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Challenging the elite-public divide

Representing former Indonesian first lady, Ani Yudhoyono in online news discourse

JANE LOUISE AHLSTRAND

ABSTRACT

Women in politics invariably attract heightened levels of attention due to their marked difference to the masculine political norm. With the rise of social media and online news, political women can achieve visibility, but also experience even more intense scrutiny. Former first lady, Ani Yudhoyono became an iconic figure in the lead up to the 2014 Indonesian presidential election, through her association with her husband's flailing presidency, and as a high-profile political woman involved in social media blunders. Using critical discourse analysis, specifically social actor analysis, this paper examines the discursive strategies engaged by the mainstream Indonesian online news media to malign Ani Yudhoyono, and draw a wedge between her and the Indonesian public, which in turn undermined her husband's presidency. The analysis highlights the role of online news media discourse in shaping power relations and ideological groupings, as well as the role of first lady as a target of political contestation.

KEYWORDS

Digital news media, women in politics, social media, power relations, populism.

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INTRODUCTION

In contexts of social-political change, prominent political figures can become icons through whom ideological boundaries and relations of power are contested and redefined across a range of discursive platforms. Women in politics become particularly conspicuous media icons under conditions of social-political transformation. By virtue of their difference to the established male political norm, women invariably challenge the established structures of power that underpin the political realm (Ahlstrand 2020; E. Ibroscheva and M. Raicheva-Stover 2014; K. Ross and A. Sreberny 2000). The role of first lady is unique in that it connects a woman intimately to the centre of political power as a feminine symbol of the incumbent government; however, the strict boundaries governing the role constrain her political mobility and scope of public engagement.

Any hint of deviation from the norm can transform the first lady into a political threat, igniting media attention and ideological contestation; such was the case with Hillary Rodham Clinton and her political activity in the US (E. Mayo and D. Meringolo 1994; K. Vasby Anderson 2004). Converging with social media, the online news media plays an increasingly important role in influencing political discourse, as well as shaping relations of power and ideological groupings (M. Lim 2017; A. Widholm 2016). The study of the discursive representation of the first lady in the online news media thus becomes an important way of identifying and examining the shifting structures of power of the political realm and the constraints on women's political participation.

This paper presents findings from the analysis of former Indonesian first lady, Ani Yudhoyono's portrayal in the discourse of the mainstream Indonesian news site, *Kompas.com*. The timeframe for the analysis spans August 2013 to September 2014, encapsulating the final twelve months of her official duties and the lead up to the 2014 presidential election. During this period, a groundswell of anti-elite, populist sentiment arose, in which Ani became a symbol of the perceived shortcomings of her husband, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (SBY) government. The populist movement was fuelled in part by online media production and consumption, particularly among Indonesia's middle class.

The analysis highlights in particular the reporting of Ani Yudhoyono's public engagement via the social media application, Instagram, and the series of clashes that occurred between her and members of the public over the twelve-month period. The level of scrutiny experienced by a female political figure on social media doubles, as she operates in two inherently gendered spaces: the political and the online realms (N. Gudipaty 2017; J. Marshall 2020). The analysis of Ani Yudhoyono thus captures the role of a political woman at the crossroads of social-political change, including the convergence of the online and public realms as a site of contestation.

Through the lens of critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA), and T. van Leeuwen's (2008) framework of social actor analysis as the core analytical approach, this paper aims to demonstrate how the language of the increasingly influential online news media can construct a female political

figure as a key target through whom ideological boundaries and relations of power are contested. This paper presents linguistic evidence in the form of discourse strategies derived from clusters of social actor representations that realize the construction of an elite-public divide, and the delegitimation (Van Leeuwen 2007) of Ani as a participant in both the political and online realms. The analysis of the discursive representations of Ani Yudhoyono, including her actions, and interactions with the public reveal the interconnected role of the online news media, social media and political women in shaping political discourse, ideological groupings, and relations of power in a nascent democracy increasingly flooded by populist sentiment. It evaluates the consequences of these representations by taking into account the influence of compelling social-political, gendered, and journalistic factors.

