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Article

The Gibran Diploma Controversy in Indonesian Online Media: A Discourse Network Analysis of Detik.com, Suara.com, and RMOL.id

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A B S T R A C T

Controversy over Gibran Rakabuming Raka's academic degree has expanded from a legal administrative dispute into narrative contestation. This study maps Indonesian online media discourse using Discourse Network Analysis (DNA), combining qualitative coding and social network analysis. Actors were coded inductively by their statements' support for or opposition to core claims (invalid versus valid diploma); "challenger" and "defender" labels thus emerged from coded claim positions, not predefined categories. Roy Suryo led challengers promoting the invalid diploma claim. Defenders comprised Djakarta Integrated School (MDIS), which issued and verified the diploma; the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), which defended Gibran and urged ending the polemic; UTS (as abbreviated in the archive), a peripheral administrative actor; and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), which validated the data through PDDikti. DNA identified MDIS as the central legitimation hub and a strong MDIS and PSI tie. Dominant frames opposed legality/ethics/nepotism to political motivation, revealing delegitimization struggles.

Keywords: *Discourse Network Analysis, The Controversy Surrounding Gibran's Diploma, Social Network Analysis, Political Communication*

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INTRODUCTION

The controversy surrounding the authenticity of Gibran Rakabuming Raka's diploma from the Djakarta Integrated School (MDIS) emerged as a prominent topic in Indonesian online media between September and October 2025. What began as an administrative matter concerning the validity of an educational document evolved into a political debate, drawing in a wide range of stakeholders including politicians, educational institutions, political parties, legal experts, and the general public. This development illustrates that the controversy over Gibran's diploma extends beyond the mere validity of an academic credential; it touches upon the credibility of educational institutions, the political image of a public figure, and the role of the media both in disseminating information and in serving as a forum for public discourse.

Previous research on the controversy surrounding Gibran and similar political issues in Indonesia has yielded several significant findings. Sinaga and Kristiyani (2024) found that media coverage frequently highlighted concerns regarding legality, ethics, and allegations of nepotism. Amini (2024) and Rahayu et al. (2024) identified a prevailing negative sentiment toward Gibran on social media, based on analyses using Naive Bayes and Neural Network methods. Meanwhile, Santoso (2024) discovered that the "Gibran" account occupied a central position within the conversation network on Twitter/X, while Sugitanata & Hamid, (2025) discussed the decline in the quality of democracy in relation to dynastic political practices. Although these studies provide insights into media coverage, public response, and political dynamics, they do not fully elucidate the relationships between the actors involved and the claims they advance during a debate. Consequently, there remains a research gap concerning

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which actors articulate specific statements, where they stand in relation to circulating claims, and how these connections give rise to distinct discourse groups. This study seeks to address this gap by mapping the relationships between actors and the claims they either support or oppose, identifying the resulting discourse groups, and determining which actors hold pivotal positions within the structure of the debate. A network-based approach was selected because it allows for the interpretation of statements not merely as textual content, but as components of relationships between various parties. Through this approach, patterns of support, opposition, and polarization can be analysed in a more structured manner than would be possible if the research focused solely on media content or framing. Furthermore, a network approach enables the identification of central actors who may influence the trajectory of a debate, while also facilitating the observation of shifts in the structure of discourse over time. Therefore, a relational perspective becomes important for understanding how administrative matters can evolve into political issues, as well as how power is exercised through the formation and dissemination of discourse.

This study employs Discourse Network Analysis (DNA), developed by Leifeld (2017), as it enables the systematic linking of content analysis specifically the substance of statements with the mapping of relationships among actors. Unlike conventional qualitative content analysis, which typically focuses on categorizing textual content, DNA allows researchers to construct a two-mode network that connects actors to the concepts or claims they articulate. Through this network, the structure of the discourse can be analysed using various metrics, such as centrality, density, and modularity. DNA also differs from the framing analysis introduced by Entman (1993); while framing analysis emphasizes how media outlets select and highlight specific aspects of an event, DNA places greater focus on the actors who construct these frames, as well as the relationships of support or opposition that exist between them. Consequently, this research can not only explain how the controversy surrounding Gibran's diploma was framed, but also identify the parties that supported or rejected specific frames, revealing how their respective positions shaped the structure of the debate. Furthermore, DNA complements the critical discourse analysis approach which generally prioritizes in-depth textual interpretation by providing an empirical, quantifiable map. By integrating qualitative and quantitative analysis, DNA enables researchers to interpret the meaning of statements while simultaneously measuring the positions of actors, the cohesion of discourse coalitions, and the degree of polarization present. Therefore, this method is considered well-suited for gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between the various parties involved in the controversy over Gibran's diploma.

Definition of Key Concepts

Discursive Network

A discursive network is a structure of relationships formed between actors and the concepts or claims they either support or oppose within a public debate. Drawing on Leifeld (2017), a discursive network can be understood as a two-mode network that connects actors to the concepts they employ when expressing their views. Through these connections, actors who share similar positions on a set of concepts can be identified as part of a "discourse coalition." In this study, the concept of a discursive network is used to examine the relationships between the parties involved in the controversy surrounding Gibran's academic degree and the statements they have made, allowing for a systematic mapping of patterns of support, opposition, and the formation of groups within the debate.

Political Framing

Political framing is a process in which actors select, emphasize, and organize specific aspects of an event to shape particular understandings, evaluations, and perspectives regarding that event (Entman, 1993) In the context of this study, political framing concerns how actors assign meaning to the controversy over Gibran's academic degree. Some parties may frame the issue as a matter of document validity that must be resolved through legal and administrative procedures, while others may view it as an attempt to attack a political

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opponent with specific underlying motives. These differing perspectives demonstrate that an event can take on different meanings depending on how actors select and present information. Consequently, political framing is used here to understand how this controversy is constructed either as an administrative issue or as a component of political rivalry.

Delegitimization

Delegitimization is a discursive process employed to diminish or call into question the legitimacy, credibility, and standing of another party. In this study, delegitimization is evident in statements that question the validity of Gibran's educational background and link this to his suitability as a public official. However, the process of delegitimization does not occur solely through statements directed at Gibran; those defending him may also delegitimize his critics by framing the controversy as a politically motivated effort lacking any legitimate basis. Thus, in this study, delegitimization is understood as a bidirectional process: it can involve casting doubt on the credibility of the individual being criticized, or questioning the legitimacy of those who raise the issue in the first place. This concept helps explain how claims and statements are employed by actors to strengthen their own positions while simultaneously weakening those of their opponents.

