, which is being exploited by politicians to attack their opponents, and that there is abuse. Then, Bouvier & Machin (2021) revealed the public's response in the form of insults and abuse towards influencers who spread hoaxes, reflecting digital bullying behaviour. This study highlights a gap in research on the shift in the role of digital citizens from activism to mass judgment. There are not many studies that discuss the use of moral and religious language as symbolic punishment and the role of virality and algorithms in reinforcing judgment. Through the case of Ridwan Kamil, this study conceptualises *cancel culture* as an ambiguity of digital citizenship in the socio-religious context of Indonesia, emphasising the contrast between the speed of judgement on social media and the slowness of the formal legal process.

The urgency of this research is to highlight the ambiguity in the practice of digital citizenship in Indonesia, as reflected in the case *of cancel culture* against public figures such as Ridwan Kamil. The digital space has two sides: on the one hand, it functions as an arena for activism and positive social control over the accountability of officials, but on the other hand, this practice has the potential to degenerate into digital bullying and *digital mob justice* (mass judgement) that can damage reputations before the truth is verified. This is clearly seen in the speed of judgement by digital citizens compared to DNA test results or legal processes. This study aims to understand the meaning and practice of *cancel culture* in digital communities and to reveal the ideology, values, and ambiguities of digital citizenship that arise in digital citizen interactions. Based on the above issues, the research questions in this study are as follows: How can critical discourse analysis be applied to digital citizens' comments on the Ridwan Kamil-Lisa Mariana case? And how can the concept of digital citizenship be interpreted in the context of the Ridwan Kamil-Lisa Mariana case?

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design with *Critical* Discourse Analysis (*CDA)* as the main analytical framework. This analysis focused on the relationship between legitimacy, power, ideology, and values embedded in the practice of digital citizenship. The unit of analysis in this study is YouTube comments related to public discourse surrounding *cancel culture* towards Ridwan Kamil. CDA in this study specifically refers to Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model, which consists of (1) the text dimension, which examines the diction, labelling, and

linguistic structure used in digital discourse; (2) the discourse practice dimension, which analyses the production, distribution, and consumption of texts on social media platforms; and (3) the socio-cultural practice dimension, which connects discourse with the broader cultural context, public morality, and social structures of Indonesian society. Fairclough's model was chosen because it is considered as the most appropriate compared to other CDA models, such as those developed by Wodak and van Dijk, as it comprehensively links the micro-linguistic features in the text with power relations and socio-cultural structures at the macro level, making it relevant for analysing the dynamics of political and moral discourse in the digital space.

Data collection was conducted through ethnographic data collection, namely through observation of the activities and interactions of digital citizens on social media platforms without face-to-face contact. In this study, ethnography was not positioned as the main approach but as a technique for accessing cultural data in the digital space, as explained by (Kozinets, 2016). This technique was used to record comments, posts, and responses from digital citizens regarding the practice *of cancel culture* against Ridwan Kamil. The stages involved were problem identification, data collection through observation of comments, data integration, and communication of analysis results. Data analysis was conducted through thematic coding. In the initial stage, digital text data (comments, posts, responses) were given initial codes such as public morality, privacy, freedom of expression, bullying, and citizenship identity. These codes were then sub-coded, and the researchers created analytical categories used in the discussion, namely moral activism, *digital outrage*, *vigilantism*, and *civic responsibility*. The process of organising and visualising data was assisted by the NVivo 15 software to create *word clouds* and matrices and to map the frequency of word occurrence and the connections between categories.

All coding results were then reread using Fairclough's three dimensions of CDA to examine the relationship between the language used by digital citizens, how this discourse spreads on social media, and the Indonesian sociocultural context, which can be explained comprehensively. Through a combination of CDA as an analytical framework and netnography as a data collection technique, this study seeks to uncover the practice *of cancel culture* in Indonesia, which represents the ambiguity of digital citizenship, namely the tension between the moral participation of digital citizens and the potential for collective bullying in the digital space.

