

PERTAMAX FUEL PRICE INCREASE AND PUBLIC CRITICISM: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NETIZEN INTERACTIONS AND COMMENTS ON THE MINISTRY OF ESDM'S TIKTOK ACCOUNT

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Abstract: *This study examines the dynamics of crisis communication and forms of public resistance in cyber space in response to the Pertamina fuel price hike policy on June 10, 2026. Given the shift of the critique arena from physical spaces to the realm of digital media convergence, this study aims to analyze the textual-visual characteristics and netizen interactions on the official TikTok account of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (MEMR). A qualitative approach was employed using cyber media content analysis, with a purposive sampling technique applied to the top comments within two weeks post-policy implementation. The results indicate that the platform's algorithm facilitates collective delegitimization through various narrative typologies. Netizens do not merely voice spontaneous anger; instead, they utilize typographical parody, the inversion of visual symbol meanings (emojis), sarcasm based on utopian conditionals regarding the minimum wage, and structural satire toward the accuracy of subsidy targeting. Furthermore, an anomaly was found in the form of counter-narratives and horizontal irony among netizens, sparking a battle of discourse concerning global geopolitics. These findings confirm that the public utilizes the comment section not only as a protest outlet but also as a space for citizen oversight and meaning negotiation. The contribution of this research is to provide a critical evaluative foundation for government agencies. Moving forward, the government needs to abandon rigid crisis communication patterns and design energy governance policy strategies that are more empathetic, transparent, and inclusive.*

Keywords: *crisis communication; media convergence; public participation; fuel price adjustment; cyber resistance*

INTRODUCTION

National energy governance policies, particularly those related to fuel price adjustments, are among the most sensitive fiscal instruments consistently at the center of socio-economic controversy in Indonesia. Fuel cannot be viewed simply as an ordinary economic commodity; rather, it has shifted its function to become a symbol of the state's presence in ensuring the people's welfare. Therefore, every price fluctuation always triggers a massive collective response from the public. When the government, through the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM), officially issued a policy to increase the price of Pertamina fuel on June 10, 2026, the decision immediately triggered a domino effect on the daily economic stability of the community. From a macroeconomic perspective, the government's justification for raising energy prices often relies on rational reasons to maintain fiscal stability, balance state budget assumptions, and control the burden of subsidies. However, for the wider public and microeconomic actors, this price adjustment policy is perceived as a severe economic pressure because it triggers general inflation of goods



prices, erodes real purchasing power, increases the cost of living, and widens significant social inequality.

In the context of macroeconomic dynamics and external factors determining energy policy, previous research conducted by Dimasti Dano (2022) emphasized that domestic energy price fluctuations are inextricably linked to global geopolitical shocks. International conflicts, such as the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, have significantly triggered a global trade crisis, embargoes, and shortages of vital commodities, leading to a supply shock phenomenon in the international market. The impact of this geopolitical instability has also boosted global crude oil prices and the Indonesian Crude Price (ICP), soaring far beyond the initial projections set in the State Budget (APBN). As a result, governments in developing countries like Indonesia are often faced with a dilemma and are forced to adjust domestic fuel prices to protect the country's fiscal posture from the threat of an extreme budget deficit. The dramatic adjustment on June 10, 2026, provides clear evidence of how these global pressures are transmitted to domestic consumers.

Meanwhile, when viewed from the perspective of political sociology and governance, research by Abim Sastrawan (2026) provides a critical perspective on how the policy is responded to and negotiated in the public sphere. Massive public resistance to fuel price adjustments is often exacerbated by the failure of crisis communication patterns implemented by government institutions. Based on his findings, the government's communication response in the face of a wave of public criticism tends to be dominated by rigid narrative justifications and is too focused on arguments of macroeconomic rationality alone, thus appearing elitist, one-way, and lacking empathy for the real psychological and economic burdens borne by the lower classes. The social legitimacy of a controversial policy will never be optimally achieved if the government only relies on symbolic clarification, affirmation of technocratic supporting data, or simply highlighting short-term social protection programs (such as temporary compensation assistance) without opening a space for inclusive, honest, and transparent interactive dialogue.