News media discourse plays a key role in mediating power relations between social groups within a hierarchical social power network (T.A. van Dijk 1995). According to M. Foucault (1978), power is fluid, and involves a continuous process of struggles and confrontations carried out among social groups. Relations of power are therefore characterized by tensions between, within, and among individuals or social groups in a specific context. Drawing upon the work of A. Giddens (1991), in 1993, Fairclough identified the emergence of a post-traditional society in which “relationships in public based automatically upon authority are in decline” (Giddens 1991: 140). As a result, “relationships and identities [...] increasingly need to be negotiated”, resulting in greater possibilities, but also greater risks than the previous fixed relationships (Giddens 1991: 140).

The pivot to the online realm and the emergence of social media has augmented the environment for the negotiation, and indeed contestation, of relationships and group boundaries. In the timeframe of this study, the online news media was produced and consumed by a predominantly urban-based, relatively young, majority male educated middle class (M. Lim 2013). The majority of *Kompas.com* readers and journalists also fell into these categories (*Kompas.com* 2016). The discursive representations and their consequences discussed in this paper therefore reflect the perspective of a specific social group in Indonesia, who nevertheless wield significant political influence, and shape the culture of the digital realm.

WHO WAS ANI YUDHOYONO?

Ani Yudhoyono carried out the role of first lady from 2004 to 2014, as the wife of Indonesia’s sixth president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). Known for her political savvy, Ani Yudhoyono is said to have played a crucial role in her husband’s political career (G. Fealy 2015). SBY ran successfully for the presidency in 2004, and again in 2009, serving the permitted maximum of two terms. As first lady, perceptions of Ani Yudhoyono were invariably tied to the shifting tides of public opinion about her husband’s presidency. While receiving overwhelming support in his first term in office, by the end of his second and final term, the public had begun to turn against SBY, increasingly

frustrated with his apparent underperformance and cumbersome, elitist approach to politics (M. Mietzner 2015). As the wife of the unpopular president, a conspicuous woman on the national political stage, and increasingly the online realm, Ani became an easy target of public disdain.

With a penchant for amateur photography, in April 2013, Ani Yudhoyono established an Instagram account, which she used to upload and share her photographic work, document her day-to-day activities, and interact with the public. Unlike most public figures who tend to rely on a social media manager, Ani Yudhoyono appeared to moderate the content and interaction herself. While potentially creating greater accessibility and proximity to the people, Ani Yudhoyono's venture into Instagram became a test of her ability to adapt to, and gain acceptance as a novice in a new community of practice in Indonesia dominated by a young, educated, tech-savvy experts, commonly known as *netizen* in Indonesia.

While originally applied to the domain of education and the process of learning (E. Wenger 1999), the concept of a community of practice now has broader applications, including to the online domain and its communities of shared practice (Wenger 2011). Ani Yudhoyono's venture onto Instagram and her engagement with an online community of practice became a site of a power struggle between a novice, yet elite Ani Yudhoyono and the expert "digital natives", representing the middle class youth of Indonesia. *Kompas.com* became an adjudicator of the friction that emerged between these two sides, highlighting a transformation of power relations, where the youth took on the authoritative role. From mid-2013, *Kompas.com* highlighted a series of unprecedented events involving conflict between Ani and members of the public on her Instagram account. The ongoing conflict provided an abundant source of news fodder for the Indonesian media.