Polarization

Polarization refers to a condition in which public debate splits into groups holding opposing views, with little common ground regarding the claims or positions they support. In network analysis, polarization can be observed through the formation of clusters characterized by strong internal ties but relatively weak connections to other groups (Reenock et al., 2022;Leifeld, 2017). This condition can intensify when actors with similar views continuously reinforce their group's narrative while tending to ignore or reject dissenting perspectives a phenomenon described by Cano-orón et al. (2019) through the concept of an "echo chamber." In the context of the controversy surrounding Gibran's academic credentials, polarization is manifested when actors form groups that consistently support or reject specific claims, thereby sharpening differences in perspective and limiting the space for the exchange of arguments between groups. Consequently, the concept of polarization is used here to identify group divisions within a discourse network and to understand how relationships of support and opposition among various parties shape the structure of public debate.

Research Objectives

This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how the discourse surrounding the controversy over Gibran Rakabuming Raka's academic diploma was constructed, disseminated, and sustained through coverage by various online media outlets in Indonesia. In the realm of political communication, issues that are essentially technical in nature often evolve into public debates once they enter the media sphere, as they frequently involve specific interests and strategies. Consequently, this research is designed to explore the dynamics of this discourse by mapping the actors involved, analysing key concepts, and examining the relationships between the various elements of the discourse.

First, this study seeks to identify the key actors involved in shaping the discourse surrounding the controversy over Gibran's academic diploma. These actors include not only those directly involved in the events but also politicians, academics, public figures, educational institutions, and the media itself. Each actor may adopt a different stance acting as an initiator, supporter, opponent, or occupying a neutral position. By mapping these individual roles, this study aims to reveal the distribution of positions and power that steer the direction of discourse within the media.

Second, this study examines the ideas, arguments, and claims employed by these actors to frame the issue of the diploma. This aspect is crucial because public debate is determined not merely by who is speaking, but also by how an issue is constructed both ideologically and rhetorically. Through an analysis of the concepts that emerge, this study seeks to grasp the

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core of the matter under dispute. This will clarify whether the unfolding debate is based on facts, driven by politics, or the result of specific framing strategies.

Third, this study aims to map the relationships between actors, as well as the connections between the concepts they introduce into online media discourse. By visualizing this discourse network, the study can uncover patterns such as polarization, cooperative ties, the formation of argumentative clusters, or indirect alliances within the discursive space. Such network analysis helps illustrate how discourse evolves, who influences whom, and how an issue shifts from one actor to another.

Fourth, this study aims to interpret the significance of these discourse network structures within the context of Indonesian political communication. This includes how a technical issue can be leveraged as a political tool, how the media may amplify or shift the focus of an issue, and how the process of politicization takes shape through interactions among the various actors involved. Through this interpretation, the study seeks to explain the mechanisms by which a public debate develops into a complex arena for the contestation of discourse. Overall, this research is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the discursive dynamics surrounding the controversy over Gibran's academic diploma in online media, thereby serving as an academic contribution to the fields of political communication, discourse analysis, and media studies in Indonesia.

Literature Review

The controversy surrounding the validity of Gibran Rakabuming Raka's academic degree widely discussed across various media highlights issues concerning integrity, political legitimacy, and the ways in which educational matters are politicized within the arena of Indonesian political contestation. To examine this case from an academic perspective, a theoretical framework is required one that addresses political legitimacy, the politicization of academic issues, and the power relations that underpin the emergence of such allegations of academic misconduct.

This study draws upon the theory of media framing (Entman, 1993), the theory of digital political communication, and the concept of political legitimacy within a democratic system. Framing theory explains how the media selects and highlights specific aspects of an issue to shape public perception of an event. Meanwhile, the theory of digital political communication emphasizes how social media accelerates the flow of information and influences the formation of collective opinion. According to Tambunan (2022), political legitimacy is heavily influenced by public perception regarding a candidate's integrity and credibility perceptions that can be undermined if a candidate becomes embroiled in issues such as corruption or controversies concerning their academic credentials.

Previous studies indicate that negative media framing can increase public distrust and diminish the legitimacy of political candidates. For instance, a framing analysis of news coverage concerning Gibran reveals that the media frequently focused on issues of legality and political ethics, while also associating him with dynastic politics and nepotism. These findings align with research by Sugitanata & Hamid (2025), which highlights a decline in the quality of democracy driven by the rise of dynastic politics a system where access to leadership positions is determined more by familial ties than by individual competence.

Furthermore, research on social media sentiment suggests that controversial issues such as the controversy surrounding Gibran's academic credentials tend to trigger negative responses and foster polarization. Amini (2024), employing the Naïve Bayes method to analyze sentiment among social media users on Twitter, found that negative sentiment dominated public discourse regarding the Constitutional Court's decision to allow Gibran to run as a vice-presidential candidate. Additionally, research by Rachimoellah (2024) demonstrates how "echo chamber" and "filter bubble" models on social media platforms exacerbate ideological divisions among the supporters of different political parties.

A social network study by Santoso (2024) indicates that the "Gibran" account serves as a central node within the social media conversation network. This underscores the fact that

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specific actors play a significant role in broadening the reach of an issue and shaping the direction of public opinion.

Other research highlights the importance of digital literacy and transparency in political communication as measures to mitigate the negative impacts resulting from the rapid spread of issues on social media (Anam, 2025). Faqihuddin & Sufyanto further suggest that more adaptive political communication strategies are essential, particularly for engaging younger demographics a primary target for viral issues.

This study draws upon three core fields: Discourse Analysis, Social Network Analysis, and Political Communication. These are integrated through the Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) approach developed by Leifeld (2017). This approach is used to examine the structure of policy debates by treating statements made by actors as relational data, which can then be mapped within a two-mode (actor concept) network. Leifeld (2017) explains that DNA combines the strengths of qualitative discourse analysis with the precision of quantitative social network analysis. In DNA, a "discourse coalition" refers to a group of actors who share similar views, claims, or concepts regarding a specific issue. By mapping these coalitions, researchers can discern the structure of public discourse, including the extent of polarization or the emergence of a consensus. The findings of Reenock et al. (2022) reinforce the effectiveness of DNA in interpreting complex policy debates within the digital sphere, as the technique clearly reveals how actors cluster based on their shared support for or opposition to particular claims.