Table 1. List of YouTube videos and number of comments related to the Ridwan Kamil Case

No	Video title and YouTube link	Date upload	Number of comments
1.	Ridwan Kamil Finally Speaks Out After Lisa Mariana Goes Viral Claiming to Be His Mistress (Tribun Lampung News Video) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekA8QyLyz84&t=50s	27 March 2025	1. 029
2.	Breaking News - National Police Criminal Investigation Agency Announces DNA Test Results for Ridwan Kamil, Lisa Mariana, and Their Child (Kompas TV) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L08Pp3uBWI8	20 August 2025	747
3.	Ridwan Kamil Dragged into Adultery Scandal with Lisa Mariana, Here Are 5 Facts (Cumicumi) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQVEkKy2SRs&t=49s	5 September 2025	2,336
4.	Saut Situmorang Highlights KPK's Investigation of Lisa Mariana Regarding BJB Corruption, Due to Receiving Money from RK? (Kompas TV Medan) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-0fbukFskA&t=1s	9 September 2025	37
5.	Investigated for Defamation of RK, Lisa Mariana Requests DNA Comparison Test in Singapore (Kompas TV) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6K7z6KCLK88&t=137s	5 October 2025	55
6.	Lisa Mariana Officially Named Suspect in Ridwan Kamil Defamation Case! Kiss Pagi (Indosiar) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgXRpaIXVDU&t=11s	15 October 2025	85
	Total		4,289

Source: Author (2025)

The research data was obtained from the YouTube digital platform. The researcher chose YouTube because, after searching for the platform with the most comments and most relevant to the context of this study, compared to other platforms where people tend to comment less. In addition, YouTube was chosen because it is open, contains long comments, and provides a broad public discussion space. Data was obtained from six YouTube videos discussing the case of Ridwan Kamil's affair with Lisa Mariana from March to October 2025. Each

video comment was observed and documented using Google Colab for data collection, followed by coding using NVivo. There were 4,289 comments successfully collected from publicly available data sources with anonymised usernames to protect privacy. The following table details the data sources used.

The YouTube channels in Table 1 were selected *purposefully* because they met two data requirements: official news channels such as Kompas TV, Kompas TV Medan, and Tribun Lampung provided verified information so that comments could be read as responses to credible information, while entertainment channels such as Indosiar and Cumicumi provided a more expressive and emotional space for comments. Thus, the combination of the two produces diverse and relevant discourse data to analyse how digital citizens form and spread *cancel culture* against Ridwan Kamil in the digital space. The validity of the data is maintained by comparing various sources and methods such as comments, news, and digital uploads from these sources, then the researchers match the results between netnographic observations and discourse analysis. Therefore, all data is recorded in detail to ensure the transparency and traceability of the research results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CDA of the ambiguity of digital citizenship in the case of Ridwan Kamil-Lisa Mariana

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) in this study aims to understand how the language used by internet users in YouTube comment sections shapes power relations, moral views, and values as digital citizens. This study uses a three-dimensional approach (Fairclough, 1995) to comprehensively examine how text, discourse dissemination processes, and socio-cultural backgrounds are interrelated in the practice *of cancel culture,* particularly in the case of Ridwan Kamil and Lisa Mariana. This approach aims to look more deeply at how public morality is symbolically formed through digital language.

The textual dimension in critical discourse analysis focuses on word choice, use of metaphors, and sentence structure that appear in thousands of comments on the YouTube platform. The findings show that the language used in the digital space is not neutral but rather reflects moral and religious concepts. Words such as *adultery, sin,* and *home wrecker* are clear evidence that digital citizens' comments tend to be morally judgemental towards women. Examples of comments provided by the initials MK *are "there are no moral adulterers"* and KW "*So teach immoral women a lesson through legal channels*". According to Elanda & Pitaloka (2022), netizen comments related to online gender-based violence contain a variety of digital content in the form of text, images, memes, videos, and news about perpetrators, which have positioned women as legitimate objects to be insulted, ridiculed, and intimidated through social media. The language in these comments functions as a symbolic tool of power to distinguish between categories of citizens who are considered good and bad through negative labelling of certain figures. According to Dunsby & Howes (2019), online labelling and bullying of individuals results in shame and public condemnation of the individuals targeted. However, positive words such as *'be patient*' and *'pray'* were also found, reflecting empathy and ethical awareness among some digital citizens. This certainly shows that language on social media has become an arena for a battle of values between efforts to maintain ethics and the urge to punish openly. Based on the results of data visualisation using *word clouds,* it can be seen that these comments reveal practices of *digital vigilantism* (judging without legal process) and *digital outrage* (collective moral anger). Both phenomena indicate symbolic violence that is often gender-based. In general, language on social media serves a dual function: as a tool for social control and as a means of collective emotional release. The following are the results of the researcher's analysis of YouTube comments, visualised in the form *of a word cloud*.

The *word cloud* on Figure 1 shows the words that appear most frequently in the comments section of digital citizens. Words such as *'pelakor' (adulteress), 'murahan' (cheap), 'gila' (crazy), 'bodoh' (stupid),* and *'jelek' (ugly)* indicate the use of emotional, harsh, and degrading language towards women, both morally and physically. This pattern shows that criticism of public behaviour often shifts into a form of symbolic punishment, where digital citizens create an image of *'disgraceful women'* through insulting words. According to Huang (2023) in China, populist nationalism and gender issues often give rise to discourse that can be detrimental to women.