THE NEWS MEDIA IN THE DIGITAL ERA IN DEMOCRATIC INDONESIA

Kompas.com is a product of the highly influential Indonesian media conglomerate, Kompas Gramedia, which owns a range of businesses, including Indonesia's longest running national print newspaper, *Kompas*. Since the New Order regime, the daily print newspaper has maintained its position as a respected national news source known for its middle-of-the-road reporting, and overall secular position in a semi-secular state. Scholars have identified an entrenched practice of cautious self-censorship among *Kompas* journalists that has contributed to its longevity. *Kompas* first managed to survive than bans imposed upon media outlets in the New Order through careful reporting tactics, and citizens learned to read between the lines in order to interpret the latent message (K. Sen and D. Hill 2007; R. Tapsell 2012).

In the democratic era, Tapsell (2012) argues that the practice of self-censorship lingers in Indonesian news rooms, but is increasingly influenced by political interests. Pressured to produce content that favours the interests of their wealthy, politically-connected media owners and other powerful clients, journalists are careful to ensure that coverage remains in their favour (Tapsell 2015a). From

a legal perspective, a law governing electronic information and transactions (ITE) introduced in 2008, and later updated in 2016, criminalizes defamation and insult on the internet (H.M. Balfas 2014). The presence and vagueness of the law, as well as the ability of powerful individuals to manipulate it, further compels journalists to self-censor, resulting in a relatively superficial discursive style, especially when dealing with sensitive topics involving powerful individuals and groups.

Since 2010, online media activity has expanded rapidly in Indonesia, particularly among the urban-based population, with many actively participating in social media (E. Gazali 2014; Lim 2013). Like elsewhere around the world, news media organisations in Indonesia began to look to online platforms as a way of reaching new audiences. Journalists are now compelled to adapt their content for consumption across a range of social media sites and applications (Tapsell 2015b). While elite groups like news media organisations traditionally have greater access to influential discourse and communication (Van Dijk 1995: 12-13), the change to an online platform has inevitably impacted on the relationship between news production and consumption. As news media and social media converge, journalists are urged to monitor and adjust their coverage to maintain public interest as indicated by online engagement (Tapsell 2015b). The conditions of online news media, however, result in a decline in the depth of reporting as well as audience engagement with the news.

In contrast to the slower schedule of print media, the 24-hour news cycle of online news media directs journalists to aim for immediacy and audience reactivity. For readers, skim reading, reactive commenting and sharing, and swift movement between online media platforms, predominantly on a mobile device, have become standard (I. Costera Meijer and T. Groot Kormelink 2015; Lim 2013). Lim (2017) argues that the constant rapid-fire production and consumption of online news media via social media has spawned “algorithmic enclaves” in Indonesia, where readers fall into self-perpetuating ideological groupings as they engage with new media reports, and seek to express, defend, or reinforce their personal beliefs, while denigrating the beliefs of others. Drawing on the work of Van Dijk (2008), Lim demonstrates that this form of polarising ideological discourse is guided by the concept of the ideological square: the “good things” of the ingroup and the “bad things” of the outgroup are emphasized, while the “bad things” of the in-group, and the “good things” of the out-group are de-emphasized.

WOMEN, POLITICS, AND THE ROLE OF THE FIRST LADY

Scholars of gender in Indonesia have examined the intimate connection between gender norms and structures of power since the New Order. Conceived as a family-state, men and women were expected to fulfill gender-specific roles that ultimately reinforced hierarchical structures of state power. The dominant discourse of motherhood directed women to their biologically-determined role in the domestic sphere as the duty-bound nurturing mother

and obedient wife. This construction of womanhood thus resulted in the long-term exclusion of women from much of Indonesian political life, and the normalization of masculine political power. Ani Yudhoyono's public reception was invariably tied to traditional gendered expectations attached to her role as first lady – a female consort to a powerful male politician (C. Adcock 2010: 147). In Indonesia, the title of first lady translates literally to 'mother of the nation' (*ibu negara*). The role therefore embodies traditional ideals of nurturing womanhood, or *ibuisme* (lit. 'motherism') (L. Bennett 2005; S. Blackburn 2004; K. Robinson 2009a) within the concept of the family-state, in which citizens are equated with her children.

