



Feedback International Journal of Communication Vol. 3 No. 1, 2026  
ISSN (online): 3046-9465  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62569/fijc.v3i1.255>  
Received: January 2026/ Revised: February 2026/ Accepted: February 2026

Feedback International Journal of Communication

<https://ejournal.agungmediapublisher.com/index.php/fijc>

## Political Framing and Elite Delegitimation in YouTube Narratives of the Sumatra Flood Crisis

Muhamad Hanif Fuadi<sup>1\*</sup>, Frista Fitriany Ramadhanita<sup>2</sup>, AH. Khairul Wafa<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Nahdlatul Ulama Tasikmalaya Institute, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, 46112, Indonesia*

<sup>2</sup>*Al-Jawami Islamic College Bandung, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, 40622, Indonesia*

<sup>3</sup>*Sirnarasa Ciamis Da'wah College, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, 46264, Indonesia*

**Abstract.** This study examines how political disaster narratives are constructed and contested in YouTube content criticizing elite responses during the Sumatra flood crisis at the end of 2025. Employing a qualitative approach, the research integrates Critical Discourse Analysis with Entman's framing model to analyze verbal, visual, and intertextual elements in selected YouTube videos that explicitly address government preparedness, elite political imagery, defensive responses, and structural-technical explanations of disaster causality. The analysis is based on a purposively selected dataset of high-engagement YouTube videos published in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, drawn from news programs and political commentary channels that consistently engage with elite criticism. The analytical scope focuses on narrative structure, visual juxtaposition, rhetorical strategies, and moral evaluations embedded in disaster-related political communication. The findings reveal four dominant framing patterns: government unpreparedness, the symbolic imagery of political elites, responsive versus unresponsive elite positioning, and technical-structural framing of disaster causes. Beyond identifying these patterns, the study demonstrates how YouTube reallocates framing authority from state-centered actors and mainstream journalism to non-state digital actors, enabling disaster narratives to function as mechanisms of political delegitimation in digital public spaces. Theoretically, this study contributes to disaster framing and political communication literature by positioning YouTube as an autonomous political actor that reshapes crisis communication dynamics, blurs the boundary between journalism and activism, and redistributes symbolic power during humanitarian emergencies. The findings underscore that contemporary disasters are not only humanitarian crises but also digitally mediated political battlegrounds that actively shape public trust, elite legitimacy, and democratic accountability.

*Keywords: Disaster politics; Framing analysis; Political communication; Critical discourse analysis; YouTube*

---

\*Corresponding author's email: [fuadi9070@gmail.com](mailto:fuadi9070@gmail.com), Telp.-



## 1. Introduction

Natural disasters are not merely humanitarian emergencies but also arenas of political contestation in which narratives, images, and meanings are actively negotiated. Disaster events frequently trigger struggles over responsibility, legitimacy, and authority, particularly when state responses are perceived as slow, inadequate, or insensitive (Boin, Hart and McConnell, 2009; Liu and Boin, 2020; Albrecht, 2021). In such contexts, disasters become political events in which media framing plays a decisive role in shaping public perception, mobilizing opinion, and evaluating political leadership.

The major flood crisis that hit Sumatra at the end of 2025 provides a critical context to examine the politics of disaster framing in digital media. In addition to reporting on humanitarian suffering, the media narrative surrounding the disaster prominently featured political elites, state preparedness, and symbolic authority performance. Previous studies have shown that framing disaster cases often builds on government responses either as managerial failures or as an arena to avoid mistakes, where elites seek to shift responsibility by emphasizing natural causes or structural constraints caused by natural disasters (Boin, Hart and McConnell, 2009; Liu and Boin, 2020; Albrecht, 2021; Tutan, 2025). The dynamics of the framing have a significant impact on political legitimacy, public trust, and democratic accountability.

In the contemporary communication environment, YouTube has emerged as a major platform in the production and circulation of political meaning. It serves not only as a channel for the dissemination of information but also as a discursive arena in which alternative narratives, moral evaluations, and emotional appeal are constructed and contested in every content presented (Motahar *et al.*, 2021; Ghivari and Kosasih, 2024). Visual and audiovisual elements such as thumbnails, editing choices, narrative, and the juxtaposition of elite imagery with the suffering of citizens play a central role in shaping how disasters and political actors are interpreted. Through this practice, YouTube allows non-state actors to challenge dominant narratives traditionally controlled by mainstream journalism and state institutions.

Research on disaster politics in various contexts has consistently shown that media framing influences how political elites are perceived as competent, empathetic, and even opportunistic. Studies in the UK, Turkey, and Indonesia illustrate a recurring pattern of framing government unpreparedness, moral failures, or technocratic rationalization during flood and earthquake crises (Albrecht, 2021; Hasfi and Fisher, 2025; Tutan, 2025). In the Indonesian context, existing scholarship has largely focused on mainstream media narratives, particularly in cases such as the Jakarta floods, emphasizing institutional interests and elite-driven framing (Hasfi and Fisher, 2025). However, these studies have paid limited attention to YouTube as a distinct political space with its own logics of visibility, participation, and counter-framing.