The gap between global-technocratic rationality outlined by Dano (2022) and the crisis of public communication legitimacy explored by Sastrawan (2026) has now found a new stage for articulation in the digital era. Public criticism, once channeled through physical street demonstrations, has now migrated massively to the digital public sphere, particularly short-video-based social media platforms like TikTok. Recognizing this shift, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources actively uses its official TikTok account as a crisis communication instrument to educate the public about the reasons for the price increase as of June 10, 2026. However, TikTok's digital ecosystem has unique characteristics; its highly dynamic and fluid For You Page (FYP) algorithm actually facilitates netizens' collective delegitimation practices. The comments section on the official account quickly transformed into an arena for cultural resistance where thousands of satirical comments, sharp criticisms, and expressions of netizen dissatisfaction interact, accumulate, and amplify negative sentiments capable of degrading public trust in a matter of hours.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on macroeconomic impacts, such as Dano's (2022) research, and formal government communication patterns (such as Sastrawan's (2026) research), much of the previous literature remains stuck in a statistical quantitative approach or focuses on conventional media objects such as written press releases, formal documents, or traditional text media such as X (Twitter). Qualitative studies that specifically examine the unique characteristics of text-visual interactions, netizen communication behavior, and how the



negotiation of meaning is directly produced within the comments section of the TikTok short video ecosystem are still very rare.

Therefore, this research, titled "Pertamax Fuel Price Increase and Public Criticism: Content Analysis of Netizen Interactions and Comments on the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources' TikTok Account," is crucial. By capturing the current momentum following the June 10, 2026, policy, this study aims to fill this gap in the scientific literature and provide a critical, applicable evaluation for government agencies in developing more empathetic, dialogical, transparent, and inclusive policy communication strategies in the future.

The study of the fuel price adjustment policy cannot be separated from the trade-off between the need to maintain the country's fiscal space and its impact on public economic stability. Domestic energy price fluctuations are highly vulnerable to global geopolitical shocks, such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which triggered a *supply shock* and significantly increased the price of Indonesian crude oil (ICP). This ICP spike, in turn, caused the realized fuel subsidy budget to swell far beyond initial assumptions.

In this fiscally stressful situation, maintaining subsidized fuel prices is often seen as burdening state finances. While energy subsidies are intended to maintain purchasing power for low-income communities, in practice they often narrow fiscal space that could otherwise be allocated to productive development programs such as health, infrastructure, or education. However, the decision to cut subsidies or raise retail fuel prices always has immediate economic consequences. Rising operational costs in various sectors immediately trigger *cost-push inflation*, erode real wages, and risk slowing national economic growth.

This depressed economic situation has triggered a crisis of trust that demands an appropriate public communication strategy from the government. When responding to the fuel price hike crisis, the government and related entities, such as PT Pertamina, often employ various crisis communication strategies. A study using the *Situational Crisis Communication Theory* (SCCT) framework found that in the face of public criticism regarding fuel, the government's narrative is often dominated by *denial* and *justification strategies* to protect the institution's reputation. The problem is, justifications that rely solely on macroeconomic rationality are often perceived by the general public as rigid and lacking empathy.

This failure to build inclusive dialogue has now found its primary platform for resistance on social media. Unlike conventional media, short-form video platforms like TikTok provide a space for netizens to respond to policies in *real time*. TikTok's algorithm-driven *For You Page* (FYP) ecosystem allows for rapid and massive public delegitimization. In the comments sections of official government accounts, technocratic narratives are often met with thousands of satirical and sharply critical comments that accumulate, creating an arena for cultural resistance that erodes public trust.

Unlike previous research, which generally focused solely on analyzing economic impacts or simply examining conventional media coverage, this study utilizes TikTok's comment section as the primary observational platform. The focus is on examining how textual-visual interactions and the negotiation of meaning are directly produced by netizens in response to the government's crisis narrative.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach through a qualitative descriptive cyber analysis method (cyber media content analysis) which refers to Nasrullah's (2020) cyber media