METHOD

This research is situated within an interpretive constructivist paradigm. This paradigm posits that social reality including discourse that emerges in the public sphere does not exist in isolation; rather, it is shaped through the interactions and interpretations of social actors. Consequently, the controversy surrounding Gibran's diploma is understood as a social construct, arising from various claims produced by actors within the media. The researcher's task is to interpret the meaning underlying this construct, utilizing network visualization as empirical evidence.

This study is exploratory descriptive in nature and employs a mixed-methods approach. It combines qualitative analysis to explore the meanings embedded in the claims appearing within the discourse with quantitative network analysis, which maps the patterns of relationships among the elements present in that discourse. These two approaches are integrated via the Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) method, developed by (Leifeld, 2017). This method treats statements made by actors as interconnected data points, organizing them into a two-mode network that links actors to specific concepts.

The research population encompasses all online news coverage concerning the controversy over Gibran's diploma. A purposive sampling strategy was applied based on the following criteria: 1) The articles must originate from national online media outlets with distinct editorial profiles (Suara.com, RMOL.id, and Detik.com). 2) The articles must have been published during the peak of the controversy (September–October 2025). 3) The articles must contain direct quotes from at least two different actors.

Based on these criteria, three articles were selected as the primary units of analysis.

The articles were collected using search engines and the internal search functions of each media outlet's website. The search process utilized a set of Indonesian language keywords related to the controversy surrounding Gibran Rakabuming's diploma. These keywords are combined with search engine operators and quotation marks to obtain more relevant results such as "Gibran's diploma" or "Gibran Rakabuming's diploma," "controversy surrounding Gibran's diploma," "authenticity of Gibran's diploma," "Roy Suryo," and "diploma." The search is limited to the period from September 1 to October 31, 2025, in accordance with the timeframe for the peak of the discourse as established in the research manuscript.

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The selection of articles was conducted based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that the analysed documents aligned with the research focus. To be included in the archive, an article had to be a news report excluding opinion pieces, editorials, or feature stories published by Suara.com, RMOL.id, or Detik.com between September 1 and October 31, 2025. Furthermore, the articles had to be written in Indonesian and address the validity of Gibran's academic diploma as the primary issue. Additionally, each article was required to include direct quotes from at least two different actors. Conversely, the following were excluded from the research archive: opinion pieces, editorials, columns, press releases published without journalistic processing, articles from other media outlets, content from blogs or aggregators, articles published outside the specified timeframe, pieces that mentioned the diploma issue only in passing, articles containing only one source or lacking direct quotes, and texts in foreign languages or translations.

The article selection process must be documented in stages to demonstrate how the research archive was compiled. These stages include the number of documents identified during the initial search, the number of documents remaining after the removal of duplicates, the number of articles that passed the screening of titles and opening paragraphs, and the final number of articles that met all criteria following a full text review. The figures for each stage must reflect the actual results of the search and filtering process carried out by the researcher. Based on this research design, the final archive consists of three articles from Suara.com, RMOL.id, and Detik.com. The article from Suara.com was published on September 24, 2025, while the article from RMOL.id was published on October 22, 2025. The publication date for the Detik.com article must be specified based on the actual document used in the research.

Data analysis in this study employs Discourse Network Analysis (DNA), a method developed by Philip Leifeld. This approach integrates qualitative content analysis with social network analysis, enabling researchers to map the relationships between various actors and concepts that emerge within a public discourse (Leifeld, 2017). In other words, DNA helps reveal how specific actors voice, support, or oppose particular claims, and how these interactions shape the overall structure of the discourse. In the application of Discourse Network Analysis (DNA), each observation is represented by three elements: an actor, a concept, and a value indicating the stance or position taken. Following Leifeld (2017) convention, a value of +1 denotes support, 0 indicates a neutral or ambiguous position, and −1 signifies opposition. This approach allows a single article to yield multiple observations; an actor may be associated with several observations when discussing different concepts, and multiple actors who support the same concept become connected within an actor-to-actor one mode network projection. Consequently, the resulting network illustrates patterns of support for or opposition to claims, rather than merely reflecting the number of articles or the length of the texts being analysed.

In the initial phase, every quote, statement, or comment made by the actors involved is systematically coded. This coding process breaks down the key elements into: (1) Actors: the individuals or institutions participating in the discourse such as Roy Suryo, MDIS, PSI, the KPU (General Elections Commission), legal and political experts, IPB (Bogor Agricultural University) lecturers, and, naturally, the general public. (2) Concepts or Claims: the substantive issues or assertions addressed by the actors for example, K1 = "Invalid Diploma," K2 = "Valid Diploma," K3 = "Politically Motivated," or K4 = "Ending the Polemic."

The codebook for this study is designed to categorize actors' statements based on concepts related to the controversy surrounding Gibran's diploma. Concept K1 an invalid or problematic diploma encompasses claims that question the diploma's validity. This concept includes two sub concepts: K1a, which covers claims that the data cannot be found within the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's system; and K1b, which pertains to alleged administrative irregularities, such as discrepancies in the diploma number, official seals, or administrative procedures. Meanwhile, K2 a valid diploma includes statements affirming the legitimacy of Gibran's diploma. This concept consists of sub concept K2a, regarding the presence of data in the Higher Education Database (PDDikti), and K2b, concerning claims that all academic and administrative requirements have been met.

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Furthermore, the study employs concept K3 a politically motivated controversy to identify statements linking the diploma polemic to political interests, as well as concept K4 calls to end the polemic to group claims asserting that the matter is resolved and should not be prolonged. In total, the codebook comprises eight codes: four primary concepts and their four corresponding sub concepts.

The application of the codebook involves linking each actor to the concepts they express, then assigning a value based on the position conveyed in the news coverage. For instance, if Roy Suryo claims that a diploma is problematic and that no corresponding data can be found in the ministry's system, his statement is coded as support for K1 and K1a, with a value of +1 for each. Conversely, if MDIS states that Gibran's diploma is valid and that the data is recorded in the PDDikti (Higher Education Database), this statement is coded as support for K2 and K2a, with a value of +1 for each. If MDIS also explicitly rejects the claim that the diploma is problematic, this can be recorded as a value of −1 for K1. Furthermore, if the PSI (Indonesian Solidarity Party) states that the diploma is valid, that the controversy is politically charged, and that the issue should be brought to an end, these statements are coded as support for K2, K3, and K4, respectively. Statements from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) or experts from IPB University may also be coded as support for K2 and K2a, provided that the content of their statements explicitly affirms the validity of the diploma and the existence of its data in the PDDikti. All such examples must be aligned with the actual content of the quotes and attributions found within the articles included in the archive.