This gap is theoretically significant. While the literature acknowledges that legitimacy during disasters is increasingly shaped by moral perception, empathy, and the congruence between rhetoric and action (Boin, Hart and McConnell, 2009; Albrecht, 2021), few studies explicitly examine how these processes unfold through audiovisual discourse on YouTube. Research that links disaster framing on YouTube to mechanisms of political delegitimization particularly through representations of elite imagery, unpreparedness, defensive responses, and structural blame shifting remains scarce (Motahar, Tavakoli and Mura, 2021; Ghivari and Kosasih, 2024).

Addressing this gap, the present study examines how disaster politics are framed in YouTube content criticizing political elites during the Sumatra flood crisis. Drawing on



Critical Discourse Analysis and Entman's framing model (2007), the study investigates how verbal, visual, and intertextual elements construct meanings of responsibility, morality, and legitimacy. Rather than merely identifying framing patterns, this research conceptualizes YouTube as an active political actor that redistributes symbolic power, challenges state-centered authority, and transforms disasters into digitally mediated battlegrounds of legitimacy.

Accordingly, this study is guided by three research questions. First, how are political elites framed in YouTube content during the Sumatra flood crisis, particularly in relation to state unpreparedness, imagery, and moral responsibility toward victims? Second, which framing patterns dominate the YouTube narratives, and what linguistic, visual, and rhetorical strategies account for their prominence? Third, how does disaster framing on YouTube function discursively as a mechanism of political delegitimation, shaping public judgments of empathy, competence, and leadership ethics in times of crisis?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to the literature on disaster communication and digital political communication by foregrounding YouTube as a critical arena in which humanitarian crises intersect with struggles over political legitimacy, public trust, and symbolic power.

## 2. Method

The study used a qualitative research design based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and framing analysis to examine how the politics of disaster and elite delegitimation were constructed in YouTube content during the Sumatra flood crisis. The qualitative approach is theoretically justified because this study does not aim to measure the effect of media or audience attitudes statistically, but rather to uncover how meanings, power relations, and claims of legitimacy are discursively produced and contested in digital media texts. CDA is particularly suitable for this research because it conceptualizes discourse as a social practice that reflects and reproduces power relations, ideological positions, and political interests (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2008). In the context of disaster communication, CDA allows researchers to critically interrogate how language, visuals, and narrative structures frame political elites as responsible, negligent, empathetic, or exploitative actors.

Framing analysis, operationalized through the Entman model, is integrated with CDA to provide a systematic analytical bridge between micro-level textual features and macro-level political meaning. While the CDA explains how the discourse works, the framing analysis clarifies what interpretative packages take precedence and which political consequences they bring. This combined approach reinforces analytical rigor by ensuring that interpretive claims are anchored in linguistic-discursive evidence and well-established framing theory. The researcher adopts a critical-interpretive position, acknowledging that the analysis is not value-neutral. Reflexivity is maintained by basing interpretation on explicit analytical indicators, transparent coding steps, and direct reference to empirical material (verbal, visual, and intertextual cue narratives). This positioning enhances methodological credibility while remaining consistent with the epistemological foundation of the CDA.

### 2.1. Datasets and Data Sources

The dataset consists of a small and purposively selected corpus of YouTube videos published in the immediate aftermath of the Sumatra flood disaster at the end of 2025. The limited size of the dataset is an intentional methodological choice rather than a



sampling weakness, as CDA prioritizes depth of analysis over breadth of representation. Video selection followed clearly defined criteria: 1) the video explicitly discusses or criticizes the response, presence, or imagery of political elites during the disaster; 2) the video demonstrates substantial public visibility, indicated by views, comments, or circulation across platforms; and 3) the video originates from channels with a consistent focus on political commentary or public affairs. Based on these criteria, the primary material analyzed is the YouTube video titled *"Menyedihkan! Derita Warga Korban Bencana Sumatera Jadi Ajang Tebar Pesona Pejabat"* published on the Rocky Gerung Official channel. This video was selected because it crystallizes elite criticism, humanitarian imagery, and moral evaluation within a single narrative structure, making it analytically rich for CDA and framing analysis. The reliance on a limited number of videos is explicitly acknowledged as a methodological limitation. However, this limitation is analytically justified because the study seeks to uncover discursive mechanisms and framing logics, not to generalize statistically across all disaster-related YouTube content. The selected video functions as a critical case, illustrating how digital disaster narratives operate as instruments of political delegitimation.