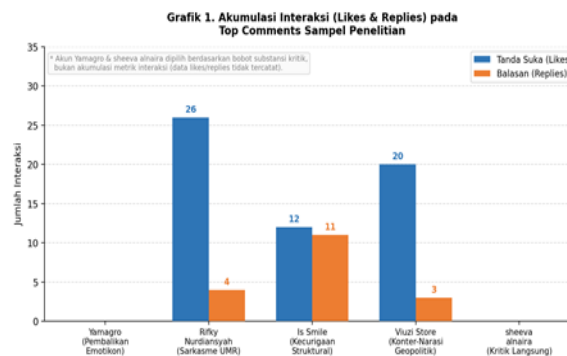


methodology framework to deeply dissect expressions of direct criticism, expressions of emotional dissatisfaction, straightforward sarcasm, and the use of rejection emoticons. in the comments column of the Pertamina fuel price adjustment socialization video on the official TikTok account of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources @kementerian_esdm within a two-week period after the fuel price increase policy from June 10 to June 24, 2026. Data were collected using cyber documentation techniques and non-participant virtual observation with purposive sampling specifically focused on the top comments with a high accumulation of likes and replies.

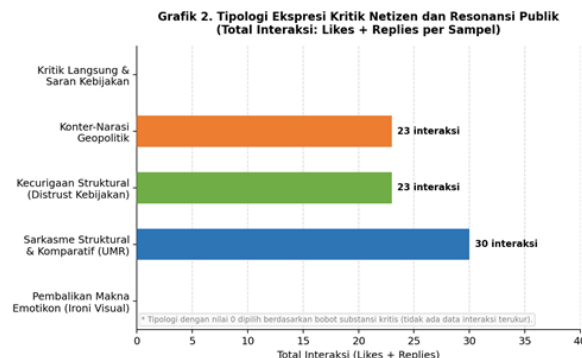
DISCUSSION

Research findings must be written and illustrated clearly. The discussion in the research article explains the results. No data should be presented repeatedly; the results are supported by well-processed data and illustrations.

Existing tables or images are presented with explanations. A table consists of three horizontal lines. The figures shown are clearly visible. The table number and title are placed above the table, while the figure numbers and titles are placed below the figure. Complete the tables and figures by citing the source below each table/figure. Example table format:



Graph 1. Accumulation of Interactions (Likes & Replies) on Top Comments of Research Samples



Graph 2. Typology of Netizen Criticism Expressions and Public Resonance (Total Interactions: Likes + Replies per Sample)

Based on the analysis of the research data, it was found that the dominant visual text characteristics used by netizens in responding to the Pertamina price increase as of June 10, 2026, were the use of straightforward sarcasm packaged in a binary opposition format and the reversal of the meaning of visual symbols. Textually, the "Yamagro" account constructed its narrative into four contradictory lines that clashed idealistic political rhetoric with economic realities on the ground, as presented in Figure 1.

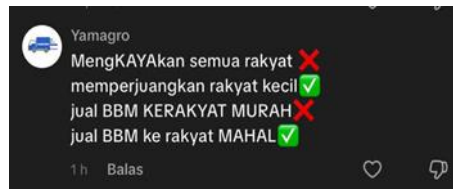


Figure 1. Screenshot of Comments from the Yamagro Account in the TikTok Comments Column of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources)

The use of all-caps for the words "MengKAYAKan," "KERAKYAT MURAH," and "MAHAL" (expensive) as seen in Figure 1 serves as emotional emphasis (*textual shouting*). This emphasis aims to emphasize anger and demonstrate the wide gap between promises of public welfare and the reality of policies perceived as stifling. This characteristic is a key representation of the massive emotional dissatisfaction expressed in the comments section of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources' TikTok post following the policy's implementation.

In line with Nasrullah's (2020) cyber methodology framework, TikTok's virtual space provides symbolic facilities in the form of emoticons, which in this study have been shown to experience a radical reversal of meaning through virtual irony techniques. Based on the visual evidence in Figure 1, netizens sarcastically added a green check mark (✔) emoticon to the phrases "fighting for the little people" and "selling fuel to the people at an EXPENSIVE rate." The presence of this symbol does not mean that netizens agree with the policy, but rather a bitter confirmation and sharp sarcasm that the real "achievement" that the current government has managed to realize is only raising fuel prices to be expensive. In contrast, the red cross (✖) emoticon placed on the sentences "Enriching all the people" and "Selling cheap fuel to the people" serves as a symbol of the public's total rejection of the claims of economic welfare echoed by the relevant agencies.