Figure 1. Word cloud of digital outrage categories
Source: Data processed by the researcher using NVivo 15 (2025)

The discourse practice dimension in this analysis focuses on how information is created, disseminated, and received in the digital space. Online media is the main source for the dissemination of news, which is then responded to by digital citizens through comments, *likes*, and various other forms of interaction. This process forms an interactive discourse cycle in which, when news is published, digital citizens respond through comments, and these responses gain support from other users, thereby reinforcing the moral meaning that is developing in the digital space. Tippett (2024) in the UK expressed a similar view, noting the occurrence of vigilante justice and linking it to the dynamics of digital discourse that can shape collective moral meaning through interactions on social media. In this context, discourse on social media is not passive. Each user plays an active role in shaping and expanding the meanings that circulate. Viral phenomena and social media algorithms can accelerate the spread of moral opinions, turning comment sections into open spaces for constructing collective 'moral truths'. However, the results of data processing also show that digital citizen participation is triggered more by moral emotions such as judgement and *body shaming* than by ethical and reflective thinking. This indicates that social awareness in digital citizenship practices is still relatively weak. The following Figure 2 are the results of the researcher's analysis showing the relationship between themes and dimensions of digital citizenship in YouTube comments.

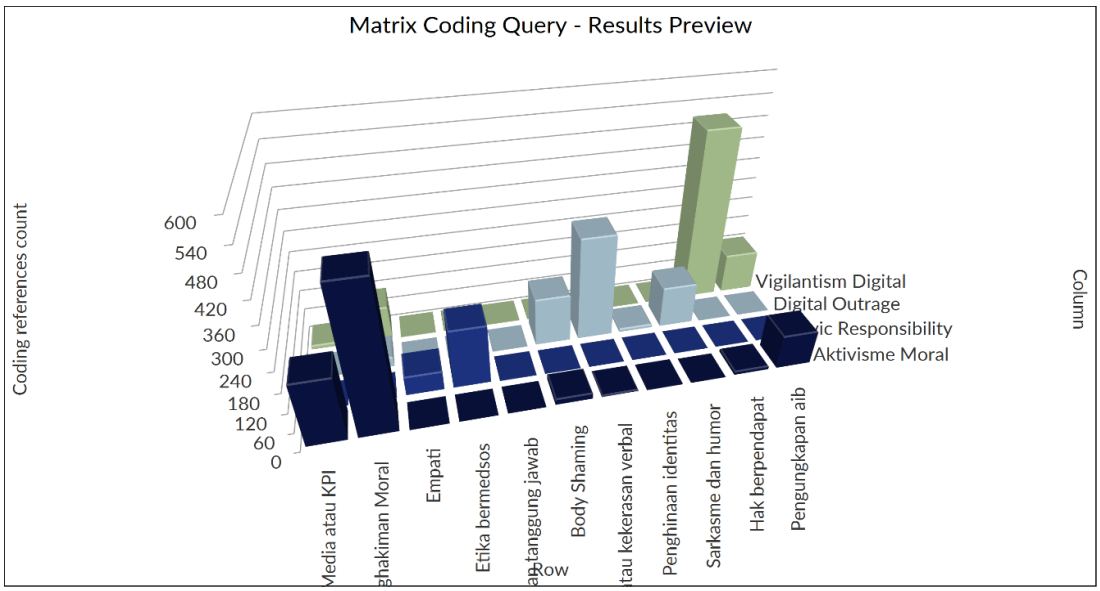

Figure 2. Matrix coding query
Source: Data processed by the researcher using NVivo 15 (2025)

Based on the *Matrix Coding Query* graph, there are three main parts. The X-axis shows various themes that frequently appear in digital citizen conversations, such as media or KPIs, moral judgement, empathy, social media ethics, *body shaming,* and exposure of shameful acts. The Y-axis depicts the height of the bars, which shows how often these themes are discussed or associated with certain categories. Meanwhile, the Z-axis shows the four categories in this

research concept that form the basis of analysis in this study, namely moral activism, *civic responsibility*, *digital outrage*, and *digital vigilantism*. The graph shows that the theme of moral judgement is the most dominant and is closely related to the categories *of digital vigilantism* and *digital outrage*. This indicates that the practice *of cancel culture* in Indonesia often begins with a moral judgement of a person's behaviour, which then develops into collective action to punish them. Moral activism, which should be a positive form of social control, has instead turned into surveillance and negative labelling of individuals in the digital space.