The analysis was conducted through an iterative, step-by-step procedure. First, the video was transcribed and segmented into narrative units based on thematic shifts, visual transitions, and changes in evaluative tone. Second, each segment was examined using Fairclough's textual indicators (lexical choice, evaluative expressions, metaphors, and visual-verbal alignment) to identify moments of moral judgment, attribution of responsibility, and symbolic positioning. Third, Entman's framing functions were applied to each segment to determine whether a discursive element primarily contributed to problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, or treatment recommendation (Entman, 2003, 2010). For instance, visual contrasts between elite appearances and victims' suffering were categorized as moral evaluation, while explicit references to governance failure or delayed response were coded as causal attribution. Finally, findings were interpreted within van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework to connect recurring discursive patterns with broader assumptions about elite legitimacy and power relations.

## 2.2. Critical Discourse Analysis Framework

The study integrates Fairclough's three-dimensional model and van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to construct a multi-layered analytical framework. Integration is theoretically coherent, as both approaches emphasize the relationship between discourse, power, and ideology, while operating at a complementary analytical level. At the textual level (Fairclough), analysis focuses on lexical choices, evaluative expressions, metaphors, syntax, and visual-verbal alignment in video titles, narratives, texts, and thumbnails. Indicators such as emotional diction ("sad", "spreading charm"), irony, and contrast structures are operationalized as markers of moral judgment and ideological position. (Suswandi, 2020; Ghivari and Kosasih, 2024; Taibi, Rizal and Hussin, 2024).

At the level of discourse practice, attention is given to production and presentation strategies, including narrative sequencing, rhetorical style, intertextual references to political statements, and visual composition. These indicators reveal how meaning is structured, amplified, and circulated within the YouTube platform. (Hamid and Jabar, 2020). At the level of social practice, findings are interpreted within the broader political context of disaster governance, elite accountability, and digital public contestation. Van Dijk's framework complements this analysis by operationalizing: 1) Macrostructures as dominant themes (elite criticism, government unpreparedness); 2) Superstructures as



narrative patterns (emotive openings, accusatory cores, moral closures); 3) Microstructures as linguistic strategies (emphasis, generalization, irony); 4) Social cognition as shared assumptions about elite insensitivity; and 5) Social context as asymmetric power relations between state actors and citizens.

### 2.3. Framing Entman Model

To systematically identify framing patterns, this study applies Entman's four framing functions problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation within a CDA-informed analytical process. Each framing element is operationalized through concrete empirical indicators. For example, problem definition is identified through recurring narrative emphases on victim suffering and symbolic elite presence. Causal interpretation is traced through explicit accusations or implicit attributions of blame to officials, governance structures, or policy failures. Moral evaluation is expressed through evaluative language, irony, and visual juxtaposition between elites and victims. Treatment recommendations appear in closing statements, calls for accountability, or demands for ethical leadership.

The strength of this model lies in its compatibility with CDA: framing functions are not treated as isolated categories, but as discursive outcomes produced through language, visuals, and narrative strategies. Linking framing indicators directly to empirical examples enhances analytical precision and avoids abstract categorization.

### 2.4. Supporting Analysis

To enrich the analysis beyond verbal discourse, this study incorporates visual semiotic analysis and a limited examination of audience comments. Visual semiotic analysis focuses on thumbnails, camera angles, visual contrasts, and symbolic gestures. These elements are analyzed as meaning-making resources that frame elites and victims through juxtaposition, hierarchy, and emotional appeal (Motahar, Tavakoli and Mura, 2021).

Audience comments are analyzed selectively, not to measure sentiment quantitatively, but to capture dominant interpretive responses that reflect how framing resonates with viewers. Comment analysis is conducted thematically by identifying recurring evaluative patterns, such as moral condemnation, distrust of elites, or solidarity with victims. Only highly engaged comments (top-ranked or frequently liked) are examined to maintain analytical focus. The scope of comment analysis is deliberately limited and explicitly acknowledged as illustrative rather than representative, serving to triangulate discourse analysis findings rather than to claim audience consensus.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Disaster Politics Framing Patterns in YouTube Videos

An analysis of YouTube content on the Sumatra flood crisis shows that the framing of the disaster is not singular or descriptive, but rather works as a discursive mechanism that links the humanitarian crisis to the political evaluation of the elite. The four main framing patterns identified government unpreparedness, elite imagery, responsive versus unresponsive, and technical-structural framing do not stand in isolation, but intertwine in forming a cohesive narrative of political delegitimization. In Entman's framework (2010), the suffering of citizens is not only the background of events, but is constructed as the core of the problem that requires political accountability.



The narrative of government unpreparedness and elite imagery is often sharply contrasted through the visualization of citizen suffering juxtaposed with footage of sluggish bureaucracy or statements from officials perceived as lacking empathy. Within the “responsive versus unresponsive” framing pattern, YouTube’s algorithm amplifies this narrative by prioritizing videos that trigger high emotional engagement, which frequently culminates in a moral judgment of leadership effectiveness. Consequently, the natural disaster is no longer viewed merely as a technical or ecological event, but as a stage for proving political competence, where logistical failures on the ground are directly translated into systemic failures of governance.