In global political contexts, the first lady occupies an important, yet highly constrained position. In the US, the role traditionally embodies the notion of domestic femininity and stands as a symbol of traditional white middle-to upper-class womanhood (Mayo and Meringolo 1994). Counter to this idealized representation of femininity is the fear of an outspoken, politically active woman, which bears striking parallels to the Indonesian context. The mass media reinforces the dichotomy between the ideal, passive model of femininity and the undesirable, politically active woman. This simplified dichotomy makes political actors more easily identifiable as heroes or villains, and fosters scapegoating within a superficial political narrative (Vasby Anderson 2004: 28). According to the gendered mediation thesis, the media constructs politics as a male-oriented pursuit, and marks women in politics as outsiders, and ultimately seeks to constrain them within stereotypes of femininity (Ibroscheva and Raicheva-Stover 2009: 111).

A non-traditional first lady thus stands at odds the structures of masculine political power, and can threaten the authoritative status of their husband as president (Vasby Anderson 2004: 20-21). Media portrayals of Hillary Rodham Clinton as first lady in the US, for example, commonly positioned her in breach of tradition and vilified her on the grounds of her political ambition and unladylike behaviour (J. Ritchie 2013; Vasby Anderson 2004: 28). T. Romaniuk's (2016) discursive analysis of the representation of Rodham Clinton in the US media demonstrated a sense of discomfort with her departure from a traditional role and personal engagement with politics. Her communicative behaviour in interviews was scrutinized closely, and refracted unfairly through a gendered lens. R. Page's (2003) analysis of the discursive representation of former first lady to UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, Cherie Booth Blair demonstrated the "coexistence of two competing versions of femininity" (Page 2003: 569) – on the one hand representing her as stereotypically passive, silent escort to her husband, while on the other, as a powerful, active professional in the public domain. The stereotypical passive representation, Page argues, functioned to secure her husband's political status (Page 2003: 569-570), and balance out her alternative, powerful, and thereby threatening persona.

In Indonesia, since the onset of democratic reform in 1998, women have gained greater public visibility and diversity in their political participation. Women's newfound presence in the public and political realms has often

sparked intense ideological debates and struggles over power, with certain groups uneasy over their prominence and perceived erosion of established masculine structures of power (A. Heryanto 2008; Robinson 2009b, 2015; S. van Wichelen 2006). Indonesia's fifth president, and first woman in the role, Megawati Soekarnoputri, for example prompted significant debate. Drawing upon stereotypical arguments, certain groups claimed that Islam did not permit a woman to lead a Muslim nation. On the other hand, Megawati's supporters constructed her as a nationalist and feminist symbol (R. Gerlach 2013; Van Wichelen 2006).

Women in politics became a particularly contentious issue approaching the end of the Yudhoyono presidency and the 2014 presidential election campaign, citing their political participation as a crucial component of democratic reform (M. Budianta, K. Chandrakirana, and A. Yentriyani 2015). Where gender and political power are connected, however, female politicians occupy a precarious position. While their presence in the political realm may symbolize social-political change, they remain subject to gendered constraints. As this paper will demonstrate, these constraints are reinforced by news media coverage, particularly in the online realm. The analysis of Ani Yudhoyono's portrayal in *Kompas.com* discourse thus contributes to understanding how the online news media regulates the role of female political figures and their access to power, while manipulating their image as a source of ideological contestation.

THE ANALYSIS OF ANI YUDHOYONO IN *KOMPAS.COM* DISCOURSE

This paper presents findings from the analysis of 50 news texts featuring Ani Yudhoyono as the main social actor published by *Kompas.com* in the final twelve months of her time in office (August 2013 to September 2014). The data were collected as part of broader research on the representation and status of Indonesian political women in the democratic era (see Ahlstrand 2022). The texts were analysed primarily through the lens of Van Leeuwen's (2008) social actor analysis, focusing on the portrayal of social actors and their actions as individuals, members of groups and as impersonalized or personalized figures. The findings are presented through illustrative examples that will follow below.