Themes such as *body shaming* and identity insults also appear frequently in the category *of digital outrage*. This indicates that moral outrage is often expressed not only through ethical arguments but also through attacks on a person's physical appearance or personal life. According to Mayer & Vanderheiden (2021), *body shaming* is physical abuse on social media. This results in ethical studies that should be constructive turning into a form of symbolic violence. Based on the data processing results, it also shows that digital citizen participation is more triggered by moral emotions such as judgement and *body shaming* than by ethical and reflective thinking. This indicates that social awareness in digital citizenship practices is still relatively low. Conversely, themes that reflect good digital citizenship, such as empathy, social media ethics, and social responsibility, appear less frequently and are more often associated with the category of civic responsibility. This shows that digital citizen participation in the digital space is more predominantly driven by emotions and solidarity in anger than by ethical reflection and a sense of social responsibility. As a result, the right to express oneself becomes more prominent, while the obligation to maintain dignity, empathy, and privacy is often neglected.

Overall, this graph shows the tension between the right to express oneself and social responsibility in the digital space. Although initially intended to uphold public values and accountability, the practice of *cancel culture* actually reveals the ambiguity of digital citizenship in Indonesia, where citizen participation can easily turn into mass digital bullying.

The final *dimension*, *socio-cultural practices,* links the results of discourse analysis with Indonesian society's religious culture, which upholds morality and has strong social ties. This culture forms the basis for citizens to assess and correct the behaviour of public figures. Within this framework, *cancel culture* is understood as a form of social control rooted in values of decency and morality. However, when it takes place in the digital space, this practice often turns into mass judgement due to a lack of awareness of privacy and individual justice. This phenomenon is closely related to the culture of collective shame in Indonesia, where honour and social reputation are prioritised over personal privacy, while religious moral influence is used as the basis for public judgement. Moral violations that are considered deviant, especially those related to family values and sexual behaviour, trigger a strong collective response in the form of insults and ostracism as an attempt by society to restore social order. The results of the YouTube comment analysis are displayed in the form of *a word cloud* at Figure 3.

Figure 3. Word cloud of the civic responsibility category
Source: Data processed by researchers using NVivo 15 (2025)

The *word cloud* on Figure 3 displays words that often appear with positive meanings, such as *patient, sincere, polite, courteous, steadfast, wise*, and *pray*. These words show that even though the digital space is often coloured by expressions of anger and judgement, the noble values of Indonesian culture are still preserved. These values reflect the character of a society that upholds ethics, politeness, and sincerity in interactions. Thus, these findings show that Indonesian culture has two roles: on the one hand, it encourages digital citizens to uphold public

morals, but on the other hand, when brought into the digital space, its expression can become spontaneous and emotional. In other words, the digital space becomes an arena where traditional values emphasising politeness meet modern expressions that tend to be free. According to Wahyuni & Nofrita (2025), the importance of politeness is to maintain communication with other individuals or groups so that no language hurts the other party. Therefore, values such as patience, courtesy, and sincerity need to be strengthened so that the digital space does not merely become a place for judging but also a means to foster moral awareness and social responsibility.

The *word cloud* above contains words such as 'patience', 'sincerity', 'pray', 'fortitude', 'politeness', and 'courtesy', indicating a pattern of positive behaviour in the YouTube comments section, where some users choose to respond calmly rather than harshly. This pattern is in line with the findings of Coyne et al. (2018) that positive messages in the media can increase empathy and reduce harsh language on the internet. It also supports the view of Lysenstøen et al. (2021) that social media not only brings out negative behaviour, but also positive behaviour when users support each other with kind language. The empathy that arises can encourage people to use gentle and supportive words such as 'be patient' and 'pray' directed at Ridwan Kamil. In the Indonesian context, the use of words such as 'polite', 'civilised', and 'wise' shows that the norm of politeness still serves as a guideline in responding to public issues on social media. Research by Wang et al. (2024) reveals that digital citizens tend to use polite values to maintain social relationships in the digital space, while Rahim (2023) says that religious diction such as praying and inviting patience reflects a civilised linguistic identity. Meanwhile, Palupi & Endahati (2019) add that polite language serves as a sign that someone understands ethics as a digital citizen, as well as a way to defuse conflict. This can be seen from the *word cloud* collection.

Thus, it can be concluded that the practice *of cancel culture* reflects the ambiguity of digital citizenship. Language that should uphold morality has instead become a tool for collective judgement and a form *of digital vigilantism*. Therefore, it is important to integrate ethics, empathy, and social responsibility into every activity in the digital space. These findings emphasise the need for comprehensive digital citizenship education, platform moderation policies that balance freedom of expression with user protection, and regulations that govern the intersection between traditional moral values and digital public discourse.