Technical-structural framing is employed not to offer scientific solutions, but to emphasize long-term policy negligence, such as failed infrastructure development or uncontrolled land exploitation. This pattern steers public opinion toward viewing the Sumatra floods as a direct consequence of elite policies that prioritize economic interests over citizen safety. Thus, YouTube functions as a discursive space that transforms collective grief into political demands, where every snippet of disaster footage serves as an instrument to challenge the legitimacy of power through the lens of public accountability.



**Figure 1** Exposure to politics in disasters

Figure 1 illustrate in the opening segment of the video (00:00–01:10), the narrative is built through visuals of the suffering of flood-affected residents who are placed as the center of meaning (problem definition). Representations of submerged houses, children and the elderly in a tired condition, as well as expressions of resignation of citizens are shown through emotional close-ups without the presence of state symbols or public officials. This visual strategy results in what can be termed the symbolic absence of the state, in which the state is not visually present at the time the humanitarian crisis is defined. Thus, disasters are not positioned solely as natural events, but as humanitarian crises that imply a failure of social protection. The framing invites audiences to interpret the disaster through a humanitarian lens rather than through a purely environmental or meteorological perspective. By prioritizing the voices and visual experiences of affected



residents, the narrative constructs empathy and emotional engagement with the victims. At the same time, the absence of institutional actors subtly suggests a gap between public expectations and the visibility of state intervention. Consequently, the opening sequence functions not only as a depiction of suffering but also as a discursive entry point that frames the disaster as a matter of social responsibility and governance.

**Table 1** Mapping Visual Segments, Framing Functions, and Discursive Effects

Visual Segment	Framing Function (Entman)	Discursive Effect
Victim-only opening	Problem definition	Symbolic absence of the state
Elite–victim juxtaposition	Moral evaluation	Delegitimization through performative presence
Critical commentary	Causal interpretation	Attribution of political responsibility
Defensive statements	Frame contestation	Digital blame game
Reflective closure	Treatment recommendation (implicit)	Ethical demand for leadership

Table 1 explain the relationship between the main visual segments in a YouTube video, the framing function according to the Entman model, and the resulting discursive effect. This mapping is used as an analytical tool to organize empirical findings before being elaborated narratively in a results subsection. The table is not intended as an interpretive summary, but rather as an analytical orientation framework that shows how visual elements contribute to the construction of meaning, moral evaluation, and political delegitimization in the narrative of digital disasters. The four framing patterns identified in YouTube's narrative of government unpreparedness, elite imagery, responsive versus unresponsive positioning, and technical-structural explanations operate not as isolated frames but as interrelated components of a broader narrative of delegitimization. Together, they build a cumulative evaluation of political authority that links administrative performance, moral behavior, and symbolic presence. This interconnected framing structure allows human suffering to continue to be translated into political judgment.

### 3.1.1. Framing Government Unpreparedness

The framing pattern of government unpreparedness emerged as the dominant frame that defines disasters not only as natural events, but as failures of risk management and state response. YouTube videos consistently emphasize the delay in response, weak central-regional coordination, and logistical unpreparedness, even though early warnings have been delivered by BMKG. In Entman's framework, this frame works strongly at the level of problem definition and causal interpretation, with the state positioned as the main actor responsible (Boin, Hart and McConnell, 2009; Albrecht, 2021).

What distinguishes framing on YouTube from mainstream media is its evaluative moral intensity. Verbal narratives not only report delays, but attribute them to insensitivity and structural negligence. The use of evaluative diction such as “late”, “stutter”, and “ignore” serves as a moral judgment that implicitly invites the audience to assess the political legitimacy of the elite (Entman, 2003, 2010).



Visually, this framing is strengthened through the visual juxtaposition framing technique (Motahar, Tavakoli and Mura, 2021), which is the contrast between the visual of officials in a safe space and the representation of victims who are submerged, exhausted, and without adequate protection. This combination creates a symbolic narrative of the power distance where the state is formally present but substantially absent. Thus, framing unpreparedness is not only informative, but operates as a structural critique of the state's capacity to fulfill its social contract in times of crisis.

### 3.1.2. *Framing the Imagery of the Political Elite*

The second significant framing pattern is criticism of the image of the political elite in the midst of the suffering of the people. Programs such as “KompasTV's One Desk” criticize officials who are actually on vacation or avoid responsibility when disasters occur. This framing highlights an attempt to portray politics that are perceived as insensitive to crisis situations, which undermines public trust in political elites. If framing unpreparedness questions capacity, then framing the image of the elite directly questions the ethics and morality of power. In this pattern, the presence of elites at disaster sites is represented as performative and image-oriented, rather than as an empathetic leadership practice. The visuals of officials smiling, surrounded by cameras, or associated with non-crisis activities (such as holidays or symbolic agendas) are positioned in contrast to the suffering of citizens.