Van Leeuwen's taxonomy of social actor representations provides a resource for understanding the dissemination of power relations between the social actors; and how the text producer strategically foregrounds and conceals information deemed relevant. Van Leeuwen's approach also gives attention to transitivity structures in the discourse derived from the work of M. Halliday (1985), and links social actors to a different range of social processes, as both individuals and in interaction. The allocation or concealment of agency through transitivity structures and nominalization, alongside grammatical objectification demonstrates the social actors' level of involvement in social events portrayed in the discourse.

Complementary to the focus on social actor analysis, the analysis also incorporated Van Leeuwen's concept of legitimation (Van Leeuwen 2007)

to understand how *Kompas.com* discursively regulated Ani Yudhoyono's participation in both the political and online realms. The analysis of Yudhoyono as a discursive site of contestation also referenced Van Dijk's model of the ideological square (2008) to identify where boundaries were drawn between the different ideological groups in the discourse.

The analysis uncovered two major discourse strategies in the construction of Ani Yudhoyono. The strategies consisted of building blocks of social actor representations, including legitimation techniques, clustered according to a shared, contextually-located social-political function. These are labelled: *contesting elite-public relations*, and the two-pronged strategy of *delegitimation through authorization* and *trivialization*. The components and social-political functions of these strategies are discussed below through several illustrative examples derived from the analysis of the *Kompas.com* texts. Linking the social actor representations to the immediate and broader historical context iterates their causes and consequences, the ideological division of the Indonesian political sphere, and the goals of the mainstream digital media.

STRATEGY 1: CONTESTING ELITE-PUBLIC RELATIONS

Occurring primarily in the coverage of conflict on Ani Yudhoyono's Instagram account, the strategy of contesting elite-public relations showcased unprecedented interactions between the first lady and members of the general public. The strategy posited Ani Yudhoyono in the role of the antagonist, and the public in the role of savvy protagonist. The main events associated with this strategy included Ani's defence of the authenticity of a rather awkward photograph of her granddaughter at the presidential palace; her angered response to ridicule of her family members choice of formal batik clothing on a beach; her reactionary stance against cynical comments about her son's continued preference for long-sleeved shirts; and a debate about her ongoing use of social media during serious flooding in Jakarta. The portrayal of these events highlighted the divide between the first lady and the public. Over time, the allocation of responsibility to participants in the conflict gained greater clarity. Rather than appearing as a public social media onslaught against Ani Yudhoyono, *Kompas.com* managed to strategically shift the blame solely onto her.

Excerpt (1) below documents an early debate over the authenticity of her photograph of granddaughter, Almira Tunggadewi. Ani Yudhoyono vigorously defended the authenticity of her photograph against claims from Instagram users that it had been photoshopped. As an initial report, *Kompas.com* takes a cautious approach, and does not describe the events explicitly, allocate blame, or challenge hierarchical elite-public relations of power. Using a range of subtle, de-agentalizing and impersonalizing representations of social actors, their actions and interactions, the report covers a potentially sensitive, albeit scandalous event involving a member of the political elite.

Jejaring sosial Instagram diramaikan perdebatan sengit antara akun yang terverifikasi milik Ibu Negara Ani Yudhoyono dan sejumlah follower akun tersebut.

'The Instagram social network was enlivened by a fierce debate between the verified account of First Lady Ani Yudhoyono and a number of followers.'