From a purposive sampling perspective, the "check-and-cross" comment model, as shown in Figure 1, is highly adaptive to TikTok's algorithm, enabling it to achieve top *comments with a high accumulation of likes* and replies. This template-like or *meme-copy-and-paste writing structure is favored by the online community due to its scannable nature* yet strong visual appeal. The presence of this paradoxical text-visual combination comment within two weeks of the fuel price hike indicates Netizens are no longer simply using conventional insults. Instead, they have shifted to using typographic parodies and organized symbolic resistance to wage collective digital resistance on the official account @kementerian_esdm.

Based on the results of a digital media content analysis of comments on the "Rifky Nurdiansyah" account, we found text-visual characteristics that emphasized expressions of

emotional dissatisfaction through utopian conditionals *and* the use of a combination of sarcastic emoticons. This digital resistance phenomenon is fully documented in Figure 2.

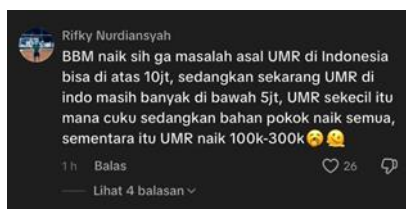


Figure 2. Screenshot of Rifky Nurdiansyah's account comment in the TikTok comment column of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources)

Textually in Figure 2, netizens use comparative logic to clash the fuel price increase policy with the reality of people's purchasing power as measured by the Regional Minimum Wage (UMR). The statement at the beginning of the sentence that reads *"Fuel price increases are not a problem as long as the UMR in Indonesia can be above 10 million"* is an assumption that is deliberately made unrealistic to create a sharp contrast with real data on the ground. Netizens then immediately reveal comparative facts that *"while now the UMR in Indonesia is still mostly below 5 million"*. The use of the diction *"UMR is so small how is it enough when all basic commodities have increased"* straightforwardly voices economic complaints while also representing the direct anxiety of the working class community regarding the domino effect of the increase in prices of basic commodities triggered by the energy policy.

Referring to the use of sarcastic language, the data in Figure 2 shows a form of sarcasm based on assumptions and numerical contrasts. Netizens use unequal numerical comparisons, namely the idealistic demand for a minimum wage of IDR 10 million, the reality of a minimum wage below IDR 5 million, and the fact that the nominal annual minimum wage increase only ranges from *"100k-300k"*. This economic calculation inequality is then visually locked using two emoticons at the end of the comment sentence. The presence of the mouth-covering emoticon (😬) symbolizes mockery or suppressed laughter at systemic powerlessness, which is then accompanied by the melting face emoticon (🤔) as a reflection of resignation, mental exhaustion, and deep cynicism due to the increasingly pressing economic burden. This text-visual combination shows how netizens articulate heavy economic criticism into a form of cyber communication that is concise, popular, yet full of satire.

Judging from the purposive sampling technique, the interaction visualization in Figure 2 proves that this comment successfully ranked among the top comments *with* an accumulation of 26 likes and has sparked a series of further discussions as indicated by the presence of 4 replies. This proves that the issue of synchronization between real income and inflation due to fuel prices is a highly contextual narrative and has received high collective validation from other TikTok users. The emergence of this wage comparison-based criticism text within a two-week period after The policy as of June 10, 2026, emphasizes that the public utilizes the digital communication space @kementerian_esdm to break through the government's macro narrative by presenting the micro reality of family economics, while also demonstrating that energy policy cannot be separated from the portrait of the welfare of national labor wages.

Based on the results of a digital media content analysis of comments on the "Is Smile" account, we found text-visual characteristics that reflect cynical criticism, structural distrust, and concerns about public policy strategies. The complete characteristics of this skeptical narrative construction can be seen in **Figure 3**.

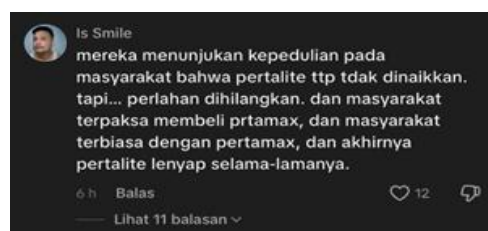


Figure 3. Screenshot of the Is Smile account's comment in the TikTok comments column of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources.