These findings are consistent with research showing that the opposition and the media are using narratives about the behavior and morals of officials as catastrophic exploitation and moral depravity (Tutan, 2025). This frame of image is also linked to broader political contestation, in which each actor pursues political gain: the government highlights quick actions and achievements, while the opposition highlights incompetence and insensitivity (Imperiale and Vanclay, 2019; Ahmad et al., 2025). The negative perception of crisis management built through this framework contributes to a decline in political trust and a strengthening cynicism towards elites, while shifting public trust to communities and social networks (Davvetas, Ulqinaku and Abi, 2021; Aassve et al., 2024).

This framing is in line with the literature that places disaster as an arena for elite moral evaluation, where personal and symbolic behavior is the main indicator of political legitimacy. In this context, YouTube is not simply criticizing policy, but constructing a narrative about moral failure that elites fail to show empathy that is in tune with the scale of public suffering. The implication is a shift in the locus of public trust. As elites are represented as actors alienated from the reality of the victim, trust is shifted to non-state communities, volunteers, and social networks. Thus, framing the image of the elite serves as a bridge between symbolic criticism and the erosion of institutional trust.

Delegitimization operates not only through explicit accusations, but through repeated visual contrasts that symbolically undermine the authority of the elite. For example, the video juxtaposes close-ups of flooded homes and exhausted residents with shots of officials smiling, talking to the camera, or appearing in a non-crisis setting. Elite performance time is often inserted after a prolonged scene of suffering reinforces the perception of performative presence rather than substantive engagement.

### 3.1.3. *Responsive versus Unresponsive Framing*

Counter-narratives emerged from officials such as Cabinet Secretary Teddy Indra Wijaya who denied the accusation of slow response, stating that the apparatus had been deployed from the beginning. This shows the existence of a defensive framing from the



government to manage the crisis of public trust. This strategy is in line with previous findings on defensive framing and exogenous framing, where leaders refer to disasters as “big and bad” and emphasize external factors to avoid accountability (Boin, Hart and McConnell, 2009; Liu and Boin, 2020). The contestation between the “unresponsive” frame of the critic and the “already responsive” frame of the government creates an intense “blame game” in the digital public space. This kind of contestation is a common characteristic in disaster politics, where each side seeks to control the narrative in order to protect or attack political legitimacy (Tutan, 2025).

Framing contestation is becoming increasingly explicit in the battle between the “unresponsive” narratives produced by YouTube's critical content and the “already acting” narratives delivered by government actors. Officials' defensive statements, such as claims that the apparatus has moved since day one, reflect the defensive framing and blame avoidance strategies prevalent in disaster politics. This fight forms the so-called digital blame game, where legitimacy is no longer determined by formal authority, but rather by the actor's ability to dominate the digital discursive space. YouTube serves as an arena where official claims are tested, questioned, and often undermined through constantly reproduced visuals of suffering. In other words, the claim of state responsiveness loses its hegemonic power when it is not in harmony with the widely circulated visual experience of the victim.

In the responsive versus unresponsive framing, official statements claiming that “the government has acted since the first day” are visually undermined by continuous footage of victims waiting for assistance. This dissonance between verbal claims and visual evidence functions as a delegitimizing mechanism, as narrative authority is transferred from formal statements to lived experience represented on screen.

#### *3.1.4. Technical and Structural Framing*

Some videos point to structural issues such as poor spatial planning, deforestation, and weak environmental regulations as the main causes of disasters. This framing shifts the focus from personal mistakes to systemic issues, which can be a strategy to dampen criticism of certain individuals or institutions. This structural frame has two distinct political implications. First, it can encourage long-term policy discussions on spatial planning, forest protection, and early warning systems, as demonstrated by the disaster risk reduction literature (Ismail-Zadeh et al., 2017; Zorn, 2018; Agarwal et al., 2023; Wisner et al., 2025). Second, structural frames can also serve as a political strategy to avoid focusing on the wrongs of specific individuals or institutions by shifting the cause to the “system”.

The fourth framing pattern shifts attention from individual actors to structural factors such as spatial planning, deforestation, and weak environmental regulations. Normatively, this framing opens up space for long-term policy discussion and is in line with the disaster risk reduction literature. However, politically, structural framing is also ambivalent. On the one hand, it broadens the public's understanding of the root of systemic problems; On the other hand, it can serve as a depoliticizing strategy by obscuring the accountability of certain actors. Thus, the technical-structural framing is not neutral, but is tied to certain discursive interests in the catastrophic political arena.

### *3.2. The Political Implications of Disaster Framing*

The analysis shows that the political framing of disasters has three main implications for political dynamics and public trust.



### 3.2.1. Delegitimization and Strengthening of Political Image

The dominant negative framing in YouTube videos has the potential to damage the image of a particular official or party, while positive framing can strengthen the legitimacy of power. The case study of COVID-19 in South Korea and the 2023 Turkey earthquake shows that the positive framing of government performance tends to maintain or increase electoral support (Jo and Chang, 2020; Binici *et al.*, 2025; Demirdogen and Olhan, 2025). However, in the case of the Sumatra floods, the dominance of the negative frame was due to unpreparedness, imagery, and structural failures that created significant political pressure on the legitimacy of the government. Leaders use a combination of competence, empathy, and fault shifting frames to maintain legitimacy (Triantafillidou and Yannas, 2022; Samaras, 2025), But its effectiveness depends on public perception of the fit between rhetoric and actual action.