In this approach, every statement made by an actor is not only recorded but also categorized into relevant units of analysis, facilitating the mapping of relationships between actors and their argumentative positions. Once all data has been coded, it is processed using software such as Discourse Network Analyzer (DNA) and Visone. These tools generate visual representations network graphs that display the relationships between actors and the claims they put forward. Through these visualizations, researchers can observe patterns of connectivity, such as which actors share similar claims, which groups hold opposing views, and the positioning of specific concepts within the discourse structure.

The resulting matrices can be projected into one-mode actor-actor networks to examine patterns of relationships based on shared positions regarding specific claims, as well as one-mode concept-concept networks to identify interconnections among the various issues that emerge. Network analysis includes measuring density to determine the overall level of connectivity, assessing the positions and roles of actors within the network, and calculating modularity to identify discourse groups or clusters. Given that the number of articles in the archive is relatively limited, these measurements are used to provide a descriptive account of the network's characteristics and structure, rather than as a basis for broad generalizations or statistical inferences regarding the wider media landscape.

The subsequent stage is structural analysis, which involves calculating various network metrics to understand the characteristics and dynamics of the discourse. These metrics include: (1) Density: to assess the overall level of connectivity within the network; (2) Centrality: to identify the most influential or frequently appearing actors or claims; (3) Modularity: to detect groups or clusters within the network, which may indicate polarization or the formation of alliances among actors.

Through this combination of coding, visualization, and structural analysis, DNA provides a deeper understanding of how discourse is formed, how actors enter into coalitions or opposition with one another, and how certain claims gain dominance within public debate.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The controversy surrounding Gibran Rakabuming Raka's academic diploma has extended beyond mere administrative questions regarding the document's validity; it has evolved into a discursive battle involving various actors, including politicians, legal and technology experts, and political parties. Viewed as a network of discourse, two primary

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camps emerge: those who "attack" the validity of the diploma, and those who "defend" it, asserting that there is no issue whatsoever.

Actors Involved (Nodes in the Network)

Attacking Actors/Issue Instigators

Roy Suryo: The most vocal figure questioning the validity of Gibran's diploma. He acts as the claimant who introduced the narrative that the diploma is problematic.

The assertion that Roy Suryo serves as the leader of the challenging group must be supported by observable indicators derived from network analysis, rather than relying solely on impressions formed while reading the news coverage. Within the research archive, Roy Suryo's position can be explained through four indicators, while acknowledging the limitations imposed by the number of articles analysed.

First, consider the frequency of coded statements. Roy Suryo is the only actor in the archive whose statements are linked to more than one "challenging" concept: K1, concerning the alleged invalidity of a diploma, and K1a, regarding the claim that no corresponding data could be found within the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's system. Furthermore, he can also be associated with K1b when his statements specifically address alleged administrative irregularities, such as issues with a diploma's serial number or official seal. No other actor in the archive has statements coded as supporting K1. Consequently, Roy Suryo's position is defined not merely by the volume of statements he has made, but also by his role as the sole actor generating these challenging claims within the articles analysed.

Second, the diversity of concepts employed. Roy Suryo did not merely present a primary claim regarding the authenticity of the diploma (K1); he also linked it to technical issues, encompassed by K1a and K1b. This pattern reveals that his argument was constructed by connecting alleged technical problems to a conclusion about the document's validity. In the context of a DNA (Discourse Network Analysis), this pattern indicates that, among the group of challengers, Roy Suryo utilized a broader range of concepts than other actors in that same group.

Third, his role as a catalyst for responses from other actors. Within the network structure, Roy Suryo's claims stood in opposition to the position taken by MDIS, which explicitly rejected K1. Meanwhile, PSI linked the controversy to alleged political interests (K3). These connections suggest that Roy Suryo's statements served as a starting point that prompted responses from other actors. Thus, within a two-mode network, Roy Suryo can be identified as a source of claims that elicited defensive reactions from other parties. However, these relationships must be understood based on the statements documented in the archives; they should not be interpreted as definitive proof that all subsequent responses emerged solely because of Roy Suryo's claims.

Fourth, centrality within the challenger group. When the network is projected as a one-mode actor network, Roy Suryo holds the highest degree of centrality among the challenger group. Nevertheless, this position does not imply that he is the most central actor within the network as a whole. Based on the analysis presented in this study, MDIS actually occupies the most central position in the overall network, as discussed in Subsection 2. Therefore, Roy Suryo's role as the leader of the challenger group is more accurately understood as leadership within the scope of a specific group, rather than as dominance over the entire discourse network.

Defending Actors

Gibran Rakabuming Raka: The primary subject of the controversy, though he did not provide a direct statement in the articles analysed.

Management of Djakarta Integrated School (MDIS): The institution that issued the diploma; they provided an official statement confirming its validity, serving as a source of institutional defense.

MDIS occupies a position as a central hub or center of connection in the network, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 4. This position is not only related to the number of statements,

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but also to the pattern of its relationships with other actors. First, MDIS is connected to actors from several domains, including PSI which is related to politics, the Ministry of Education and Culture which represents state authorities, and the MDIS PR Manager who is related to institutional communications. Second, MDIS is the only actor that explicitly rejects K1 while supporting K2 and K2a. Third, the MDIS statement became a reference for other actors, including PSI, which used the MDIS clarification as a basis for calling for an end to the polemic through K4.

From a conceptual perspective, MDIS focuses on institutional validity and administrative verification, especially through K2, K2a, and K2b. MDIS does not directly use K3 to link the polemic to political motives or K4 to call for an end to the debate. This shows that MDIS's main role is to build legitimacy through administrative and institutional explanations, not to form a political narrative regarding the polemic.

Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI): A political actor that actively defended Gibran and urged the public not to prolong the controversy.

The PSI role differs from MDIS in terms of network positioning, concepts used, and communication objectives. In terms of structure, PSI is connected to MDIS and KPU, but has no direct relationship with Roy Suryo. This shows that PSI's response to the challenger's claims took place through MDIS clarification, not through direct debate with Roy Suryo. From a conceptual perspective, PSI is the only actor that combines support for K3, namely allegations of political motives, with K4, namely a call to end the polemic.