Moral activism and the dynamics of the digital space in Indonesia

The critical discourse analysis above, using Fairclough's three-dimensional approach, shows that language on social media not only functions as a means of communication but also as a way for digital citizens to assert moral legitimacy. The words contained in comments reflect religious and ethical values, thereby shaping public opinion about who is considered right or wrong. In social practice, power is no longer solely in the hands of the state or the media but has begun to shift to digital communities that are active in shaping public opinion. Language in the digital space does not merely describe reality but also shapes society's view of what are considered valid moral values. Comments by digital citizens on YouTube often combine news snippets, religious teachings, and cultural values, giving rise to a new pattern of communication called digital public morality. In this pattern, the measure of truth is determined by conformity with shared moral values, not merely by legal facts or data in the media. The concept of digital public morality reflects the ambiguity of digital citizenship in Indonesia. Citizens use their participatory rights to demand accountability from public figures, but this practice also risks turning into collective bullying that damages individual dignity and disrupts the fair legal process. This dual nature of moral activism and the potential *for vigilantism* shows that there is room for contestation in the digital civic engagement of today's Indonesian society.

The comments made by digital citizens on YouTube often combine news snippets, religious teachings, and cultural values. This combination creates a new pattern of communication called 'digital public moral', where the measure of truth is now determined based on conformity with shared moral values rather than legal facts or media data. The concept of digital public morality here refers to morality that is formed, disseminated, and agreed upon collectively by digital citizens through comments and interactions on social media. According to Farhan (2023), it is important for Indonesian netizens to be aware of shame because it is considered impolite in Southeast Asia to be more careful and pay attention to social media ethics when commenting on posts. Furthermore, in Fairclough's framework, this shows how discourse

can reinforce the ideology of dominant groups, namely those who feel they represent the moral voice of society. Moral activism, which initially had good intentions, can easily turn into oppressive social judgement. Therefore, digital citizens need to be aware of the importance of critical thinking and ethical responsibility so that the digital space remains a place for dialogue rather than punishment. In this section, the line between moral activism (admonishing and reminding) and moral surveillance (punishing and shaming) becomes blurred.

After examining how moral discourse is formed in the digital space, this section explores how that discourse turns into moral activism. Digital and moral activism are important means for citizens to voice social issues and demand accountability from public officials (Legocki et al., 2020), especially in the era of social media in the context of Joyce's (2010) theory, which enables the rapid and widespread formation of public opinion. This study highlights the case between Ridwan Kamil and Instagram celebrity Lisa Mariana as an example of how digital spaces are used to spread allegations of infidelity and claims of having children, which then developed into legal and social conflicts. Although DNA test results showed no match and Lisa Mariana was named a suspect for defamation, the dynamics of this case show that digital activism is not only about expressing criticism, but also about how society navigates the line between freedom of expression and moral responsibility. Therefore, moral activism exists to balance the spirit of digital participation with ethical values, so that demands made of public officials are not trapped in sensationalism but are based on justice and truth (Cruz & Plaisance, 2021).

Figure 4. Word cloud of vigilantism categories
Source: Data processed by researchers using NVivo 15 (2025)

The case of the alleged affair between Ridwan Kamil and Lisa Mariana shows that Indonesian digital citizens are not only recipients of information but also act as guardians of public morality. They feel entitled to judge and demand social sanctions against figures in this context as public officials who are considered to have violated norms, even though the allegations have been denied and declared to be hoaxes by the parties concerned. This pattern is in line with the phenomenon *of cancel culture*, where moral demands often turn into collective judgement, particularly because social media dynamics tend to prioritise emotional content over balanced discussion. In this way, platforms amplify emotional and moral voices over clarification. As an example in this research dataset, Ridwan Kamil's official statement denying the allegations received far fewer comments, with responses dominated by critical and sceptical attitudes, while accusatory posts continued to circulate with a much higher level of engagement, showing how clarifications struggle to gain attention compared to the initial allegations. This causes the digital space to shift from active participation to moral policing, which can reinforce unproven allegations. Because citizens feel they have a moral responsibility and the facts of the case are still unclear, digital platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube are filled with comments. However, the comments used as research data in this study come from YouTube because it has the most comments on this case, which are filled with religious undertones, shame, and family dignity, accompanied by calls for a boycott. Citizen participation has also shifted to collective surveillance of this case, which further reinforces the perception that it is un s without real evidence. According to Jaafar & Herna (2023), it is hoped that the public will be more cautious in their actions in the digital space, particularly in understanding the concept *of cancel culture* that is developing in Indonesia. This situation indicates that public participation in the digital space does not always align with civic ethics, making it easy to shift from activism to bullying.