The Critical Discourse Analysis (AWK) approach allows for a sharper reading of the power relations that work in the framing of disaster politics. In this context, power is not merely understood as a formal authority of the state, but as a symbolic power to define meaning, legitimacy, and responsibility (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2008). The political elite who appear in the video have symbolic institutional power, namely legitimacy derived from position and access to state resources. This power is evident in the use of formal language, quick response claims, and an emphasis on bureaucratic procedures. Defensive statements such as “the government has been moving since day one” (paraphrasing) reflect efforts to maintain the hegemony of the official narrative through defensive framing and blame avoidance.

On the other hand, YouTube as a platform presents an alternative symbolic power. Content creators and digital journalists have no formal authority, but gain power through visibility, public affection, and moral legitimacy. By visually and repetitively highlighting the suffering of citizens, YouTube content shifts the center of legitimacy from the state to the victim's experience. Within van Dijk's framework, this suggests a shift in control over discourse, in which non-state actors are able to produce counter-hegemonic discourses that challenge official narratives (van Dijk, 2008). This power relationship becomes even more apparent when YouTube's narrative places officials as actors who are “present but not substantially present”. The physical presence of the elite is framed as an empty symbol that is not proportional to the scale of the suffering of the citizens. This is where AWK shows how discourse not only represents reality, but assesses, delegitimizes, and restructures power relations (Fairclough, 2013).

The dominance of negative framing on YouTube contributes to the process of symbolic delegitimization of the political elite. In AWK's perspective, legitimacy is understood as the result of a battle of meaning, not simply a product of formal authority. When the visual of citizens' suffering is consistently contrasted with official rhetoric, the symbolic power of the state is eroded. YouTube, in this case, acts as an alternative producer of symbolic power. Content creators and digital journalists do not have institutional authority, but gain moral legitimacy through proximity to the victim's experience. This marks a shift in discourse control from the state to non-state actors in the digital public space.

More importantly, delegitimization in this case unfolds as a cumulative discursive process. Framing constructs moral judgment, which then leads to symbolic erosion of elite authority. Repeated representations of emotional distance, performative gestures, and rhetorical defensiveness contribute to what can be described as moral disqualification and loss of narrative authority. Political elites are not delegitimized solely because of



policy failure, but because their symbolic performance is repeatedly framed as incompatible with the scale of public suffering.

### 3.2.2. *Public Opinion Mobilization and Political Pressure*

The media and netizens use framing to pressure the government to be more transparent and responsive. The dominant framing of government responsibility and failure in YouTube videos fuels increased political participation and protests. The model of the dissemination of public opinion shows that the severity of the disaster, government response, accountability, and positive/negative media content determine the dynamics of opinion and the potential for the escalation of criticism (Zhang, Tang and Ni, 2025).

YouTube as a social media platform plays a role as a surveillance actor that strengthens the public's capacity to pressure the government for transparency and accountability (Ji and Zhang, 2025; Khawaja et al., 2025). The platform's accessibility and ability to quickly mobilize opinion make it an important instrument in contemporary disaster politics.

Disaster framing on YouTube also serves as a mechanism for mobilizing public opinion. The representation of the failure and insensitivity of the elite fuels political pressure on the government to increase transparency and accountability. In this context, YouTube acts as a surveillance actor that strengthens the capacity of civil society to demand state response.

### 3.2.3. *Symbolic Politics and Depoliticization*

Visits to disaster sites, expressions of empathy, or distribution of aid are often interpreted as a symbol of concern, but they are also read as electoral strategies. Leaders adopted symbols of grief, field visits, promises of help, and “language of concern” to align themselves with public suffering while controlling anger (Triantafillidou and Yannas, 2022; Samaras, 2025). “Apolitical” (depoliticized) actions and rhetoric are used to display humanitarian neutrality, but in practice often maintain the status quo and hierarchy of power (Desportes and Moyo-Nyoni, 2021; Tutan, 2025). In a context of high polarization, the claim that criticism is “just politics” becomes a way of delegitimizing the opposition and silencing accountability (Desportes and Moyo-Nyoni, 2021; Tutan, 2025).

The symbolic actions of the elite field visits, expressions of empathy, and distribution of aid are read ambivalently. On the one hand, it is meant to dampen public anger; on the other hand, YouTube's framing often interprets it as an electoral strategy and an attempt to depoliticize criticism. The claim that criticism is a “catastrophic politicization” actually serves to perpetuate unequal power relations.