This difference indicates that PSI does not focus on the technical verification of a diploma's validity, as MDIS does. Instead, PSI directs the discussion toward the reasons behind the controversy and the political repercussions it has generated. From a framing perspective, this approach can be understood as "frame displacement" a shift in the focus of the discourse from the question of whether a diploma is valid to the question of why the issue continues to be debated and politicized.

Consequently, while both MDIS and PSI support the same conclusion, they play distinct roles. MDIS emphasizes administrative facts and institutional verification, whereas PSI highlights underlying motives and political consequences. Both support K2, yet they employ different conceptual frameworks to construct their respective arguments.

Authoritative/Neutral Actors

Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) and an IPB University lecturer: State institutions and experts with the ultimate authority to validate the authenticity of a diploma at the national level.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) and experts from IPB University are linked to categories K2 and K2a through their clarifications regarding the validity of the diploma and the presence of data in the Higher Education Database (PDDikti). In this analytical framework, their contribution pertains more to the verification of data and institutional information than to statements that directly attack Roy Suryo or offer political defense for Gibran. Their position within the network can be described as "intermediate" situated between the realms of academic/state knowledge and media coverage without serving as the primary hub of the network.

Conceptually, their role is limited to explaining the legitimacy of the diploma and validating data, specifically within the context of K2a. They do not directly engage with the K3 domain which concerns political motives or the K4 domain which relates to the cessation of the controversy. The involvement of these actors provides normative legitimacy to the claim that the diploma is valid, as this claim is anchored in state authority and academic expertise. In other words, their statements help demonstrate that support for the diploma's validity does not originate solely from political actors but can also be traced to institutional sources of information. However, because they do not explicitly attack the opposing side, they cannot be classified as actors playing a confrontational role within the discourse.

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Intermediary Actors

Media (Suara.com, RMOL.id, Detik.com): Act as disseminators and recorders of the various arguments presented by each side.

Key Concepts/Claims

The question of whether the two groups differ only in their conclusions or also in the concepts they employ can be answered through the results of coding based on the research codebook. The analysis reveals that the differences between the opposing and supporting groups are not limited to their respective positions on the validity of the diploma labeled K1 and K2 but also extend to the concepts used to construct their arguments. Each group maintains a distinct focus and employs a different approach in building its claims regarding the controversy.

Several core concepts are at the center of the debate, including: (1) K1: Invalid/Problematic Diploma: The primary claim originating from Roy Suryo, supported by additional arguments such as: (a) K1a: Gibran's data does not appear in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's system (according to Roy Suryo). (b) K1b: Alleged administrative discrepancies or irregularities (e.g., regarding the diploma number, official stamps, etc.). The challenging group focuses on issues regarding document verification and alleged administrative irregularities, represented by categories K1, K1a, and K1b. Their primary concern lies in the validity of academic credentials including the presence of data within the system, the consistency of serial numbers or official stamps, and adherence to administrative procedures. Consequently, the approach employed can be classified as a technical forensic argument, as the claims are predicated on the examination of documents and administrative matters deemed to require clarification.

(2) K2: Valid Diploma: A counter claim presented by the defense. (a) K2a: Gibran's data is present in the PDDikti (Higher Education Database). (b) K2b: All academic and administrative procedures have been fulfilled. (3) K3: Politically Charged Controversy: A claim made by the defense to undermine the credibility of the opposing side. (4) K4: Calls to End the Controversy: An appeal to stop escalating the issue, as it is considered already resolved.

The supporting group employs a more diverse set of concepts, spanning three primary domains. The first domain concerns institutional verification encompassing categories K2, K2a, and K2b and is primarily utilized by MDIS, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), and experts from IPB University. The focus here is on establishing the legitimacy of the diploma based on institutional information and educational databases. The second domain relates to political motives (K3), used by the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) to link the controversy to political interests. The third domain involves efforts to bring the polemic to an end (K4), also employed by PSI to argue that the issue need not be prolonged further.

These distinctions reveal an asymmetry in the conceptual characteristics of the two groups. The challenging group focuses on a single domain the technical examination of document validity whereas the supporting group encompasses institutional verification, the interpretation of political motives, and calls to conclude the controversy. This difference in scope helps explain how the network could form two distinct major groups, each characterized by varying levels of conceptual diversity.

Upon closer inspection, the supporting group's approach is not entirely uniform. MDIS, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, and the IPB experts are primarily oriented toward verifying the legitimacy of the diploma (via K2, K2a, and K2b), without prioritizing K3 or K4. Conversely, PSI places greater emphasis on the political dimension through K3 and K4. While PSI does support the use of K2, this support serves as a foundation for developing arguments regarding political motives and the necessity of ending the polemic, rather than acting as the primary focus of an administrative review.

Meanwhile, UTS cannot be placed within a specific conceptual domain because, based on the coding scheme, no substantive statements have been identified that could be

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categorized into those codes. This distinction indicates that the supporting group can be divided into two subgroups based on their discursive orientation: a "verification" subgroup comprising MDIS, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), and experts from IPB and a "political" subgroup, represented by the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI). While both subgroups share a common support for K2, they do not necessarily employ the same set of underlying concepts.

From the perspective of Discourse Network Analysis (DNA), this pattern reveals the formation of a "discourse coalition" rooted in shared support for a single bridging concept K2 rather than in an alignment of all the arguments employed. Consequently, the relationships among actors within the supporting group should be understood as being forged through a partial convergence of positions, rather than as evidence that all actors possess identical interests and perspectives.

Relations within a Discourse Network (Network Mapping)

By examining the connections between actors and concepts, we can understand how each actor supports or opposes specific claims, thereby forming a network of relationships. Simply put, these relations can be illustrated as follows:

Roy Suryo → supports K1 and K1a.
MDIS → supports K2 and K2a, while simultaneously opposing K1.
PSI → supports K2, K3, and K4.
Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek)/IPB Lecturer → support K2 and K2a (implicitly, through validation via PDDikti).

In the discourse network map, two distinct, large clusters are visible: (1) the group associated with Roy Suryo, which focuses on claims that the "diploma is problematic"; (2) a group of defenders (MDIS & PSI) that reinforces the claim that the "diploma is legitimate" and asserts that there is a political motive behind the attacks; and (3) a neutral group (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, along with a lecturer from IPB).