The *word cloud* on Figure 4, processed using NVivo, shows that digital citizens do not stop at personal issues, but directly raise them to the level of public violations with words such as 'corruption', 'KPK', 'issue diversion', and 'BJB' because comments on YouTube show that the case is considered to be diverting attention from issues related to corruption at BJB Bank. Furthermore, public figures are considered to live off the trust of the community. This pattern is almost identical to *the digital vigilantism described by* Trottier (2015) and Loveluck (2019), whereby digital citizens utilise social media, which can be viewed by many people, to 'punish' and 'expose' something without going through the official legal process. When anger and momentum begin to build, social media reinforces this because emotional and embarrassing content goes viral faster than clarifications (Munn, 2020). What was initially intended as a practice for participation and accountability has turned into *cancel culture that* can demean people and spread to things that have not been proven to be true (Ng, 2020), and can even be mixed with fake news (Picarella, 2024). *Cancel culture* is currently used as a form of social control, but it is often excessive, can involve families, and is not always based on data (Altamira & Movementi, 2023; Jaafar & Herna, 2023; Yanuar et al., 2023). As a result, digital citizens tend to judge and criticise public figures through social media but often go beyond the facts. As a result, the digital space, which should be a place for discussion, has turned into an arena for open judgement.

The shift from digital activism to bullying

According to Velasco (2020), *cancel culture* has existed for a long time, starting with public insults against individuals, such as public punishment in front of the community. Clark (2020) explains that *cancel culture* emerged based on two components, namely demands from the mass media and social media audiences, because almost anyone can be affected by *cancel culture*, whether because of words, attitudes, or actions that are considered not in line with public expectations. *Cancel culture* is a derivative of *post-truth*, where truth is considered valid if it aligns with feelings and social support. In the context of social media, this relates to digital activities such as *clicktivism,* meaning activism primarily carried out through clicks, likes, shares, on the internet, such as liking and following accounts on social media, and the spread of , the practice of sharing, commenting on, or reposting content to mobilise and fight for change through campaigns and actions based on solidarity and participation for the empowerment and collaboration of various communities (Shahreza, M. & Basit, 2025).

According to research by Altamira & Movementi (2023), *cancel culture* in Indonesia is increasingly prevalent because social media makes it easy for people to label and garner support against figures or institutions deemed to have violated norms. Examples include the cases of Risma, Saipul Jamil, Gofar Hilman, alleged harassment at the KPI, and the boycott of AICE. The mechanism of digital participation, whereby users engage through comments, sharing, and responses, enables rapid collective action, but also blurs the line between legitimate accountability and mob justice. This dual nature reflects the core ambiguity of digital citizenship: the same tools that empower civic engagement can quickly turn into instruments of abuse when used without ethical awareness or procedural justice. Research by Effendi & Febriana (2023) shows that the practice *of cancel culture* against Rizky Billar took the form of *cyberbullying* and calls for boycotts on social media, which impacted his career, personal life, and family. This case demonstrates that *cancel culture* can be a form of social control over public figures.

Currently in Indonesia, calls to reprimand someone's behaviour on social media, such as "why are public figures like this", mass unfollowing, or boycotts, often turn into digital bullying. Social media provides anonymity and wide reach, making people feel safe when attacking others. The digital space, which was originally inclusive, has given rise to verbal abuse, doxing, and public insults when netizens perceive that a person has violated norms (Anjani, 2024; Martha, 2024). Users feel that their actions are justified and considered to be upholding digital ethics, but their actions constitute *cyberbullying* and violate the principle of justice. The process of digital bullying begins with a reprimand, then goes viral from comments or posts, and ends up becoming collective bullying. This may be caused by disappointment or dislike, but it immediately turns into a mass attack because social media accelerates the spread of emotions.

Comments from digital citizens often show a pattern of moral justification that makes public figures the target of criticism. This is in line with Bandura's (1999), theory which explains that a person can suppress feelings of guilt so that they are able to attack others without feeling guilty. Furthermore, Lowry et al. (2016) also emphasise that when someone attacks another

person and receives support, netizens are encouraged to imitate the action because they feel that their actions are justified. Thus, morality is used as a reason to punish someone outside of official rules (Witmer, 2025). This process shows that social support can trigger imitation and ultimately lead to collective bullying. What was initially intended to uphold morality can shift into mass bullying because of moral justification and language that makes the individual being commented on considered deserving of punishment. This Figure 5 shows how activism can turn into bullying based on the analysed data.