## 3.3. *Framing Dynamics in Digital Space*

YouTube as a digital platform has unique characteristics that distinguish it from traditional media in the context of disaster political framing. The platform allows alternative and critical content to flourish beyond the control of mainstream media, creating space for counter-framing and counter-narrative (Motahar, Tavakoli and Mura, 2021; Ghivari and Kosasih, 2024). YouTube's interactivity through the commentary feature also creates a more complex discourse dynamic, where audiences not only accept passive framing but actively negotiate, support, or reject the narrative being conveyed. This is in line with AWK's perspective which views discourse as a dynamic and contestative social practice (Ghivari and Kosasih, 2024; Taibi, Rizal and Hussin, 2024).



Interestingly, YouTube is not completely outside the hegemony structure. On the one hand, these platforms allow for sharp criticism of elites and the state, serving as a watchdog mechanism and symbolic delegitimization (Ji and Zhang, 2025; Khawaja et al., 2025). But on the other hand, YouTube's algorithmic logic that prioritizes sensationalism, emotion, and conflict also has the potential to reproduce certain patterns of power. Hyperbolic titles, dramatic thumbnails, and emotional narratives can reinforce the visibility of criticism, but at the same time construct disaster as a commodity of attention. In Fairclough's perspective, this discourse practice shows that digital media not only challenges political hegemony, but is also tied to the economic-political structure of digital capitalism platforms (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2008).

Thus, power in disaster politics on YouTube is ambivalent by challenging state hegemony through counter-framing and moral delegitimization and reproducing new hegemony based on platform logic, public emotions, and the economy of attention. This reinforcement confirms that the framing of catastrophic politics in YouTube videos works simultaneously on three levels: (1) textual-visual, through diction, narrative, and image composition; (2) discursive, through the contestation between critical framing and defensive framing; (3) structural-power, through the symbolic redistribution of power between the state, digital media, and citizens. Disasters are not only represented as natural crises or technical failures, but as a production arena and symbolic power struggles that determine political legitimacy in digital public spaces (Boin, Hart and McConnell, 2009; Albrecht, 2021; Taibi, Rizal and Hussin, 2024).

YouTube serves not only as a medium, but as a digital political actor that reshapes the dynamics of disaster framing. The platform allows for the production of counter-hegemonic framing that challenges the narrative of the state, while also being tied to the logic of platform capitalism that prioritizes emotions, conflict, and visibility. Disaster framing on YouTube works simultaneously on three levels: textual-visual, discursive, and structural-power. Disasters are represented not only as natural crises, but as symbolic battlegrounds that determine political legitimacy in digital public spaces.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that YouTube-based disaster narratives during the Sumatra flood crisis function not merely as representations of humanitarian suffering, but as politically consequential discursive practices that reshape elite legitimacy in digital public spaces. Rather than reiterating descriptive outcomes, the findings underscore how disaster communication on YouTube actively reconfigures power relations by relocating moral authority from state actors to digitally mediated representations of victims' experiences.

Crucially, this study moves beyond identifying dominant framing patterns by explicating the mechanisms through which elite delegitimization operates in digital environments. Delegitimization is produced through the strategic juxtaposition of elite imagery and citizen suffering, the amplification of moral evaluations embedded in audiovisual discourse, and the contestation between defensive state narratives and experiential visual evidence circulated by non-state actors. Through these mechanisms, YouTube transforms disaster communication into a site where political authority is evaluated less by formal institutional response and more by perceived empathy, authenticity, and alignment between rhetoric and lived realities.

Theoretically, this research contributes to disaster communication and political framing literature by conceptualizing YouTube as an autonomous political actor that



redistributes framing authority, blurs the boundary between journalism and activism, and intensifies legitimacy struggles during crises. By integrating Critical Discourse Analysis with Entman's framing model, the study demonstrates how verbal, visual, and narrative elements jointly function as instruments of symbolic power capable of eroding elite credibility and reconstituting public trust dynamics.

The study affirms that contemporary disasters are not only humanitarian or technical events, but digitally mediated political battlegrounds in which legitimacy, accountability, and democratic pressure are continuously negotiated. Understanding these dynamics is essential for advancing theories of crisis communication, political legitimacy, and the evolving role of digital platforms in shaping governance outcomes during times of collective vulnerability.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