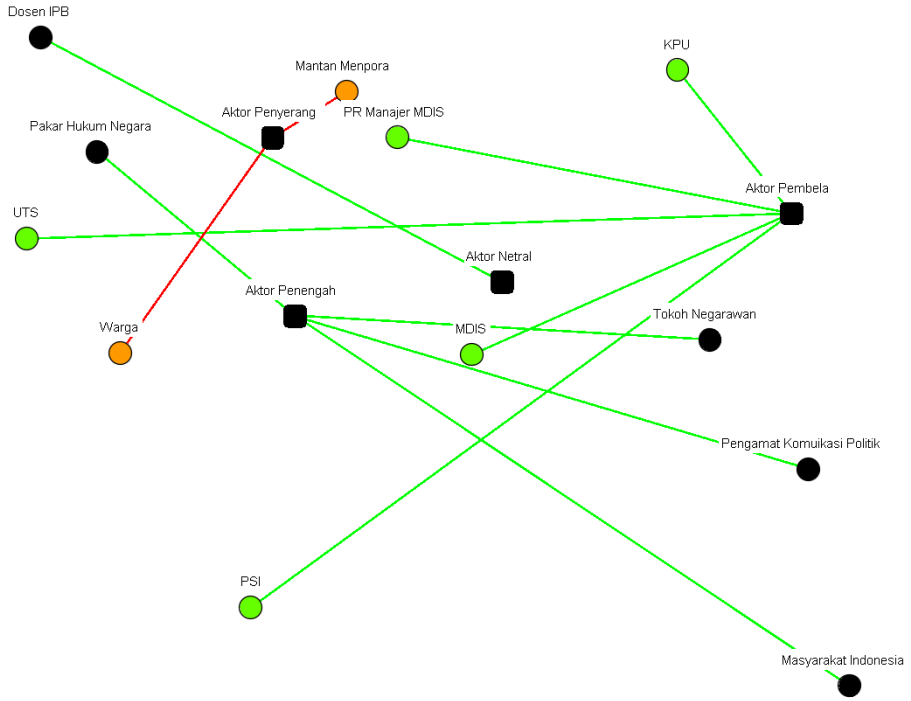

Figure 1. Network of Actors Surrounding Gibran's Diploma
Source: Data processed using Visone (2024)

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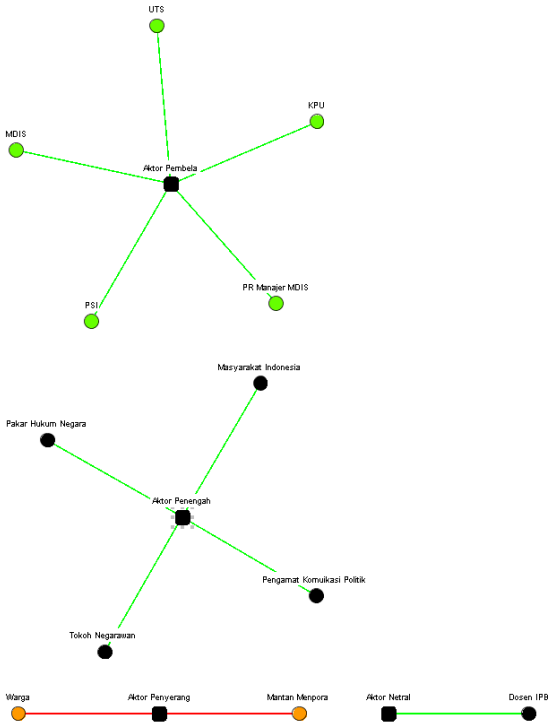

Figure 2. Network of Actors Surrounding Gibran's Diploma
Source: Data processed using Visone (2024)

Media framing analysis reveals that digital media outlets specifically Detik, RMOL, and Suara have largely emphasized issues concerning legality, ethics, and alleged nepotism in the controversy surrounding Gibran's academic credentials (Sinaga & Kristiyani, 2024). Detik, for instance, characterizes this movement as being politically motivated a continuation of smear campaigns regarding the Vice President's credentials aimed not at uncovering the truth, but at perpetuating political unrest. Meanwhile, RMOL and Suara focus more on the dynamics of the polemic and the reactions of political elites, reinforcing the impression that the issue is fraught with controversy and uncertainty. This predominantly negative framing has influenced public opinion, fostering distrust and undermining Gibran's political legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

From the perspective of Discourse Network Analysis, the resulting network reveals a concentration of discourse around specific actors. The network structure is not egalitarian or horizontal; rather, it exhibits a clear hierarchy. Actors with greater access to media and higher symbolic legitimacy tend to occupy the most central positions. This pattern confirms that the formation of discourse is not a neutral process. Media outlets selectively choose which actors are deemed credible and worthy of being quoted. Consequently, the network of actors that emerges reflects not only social connections but also discursive relations that are produced and directed by the media. Viewed through the concept of power knowledge, the central position of MDIS within the network highlights its role as an institution that produces legitimized knowledge. Statements from MDIS, as featured in reports by Detik.com and Suara.com, are positioned as the primary reference for truth even when they lack transparent procedural explanations.

The power wielded by MDIS does not manifest as direct pressure, but rather through the force of discourse. Backed by its institutional legitimacy, MDIS is able to define the boundaries of what constitutes a "clarification," a "fact," or a "resolution" to a controversy. This aligns with the perspective that knowledge is inextricably linked to the power relations that surround it.

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Thus, the centrality of MDIS illustrates how power operates through language, symbols, and institutional authority, rather than solely through formal decision making. From the perspective of media framing, the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) emerges as an actor actively shaping how the issue of the academic degree (diploma) is perceived. By calling for an end to the controversy, PSI constructs a frame in which the matter is portrayed as irrelevant, excessive, and driven by political interests. The media reinforces this frame by: (1) Presenting PSI's statements as a discursive way out; (b) Shifting the focus from administrative verification to the issue of political stability; (c) Framing criticism as a potential disruption. Within this discursive network, the proximity of PSI to MDIS and its invocation of the "Indonesian Society" (Masyarakat Indonesia) demonstrates that political framing exerts a broad influence on the formation of public perception.