Textually in **Figure 3**, this comment does not rely on visual symbols such as emoticons or conventional capitalization, but instead uses the punctuation of ellipsis or three dots ("but...") as a dramatic pause that separates the formal narrative of the policy maker from the hidden reality believed by the public. The use of the third-party pronoun "they" indicates a strict social distance between cyber netizens as representatives of ordinary people and the government as the policy-making authority suspected of having a hidden agenda.

Referring to the linguistic characteristics of sarcasm and irony, the data in **Figure 3** shows a very strong form of situational sarcasm with a cynical tone at the beginning of the sentence. The phrase "they show concern for the public that Pertalite prices are not increased" is a textual irony, in which netizens expose what appears to be the government's apparent "kindness" or "concern." Through a critical reading of the cyber text, the next sentence serves to undermine this irony by chronologically explaining the process of covert coercion: starting from the strategy of scarcity ("slowly eliminated"), forced purchasing power ("forced to buy Pertalite"), the process of forced habituation ("used to Pertamina"), to the final result of the elimination of subsidies ("Pertalite disappears forever"). This pattern reveals netizens' emotional dissatisfaction, which is no longer spontaneous, but rather a deep skeptical analysis of the public communication tactics of the relevant agencies.

Judging from the purposive sampling technique, the comment that exposed the motives behind the Pertamina price adjustment succeeded in achieving high interaction among netizens. As recorded in **Figure 3**, the comment managed to rank among the top comments with 12 likes and triggered 11 replies. The narrative characteristics that flow coherently with the repetition of the word "and" depict a resignation mixed with mass anger towards unilateral policy determination. The emergence of critical texts based on structural suspicion within two weeks after the policy as of June 10, 2026 confirms that netizens used the virtual space @kementerian_esdm to deconstruct the official government narrative, while also providing a counter-perspective to other users so as not to blindly believe the jargon of bureaucratic "care" amid real economic pressures.

Based on comments from the "Viuzi Store" account, we found text-visual characteristics that indicate a narrative anomaly. Netizens, instead of voicing criticism or sarcasm, offered defenses or counter-narratives based on alternative theories. This unique policy advocacy pattern is fully illustrated in **Figure 4**.



Figure 4. Screenshot of Viuzi Store Account Comments in the TikTok Comments Column (Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources)

Textually in Figure 4, this comment does not use visual elements such as emoticons or conventional capitalization, but instead relies on an informal, persuasive-educational style characterized by typical cyber greetings such as *"yaa gaes"* (*yeah guys*). Netizens attempt to dampen negative public sentiment regarding the macroeconomic impact of fuel price increases by shifting the focus of the root of the problem to the global geopolitical realm, namely the issue of dedollarization (the switch to the Yuan currency) and pressure from the World Bank on Indonesia's debt independence. The account even offers a specific exchange rate calculation through the phrase *"the dollar has recovered to 18,000 rupiah per 1 dollar because of the factors I mentioned above"* to strengthen its argument. Normative calls at the end of the text such as *"let's be wise people, don't be easily provoked"* reflect the polarization of opinion in the virtual space, where some users act as anchors to reduce emotional conflict amidst the massive criticism of other netizens.

The comment text in Figure 4 displays a form of subtle sarcasm or passive irony that is not directed at the government, but rather addressed to other critical netizens (*horizontal irony*). The sarcasm is packaged in the sentence, *"...so if we want to criticize the government, we must understand what we want to criticize the government..."*. Through the construction of this sentence, the "Viuzi Store" account implicitly insinuates that the wave of criticism and emotional dissatisfaction that filled the comments column of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources' TikTok post-fuel price hike was dominated by an uneducated public who only consumed by disinformation in the form of *"...video clips on social media without having to understand the root of the problem."* This phenomenon shows a form of discourse battle (*battle of discourse*), where the comment space has shifted its function to become an arena for amateur public education as well as a space for disciplining opinions between cyber users.