### References

- Aassve, A., Capezzone, T., Cavalli, N., Conzo, P., & Peng, C. (2024). Social and political trust diverge during a crisis. *Scientific Reports*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-50898-4>
- Agarwal, P., Sahoo, D., Parida, Y., Paltasingh, K., & Chowdhury, J. (2023). Land use changes and natural disaster fatalities: Empirical analysis for India. *Ecological Indicators*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2023.110525>
- Ahmad, M., Shen, Q., Boota, M., & Liu, R. (2025). Natural Disasters and Rehabilitation: Post-Disaster Aid, Corruption, Misallocation, and Mistargeting. *Sustainable Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.70225>
- Albrecht, F. (2021). Natural hazards as political events: framing and politicisation of floods in the United Kingdom. *Environmental Hazards*, 21, 17–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17477891.2021.1898926>
- Binici, S., Choi, J., Mitchell, S., & Pizzi, E. (2025). A Text Analysis of News Media Framing of Government Response to the 2023 Türkiye--Syria Earthquake. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.70023>
- Boin, A., Hart, P., & McConnell, A. (2009). Crisis exploitation: political and policy impacts of framing contests. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16, 106–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760802453221>
- Davvetas, V., Ulqinaku, A., & Abi, G. (2021). Local Impact of Global Crises, Institutional Trust, and Consumer Well-Being: Evidence from the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of International Marketing*, 30, 73–101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069031x211022688>
- Demirdogen, A., & Olhan, E. (2025). Fifty-four thousand deaths, zero electoral impact. *Public Choice*, 204, 329–354. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-025-01260-x>
- Desportes, I., & Moyo-Nyoni, N. (2021). Depoliticising disaster response in a politically saturated context: the case of the 2016-2019 droughts in Zimbabwe. *Disasters*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12516>
- Entman, R. M. (2003). Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame after 9/11. In *Political Communication* (Vol. 20, Number 4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600390244176>
- Entman, R. M. (2007). Framing bias: Media in the distribution of power. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00336.x>



- Entman, R. M. (2010). Media framing biases and political power: Explaining slant in news of Campaign 2008. In *Journalism* (Vol. 11, Number 4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884910367587>
- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Language and Power*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315838250>
- Ghivari, R., & Kosasih, A. (2024). Konstruksi Narasi Surga: Analisis Wacana Kritis Berita Janji Kampanye Calon Bupati Mesuji. *Icon: Islamic Communication and Contemporary Media Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.35719/icon.v3i2.156>
- Hamid, M., & Jabar, M. (2020). Penghuraian Strategi Wacana Teks Ucapan Belanjawan 2019. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 20, 244–263. <https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2020-2002-14>
- Hasfi, N., & Fisher, M. (2025). Narrating Vulnerability and Reshaping Resilience: Media Discourse and Political Coalitions on Jakarta Flooding. *Environmental Communication*, 19, 688–706. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2024.2445565>
- Imperiale, A., & Vanclay, F. (2019). Command-and-control, emergency powers, and the failure to observe United Nations disaster management principles following the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2019.101099>
- Ismail-Zadeh, A., Ismail-Zadeh, A., Cutter, S., Takeuchi, K., & Paton, D. (2017). Forging a paradigm shift in disaster science. *Natural Hazards*, 86, 969–988. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11069-016-2726-x>
- Ji, R., & Zhang, C. (2025). Media assistance behavior: a vital support for governmental response to social emergencies. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2025.1511160>
- Jo, W., & Chang, D. (2020). Political Consequences of COVID-19 and Media Framing in South Korea. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.00425>
- Khawaja, S., Aslam, S., Yousaf, M., Mahmood, N., Yaser, N., Raza, S., & Mahmood, T. (2025). Media, Disasters, and the Global South: Comparing Global North and South Media Framing on Pakistan's 2022 Floods. *Journalism and Media*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia6020070>
- Liu, Y., & Boin, A. (2020). Framing a mega-disaster: Political rhetoric and the Wenchuan earthquake. *Safety Science*, 125, 104621. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2020.104621>
- Motahar, P., Tavakoli, R., & Mura, P. (2021). Social media influencers' visual framing of Iran on YouTube. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 49, 270–282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2021.2014252>
- Samaras, G. (2025). Derailing Truth: Tripartite Discourse and Public Outrage Over Greece's Tempe Valley Disaster. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.70062>
- Suswandi, I. (2020). Representasi Kelugasan Beranda Laman [www.covid19.go.id](http://www.covid19.go.id): Tinjauan Analisis Wacana Kritis. *Multimedia Systems*, 1, 21–43. <https://doi.org/10.12928/mms.v1i2.2210>
- Taibi, M., Rizal, A., & Hussin, S. (2024). Komunikasi Politik di Negeri Sarawak: Analisis Wacana Kritis Terhadap Manifesto Parti Politik dalam Pilihan Raya Negeri Sarawak 2021. *Kajian Malaysia*. <https://doi.org/10.21315/km2024.42.s1.10>
- Triantafillidou, A., & Yannas, P. (2022). Coping with natural disasters: Political leadership framing of the 2018 wildfires in Greece. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12431>



- Tutan, M. (2025). Blame Games of Weather-Related Disasters: A Qualitative Research on Political Rhetoric of Government and Opposition in Türkiye. *Review of Policy Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.70031>
- van Dijk, T. A. (2008). Discourse and context: A sociocognitive approach. In *Discourse and Context: A Sociocognitive Approach*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511481499>
- Wisner, B., Alcántara-Ayala, I., Gaillard, J., Kelman, I., & Marchezini, V. (2025). *Understanding and Addressing Disaster Risk*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003292814>
- Zhang, Y., Tang, W., & Ni, T. (2025). A public opinion propagation model for technological disasters. *Scientific Reports*, 15. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-91244-0>
- Zorn, M. (2018). *Natural Disasters and Less Developed Countries* (pp. 59–78). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59002-8\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59002-8_4)