The General Elections Commission (KPU) and the educational institution (UTS) occupy the periphery of the network, despite holding significant administrative authority in a normative sense. Within the power knowledge framework, this reflects a diminished standing of technical knowledge compared to knowledge that is political and symbolic in nature. The media does not prioritize administrative processes in its coverage; rather, it treats them merely as supporting elements. This suggests that, within the public discourse, administrative truth often struggles to compete against political narratives that are more communicative and accessible to the audience.

Actors such as constitutional law experts and political communication observers occupy an intermediate position within the network. In the context of Discourse Network Analysis (DNA), they serve as bridges between academic knowledge and media narratives.

However, their contributions are primarily utilized to: (a) Reinforce existing frames, (b) Provide normative legitimacy, (c) Rather than to critique or deconstruct dominant discourses. This highlights the limited role of scholarly expertise when confronted with the dominance of political and institutional actors within the media landscape. Within the discourse network, "citizens" occupy the most peripheral position, while "the Indonesian public" frequently appears as an abstract representation. From the perspectives of framing and power knowledge, this indicates that the public voice is reduced to an object of discussion, rather than an active subject capable of voicing its own experiences and viewpoints.

The media tends to speak on behalf of the public, rather than providing a space for the public to speak for themselves. Consequently, the experiences of citizens are not treated as a source of knowledge equal to that of elite actors. By integrating framing theory, the concept of power knowledge, and Discourse Network Analysis, this study demonstrates that the controversy surrounding Gibran's academic degree serves as an arena for the construction of meaning a process deeply embedded in power relations. The media does not merely convey information; it actively: (a) Determines which actors are featured, (b) Prioritizes specific types of knowledge, (c) And frames reality in alignment with dominant discursive interests. These findings confirm that media discourse is the product of a negotiation process involving political forces, institutional legitimacy, and the operational logic of journalism.

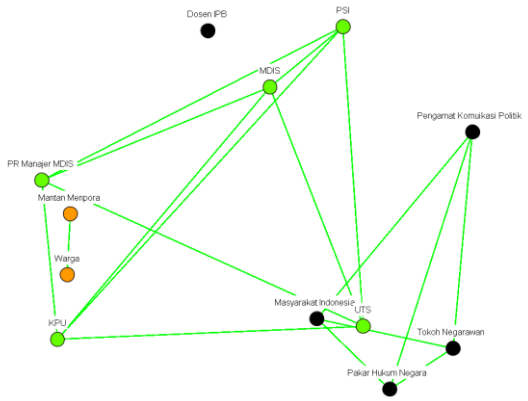

Figure 3. Relationships Among Actors Regarding Gibran's Diploma
Source: Data processing results from Visone (2024)

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Actor Network: This maps the relationships between the various parties involved in the controversy surrounding the validity of Gibran Rakabuming Raka's academic credentials, as reported by Detik.com, Suara.com, and RMOL.id. The diagram serves to illustrate how this issue has evolved beyond a mere administrative matter, becoming instead a site for discursive contestation within the public sphere. Each node in the diagram represents a social, political, or institutional actor featured in the coverage, while the connecting lines indicate communication, statements, references, or discursive alignments between these actors.

The first cluster consists of political communication observers, constitutional law experts, prominent public figures, and members of the Indonesian public. This cluster represents an interpretive and evaluative domain, comprising actors who offer normative, legal, and ethical assessments of the credential controversy. In the reporting by RMOL.id and Suara.com, these actors appear as parties who interpret whether the controversy is legally significant, politically excessive, or a legitimate form of public oversight. The relatively dense connections between the nodes in this cluster suggest an interplay of arguments and the shaping of public opinion, grounded in both scholarly and moral authority.

The second cluster, located at the bottom of the diagram, comprises institutional and political actors namely MDIS, PSI, KPU, UTS, and the MDIS PR Manager. This cluster represents the hub for the production and dissemination of official clarifications. In the articles from Detik.com and Suara.com, MDIS is positioned as a central actor, serving as the primary source of legitimacy regarding Gibran's academic status. The link between MDIS and its PR Manager underscores that the clarifications provided were structured and managed through institutional communication channels. Meanwhile, the connection between PSI and MDIS reflects a political stance that explicitly responds to these clarifications by calling for an end to the controversy.

The third cluster, which is relatively detached, illustrates a connection between private citizens and a former Minister of Youth and Sports. This smaller cluster can be interpreted as a "peripheral discourse" individual opinions or comments that emerge in the public sphere but remain unintegrated with the mainstream institutional narrative. This separation indicates the limited influence these actors have in shaping the dominant discourse.

MDIS occupies the position of the primary hub (central node) within the network, reflecting its role as the holder of symbolic and administrative authority regarding the issue of the academic degree. In the Suara.com article, MDIS is portrayed as the actor that "brings a close" to the controversy through formal clarification, while in the Detik.com article, statements from MDIS serve as the basis for PSI's call to put the matter to rest. In terms of network dynamics, the more connections MDIS possesses, the stronger its position becomes in steering the direction of the narrative. PSI acts as a political agent that supports the stabilization of the discourse. Its connections to MDIS and the KPU (General Elections Commission) reflect an effort to frame the issue as one that has been administratively resolved and, therefore, should not be prolonged politically. In terms of framing, PSI characterizes the controversy as a potential threat to political stability rather than as a substantive legal problem.

Conversely, actors within the cluster of observers and legal experts serve as guardians of critical discourse. While they lack direct institutional ties to MDIS, they play a role in scrutinizing the legitimacy of the claims being circulated. This is evident in an article from RMOL.id, which provides space for legal perspectives and alternative interpretations regarding the validity of the diploma.

The relationships between these actors reveal that the controversy surrounding Gibran's diploma is not merely a conflict over facts, but rather a conflict of interpretation and discursive authority. The links between institutional and political actors signify a discursive alliance aimed at closing the issue, while the connections among observers and the public point to the emergence of a space for critical discussion that remains relatively autonomous from formal power.

Thus, this network illustrates how online media does more than just convey information; it also facilitates a discursive arena where actors with varying interests and symbolic capital interact. The dominance of MDIS and PSI within the institutional cluster

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highlights the strength of "power knowledge," while the presence of a cluster of observers indicates that counter discourses remain alive within the public sphere.

Overall, this actor network diagram confirms that:

The controversy surrounding Gibran's diploma evolved as a network of relationships between actors, rather than as a singular event.