Figure 5. Word cloud of moral activism categories
Source: Data processed by researchers using NVivo 15 (2025)

The word cloud *in* Figure 5 shows the dominance of the words 'shame' and 'event', indicating that shame is used as a means of social control and punishment for individuals who appear in the media. The media functions as a stage for displaying values that are considered correct, in line with Fairclough's view that the media expands its influence through the way it speaks and conveys information. Terms such as 'stage', 'event', 'television programme', and 'KPI' reinforce the role of the media as a link between public norms and public figures, so that the KPI is expected to be firm in monitoring content in order to present educational, inspirational, and informative programmes. Moral and religious terms such as 'sin;, 'haram', 'adultery', 'immoral', 'moral', and 'unholy' indicate the strong legitimacy of religion in digital debates. According to Bernatzky, Costello, & Hawdon (2022), the media serves as a stage connecting public norms and public figures, while religious legitimacy reinforces attacks on public figures. This language is used to justify attacks, in line with Bandura's theory of *moral disengagement*, whereby netizens shift personal responsibility to the masses so that attacks are considered legitimate. *The word cloud* also highlights the ambiguity of digital citizenship because the language used is often ambiguous. Words such as 'moral' or 'appropriate' can be understood as criticism, moral demands, and insults. This shows how language in the digital space not only conveys messages but also becomes a tool for moral legitimacy and social control. As a result, discussions easily shift from social movements to mass bullying, especially when punitive comments receive widespread support (Chaer, 2018; Pateda, 2010).

Neglected digital citizenship values

Ribble (2014) explains that ideal digital citizenship encompasses nine elements, including digital access, digital commerce, digital communication, digital literacy, digital etiquette, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, digital health and wellness, and digital security. These nine elements emphasise that digital citizens not only have the right to be present and speak in the virtual world, but also have an obligation to maintain ethics, respect others, and protect data and individual dignity. However, the findings of this study reveal that in the practices of digital citizens when responding to the Ridwan Kamil-Lisa Mariana case, several relevant elements, namely digital etiquette, digital literacy, digital law, and digital rights and responsibilities, were not strongly evident. Based on this framework, the results of this study show that there is a conflict between the nine elements of Ribble's digital citizenship and the behaviour of citizens in the digital space. This conflict is particularly evident in (1) the right to freedom of expression that is

not accompanied by respect for privacy, (2) social control that turns into mass judgement, and (3) digital freedom that is not accompanied by civil ethics.

First, the right to freedom of expression without respect for privacy in this principle of digital rights and responsibilities, digital citizens should be able to balance freedom of speech and the obligation to protect the rights of others, including privacy. However, in reality, many comments on social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and others, but the researchers' analysis of YouTube comments actually mentions things that tend to be personal in nature, such as disgrace, family, or other aspects that are not relevant to public issues. This shows that the right to speak is more often prioritised than maintaining the dignity of others. As explained by Hanlon & Jones (2023), low awareness of the right to freedom of expression will accelerate the spread of information that facilitates privacy violations. Furthermore, in Indonesia, comments that attack the physical appearance or family of public officials, as shown in the research by Suryani et al. (2021), indicate that digital decorum and respect for the rights of others have not been fully implemented.

Secondly, social control that turns into mass judgement. In digital citizenship, citizens essentially have the right to monitor public officials, but they must also follow the rules of law and communication ethics. Findings from research by Dunsby & Howes (2019) show that this monitoring often turns into a form of self-punishment or digital vigilantism, where digital citizens immediately judge without any legal process. Thus, when an issue goes viral, even the accused are often not given the opportunity to explain themselves. This pattern is clearly seen in the data, where accusatory content consistently receives higher engagement than clarifications, showing how social control mechanisms quickly turn into collective judgement. This digital judgement often reflects a tendency to judge openly in the digital space without a clear legal basis (Effendi & Febriana, 2023). Thus, digital vigilantism values public moral compliance with procedures that do not take over the role of law enforcement, and responsibility for the impact of comments cannot be optimally implemented.

Third, digital freedom without civic ethics. Many social media users are technically proficient but lack digital literacy and good ethics. Digital literacy is not only about proficiency in using digital applications or platforms but also the ability to sort information, verify its accuracy, and choose words that do not hurt others. Without adequate digital literacy and ethics, freedom of expression on social media risks turning into actions that can harm others, such as bullying, doxing, or spreading allegations that have not been proven to be true (Diether et al., 2024). This shows that technical skills in using digital media are not enough to create a healthy communication space. Yanti's (2018) research also reveals that even though users are familiar with technology, they still lack empathy and do not understand the importance of ethics in digital interactions. This condition shows that values such as politeness, communicating wisely, and understanding the context of information have not been fully implemented by most digital citizens.