Based on purposive sampling, comments defending the policy or correcting misconceptions like this one still managed to rank among the top comments *because* they generated high levels of interaction. As shown in Figure 4, this counter-narrative garnered 20 likes *and* three replies. This characteristic of lengthy narratives without punctuation is common in TikTok's cyber communication ecosystem, expressing hastily delivered arguments yet laden with emotional defense. The presence of geopolitically charged defense texts within two weeks of the June 10, 2026, policy implementation confirms that the ministry's cyberspace is not monolithic. The comments section was not only filled with the outbursts of anger from lower-class communities

but also featured netizens attempting to position themselves as alternative economic analysts to validate and justify the government's price adjustment decision.

Based on further text analysis, different text-visual characteristics were found from the previous samples. This time, netizens used a direct criticism approach, structural suggestions, and subtle irony *at* the end of sentences. Textually, the account "sheeva alnaira" conveyed substantive complaints about the weak supervision and distribution system of subsidized energy at the grassroots level , as shown in **Figure 5**.

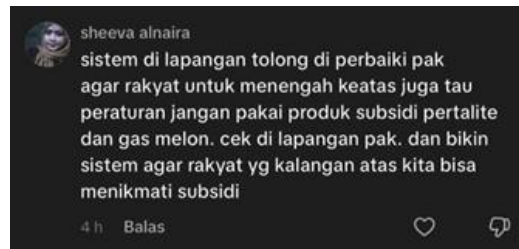


Figure 5. Screenshot of Sheeva Alnaira's account comment in the TikTok comment column of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources)

The narrative construction in Figure 5, from beginning to middle, clearly highlights the issue of inaccurate consumption targeting of subsidized products such as Pertalite and "melon gas" (3 kg LPG), which are considered to still be consumed by the upper-middle class. The sequentially written phrases of demands for action, such as *"please fix the system in the field, sir"* and *"check in the field, sir,"* reflect expressions of emotional dissatisfaction channeled through direct pressure on policymakers as the responsible authorities.

Interestingly, referring to the characteristics of sarcastic language, netizens closed their comments on Figure 5 with the sentence, *"...and create a system so that our upper-class people can enjoy subsidies."* This closing sentence is a form of sarcasm based on a logical reversal (*ironic inversion*). Netizens are not actually asking the government to facilitate subsidies for the wealthy, but rather a sharp sarcastic sarcasm to highlight the ironic reality on the ground. Through this figure of speech, netizens express despair and ridicule towards the government's oversight system which is considered very weak, as if the system actually allows subsidized commodities to be enjoyed freely by the undeserving elite.

From a purposive sampling perspective , the data selection in Figure 5 was not based on the quantity of interaction metrics (such as the number of likes or replies), but rather on the weight of the critical substance offered. Although this comment was relatively recently uploaded, as indicated by the four-hour time stamp ("4 h") after its broadcast, its textual strength rests on a highly representative narrative that embodies the collective resentment *of* lower-class people who feel their subsidy rights have been violated. The emergence of this critical-satirical response confirms that the public is utilizing the comments section of the official account @kementerian_esdm not only as a platform for price protests, but also as a space for citizen oversight *to* correct structural inequalities and systemic failures in national energy governance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of cyber media content on the official TikTok account of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, it can be concluded that public criticism of the Pertamina price increase as of June 10, 2026, has transformed into an organized form of digital cultural resistance. Social media algorithms facilitate netizens to collectively delegitimize the government's narrative through specific text-visual characteristics. This form of resistance manifests in various typologies, ranging from the reversal of the meaning of emoticons as virtual irony, structural sarcasm highlighting the failure of the subsidy monitoring system, to comparative criticism that clashes energy prices with the reality of workers' wages (UMR). Furthermore, the comment space has also become an arena for horizontal discourse battles between users regarding macroeconomic and geopolitical issues, which demonstrates the increasingly complex dynamics of public participation in the era of digital convergence.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that government agencies evaluate and reform their organizational crisis communication strategies to be more inclusive and dialogical, and abandon the one-way technocratic approach that has been proven to trigger a crisis of public trust. For further research, it is recommended to expand the scope of the analysis by conducting comparative studies across media platforms (for example, comparing the discourse structure between TikTok and platform X), as well as further examining the long-term impact of *the citizen oversight phenomenon* in cyber media on the reputation of public institutions.

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