MDIS functions as a center of legitimation, while PSI acts as a political player striving to stabilize the narrative. Observers, legal experts, and the public play a role in maintaining a space for criticism and alternative interpretations. Online media serves as the primary medium that connects these actors and reveals the relationships between them. This network based analysis helps explain how the discursive structure of the diploma controversy is formed, sustained, and contested within online media coverage.

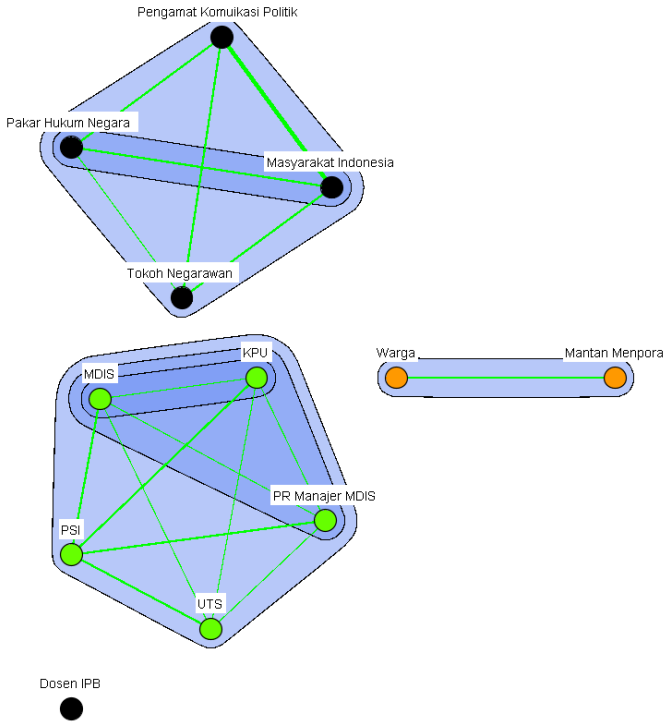

Figure 4. Actor Network Diagram Regarding Gibran's Diploma
Source: Data processed using Visone (2024)

Social Media Analysis Findings: An analysis of social media networks reveals that the "Gibran" account served as a central hub in public discourse on Twitter/X regarding the controversy surrounding his academic credentials (diploma). This account triggered thousands of interactions and retweets, causing the issue to spread widely and go viral (Santoso, 2024). The "Gibran" account exhibited the highest degree of centrality, functioning as a primary connector between different conversational groups both those supporting and those opposing him. The resulting communication pattern indicates a strong polarization: supporters tended to defend the validity of the credentials, while opponents focused on alleged ethical and legal violations.

Furthermore, sentiment analysis conducted using Naïve Bayes and Neural Network methods reveals that negative sentiment toward Gibran was more prevalent. The issue of the validity of his academic credentials and accusations concerning dynastic politics emerged as the primary drivers of this negative sentiment (Amini, 2024; Rahayu et al., 2024). Among the Twitter accounts and posts analyzed, the majority reflected negative sentiment, followed by neutral sentiment, with only a small portion expressing a positive tone. The negative sentiment was largely fueled by a narrative of distrust toward educational institutions, the Constitutional Court, and the political elite. Conversely, positive sentiment generally originated from loyal supporters who emphasized Gibran's achievements, accomplishments, and formal legitimacy.

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Similar findings are observed in the comment sections on the YouTube platform. Many comments carry a negative tone including insults, slander, and content that may potentially violate the ITE Law (Law on Information and Electronic Transactions) (Saddhono & Maret, 2024). Such comments are often expressed through sarcastic language, the use of memes, and conspiratorial narratives, which ultimately further erode public trust and deepen polarization within the digital sphere.

Regarding the discussion, these research findings align with studies by Amini (2024) and Wasisto & Pahlevi (2024), which indicate that controversial issues on social media tend to trigger negative sentiment and deepen polarization in the public sphere. Furthermore, Santoso (2024) emphasizes that the role of central actors within digital social networks is crucial in expanding and reinforcing the dissemination of an issue. Negative media framing, as identified by Sinaga & Kristiyani (2024), also contributes to increasing public distrust and weakening a candidate's political legitimacy.

Nevertheless, this research demonstrates that the level of virality an issue attains on social media is not determined solely by media framing. Equally important are the dynamics of social networks and the patterns of interaction among the actors within them. Polarization is further intensified by the existence of "echo chambers" situations where individuals or groups with similar viewpoints reinforce the same narratives, while dissenting perspectives are frequently rejected or denied.

Viewed through the lens of political legitimacy theory, the controversy surrounding Gibran's academic diploma illustrates how a decline in trust toward institutions can undermine political legitimacy, even when a candidate has fulfilled all administrative and legal requirements (Tambunan, 2022; Sugitanata & Hamid, 2025). These findings underscore that transparency, accountability, and effective political communication play a crucial role in efforts to rebuild public trust.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the controversy surrounding Gibran Rakabuming Raka's diploma through Discourse Network Analysis (DNA), identifying two main discourse groups with different patterns of relationships. The opposing group centers on Roy Suryo, whose claims focus on credential verification and alleged administrative discrepancies. Meanwhile, the supporting group involves MDIS as a source of institutional legitimacy, PSI as an actor promoting political stabilization, and Kemendikbudristek and IPB University experts as providers of normative clarification regarding PDDikti data validation. These findings demonstrate that actors sharing similar positions may have different interests, communication objectives, and roles within the discourse network. Methodologically, combining qualitative coding and network analysis reveals patterns of support, opposition, coalition formation, and actor centrality beyond conventional content analysis. The findings highlight the importance of media literacy and responsible journalism in distinguishing factual verification from political statements. However, the study is limited by its reliance on three media outlets, three articles, and a short observation period. Future research should expand media sources, observation periods, and intercoder reliability testing to examine discourse dynamics more comprehensively.

DECLARATION

Author Contributions: FX. Danang Pramono Sakti conducted the research, collected and coded the media data, performed the network analysis, and prepared the manuscript.
Conflict of Interest: The author reports no competing interests.
Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency.
Ethical Approval: The study examined publicly accessible online news content and did not involve human participants. Formal ethical approval was therefore not required.
Informed Consent: Not applicable, as the research used published media content without direct participation or interaction with individuals.

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Use of Generative AI: Generative AI tools were used, if applicable, for language refinement. The research process, data coding, network analysis, and interpretation remained the author's responsibility.

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