When linked to the results of the Matrix Coding Query and the previous word cloud, it appears that themes such as exposure of shame, moral judgement, and physical abuse appear much more frequently than themes of empathy, politeness, and social responsibility. This shows that morality in the digital space is more often demonstrated through social sanctions than through ethical citizenship practices. Within Ribble's framework, responsible digital citizens are required to demonstrate ethical behaviour when interacting in the digital space. This includes the ability to refrain from actions that harm oneself or others, maintain individual privacy, protect personal data, and provide space for clarification processes for those involved. The implementation of these principles is essential to maintaining a healthy and equitable digital space for communication.

After explaining the results of the query coding matrix analysis in the critical discourse analysis section, which maps the trends in themes and dimensions of digital citizenship, the next discussion focuses on word cloud analysis to describe more concretely the language expressions and diction choices used by digital citizens in responding to these issues. The findings from the Matrix Coding Query analysis presented by the researcher in the sub-discussion of critical discourse analysis show a change in the meaning of digital community participation from moral activism to digital bullying (see Figure 6). This pattern shows that the topics of moral judgement and exposure of wrongdoing most often appear in the context of digital vigilantism and digital outrage, while themes such as empathy and social media ethics

are less visible. According to Demelius & Yoshida (2025), digital vigilantism as a political act to enforce norms and seek positions of power positions social media as a space for identity formation. This shows that morality in the digital world is often expressed through social sanctions, rather than through constructive ethical thinking. To clarify this pattern, a word cloud analysis was conducted to find words frequently used by social media users in comment sections. This analysis provides a visual representation of how moral sentiments and social expressions are formed through language. The results of the word cloud show that words such as 'shame', 'adulterer', 'cheap', 'event', and 'media' indicate patterns of naming, moral judgement, and a tendency to punish symbolically. Thus, the word cloud is an important addition to reinforce and support the research data from the Matrix Coding Query because it shows how unreal moral representations in the context of digital outrage and digital vigilantism are evident in the use of words by users. If the Matrix Coding Query focuses on the relationship between themes and aspects of digital citizenship structurally, then the word cloud shows the forms of language that contain feelings, values, and morality that shape the habit of cancel culture in Indonesia.

Figure 6. Word cloud of digital outrage categories
Source: Data processed by the researcher using NVivo 15 (2025)

The ambiguity in the practice of digital citizenship in Indonesia is reflected in the tendency of digital citizens to be quicker to exercise their digital rights, such as freedom of speech, expressing opinions, and criticising, than to carry out their digital responsibilities, such as maintaining privacy and communicating politely. These findings indicate the need to strengthen digital citizenship education that emphasises four crucial elements, namely digital etiquette (courtesy and empathy in commenting), digital rights and responsibilities (awareness of rights and obligations in the digital space), digital literacy (the ability to verify information before disseminating it), and digital law (compliance with the law and rejection of unilateral punishment practices).

CONCLUSION

The practice of cancel culture in the cases of Ridwan Kamil and Lisa Mariana clearly reflects the deep ambiguity surrounding digital citizenship in Indonesia. This tension arises from the enthusiasm of digital citizens to uphold moral responsibility and social control, which initially took the form of activism but quickly turned into collective judgement full of digital outrage and vigilantism. Expressions of morality in the digital space, driven by a predominantly religious socio-cultural context, are conveyed through symbolic violence and negative labelling of individuals, rather than through reflective and ethical thinking. These findings confirm that the right to express oneself and participate in the virtual world is exercised without being balanced by the nine elements of digital citizenship, but rather ignores four of them, namely digital ethics, digital rights and responsibilities, digital law and digital literacy. Thus, the space for digital

participation tends to change its function from a means of dialogue and accountability to an arena for mass online bullying, highlighting the importance of strengthening literacy and ethical awareness to balance digital rights and obligations. To overcome this ambiguity, concrete steps are needed, including comprehensive digital citizenship education programmes in schools and communities, as well as platform moderation policies that encourage constructive dialogue while mitigating harmful collective actions. However, this study is limited to one public case and one platform (YouTube) within a specific time frame, so it cannot represent all patterns of cancel culture across various issues and platforms in Indonesia. Further research could expand the scope to TikTok, X, and Instagram by comparing cases involving public figures and non-public figures and including the perspectives of victims so that the power dynamics in cancel culture are more fully revealed.

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