While *Kompas.com* refers to a "fierce debate" (*perdebatan sengit*) taking place between Ani and the public, rather than allocating clear markers of human identity and agency to those involved, it portrays the conflict through impersonalized means. The noun, *perdebatan* (debate), for instance, substitutes the human agents with the "debate". This representational choice is a form of metonymical representation known as utterance autonomization (Van Leeuwen 2008: 46), which portrays the agent by reference to their speech. In another form of impersonalized metonymical representation, *Kompas.com* uses instrumentalization, or the portrayal of a social actor "by means of reference to the instrument with which they carry out the action" (Van Leeuwen 2008: 46) to position Ani's "account" (*akun*) rather than herself as the participant in the debate. By contrast, members of the public are portrayed in a more human, yet subordinate way as her "followers". They are also aggregated (Van Leeuwen 2008: 37), or represented by reference to a vague quantity in the phrase, "a number of followers" (*sejumlah follower*), which contributes to their anonymity and the vagueness of the report.

While initially downplaying the responsibility of both sides, *Kompas.com* nevertheless managed to convey the rational approach of members of the public, and Ani's reactive behaviour. Excerpt (2) from the same report captures the apparent disparity in the conduct of the two groups.

Akun lainnya, @evi_ira dan @dvsagita, juga memberikan komentar yang menyatakan keraguan soal keaslian foto Aira tersebut. Tetapi, tak lama setelah itu, Ibu Negara segera membalas dan memberikan klarifikasi.

'Other accounts, @evi_ira and @dvsagita also made comments that expressed doubt over the authenticity of the photo of Aira. However, not long after that, the first lady quickly responded and gave a clarification.'

In the example above, two members of the public responsible for criticising the photograph are instrumentalized, portrayed by reference to their Instagram account names, which has the effect of anonymising them. This became the most common way for *Kompas.com* to represent the public in the debates. Not only are they anonymized through their accounts, the public become the subjects responsible for the seemingly innocuous act of "making comments". Moreover, these comments are not associated with any direct accusations that the photo is inauthentic, but rather, "express doubt". By contrast, Ani is clearly identified by her title, *Ibu Negara* (First Lady), and activated in the verbal process of "quickly responding" (*segera membalas*). While demonstrating hesitancy in covering the conflict directly, the report describes the first in a string of reports showcasing the elite- non-elite divide via Ani's lack of mastery

of the social media “rules of the game”, and the comparatively higher levels of knowledge and skill held by the general public.

As time passed and more conflict ensued, *Kompas.com* began to allocate responsibility to Ani Yudhoyono for the conflict in a more direct manner. Such an approach constructed a simplified, dichotomous social narrative of a deviant female political figure and heroic public, much in line with media portrayals of Hillary Rodham Clinton (Vasby Anderson 2004). To justify this portrayal when reporting on each new incident, *Kompas.com* documented a growing log of Ani Yudhoyono’s prior offences through intertextual references to previous reports. *Kompas.com* also upheld the integrity of the public involved, and positioned them at the receiving end of her negative behaviour.

Published four months after the initial debate over the photograph of her granddaughter, Excerpt (3) introduces Ani’s response to a follower’s subtle criticism of her ongoing Instagram activity during heavy flooding in the nation’s capital, Jakarta.

Jika sebelumnya Ani sempat “marah-marah” kepada follower-nya karena komentar di foto sang cucu Aira, foto putra bungsunya Ibas, dan foto keluarga besar Yudhoyono yang mengenakan baju batik di pantai, kali ini Ibu Ani bersikap sama kepada seorang follower-nya yang menulis komentar di foto cucu bungsunya, Airlangga Satriadhi Yudhoyono.

‘While previously Ani “got angry” at her followers because of comments on a photo of her granddaughter, Aira, a photo of her youngest son, Ibas, and a photo of the Yudhoyono family wearing batik to the beach, this time Mrs Ani behaved the same way towards one of her followers who wrote a comment on a photo of her grandchild, Airlangga Satriadhi Yudhoyono.’

The excerpt begins by mentioning Ani’s prior offences. Later in the report, hyperlinks are also embedded in references to her past misconduct, which function as a form of tangible evidence, empowering the reader with the ability to actively cross-check the information provided. Having established her track record, *Kompas.com* allocates responsibility directly to Ani for the act of “getting angry” (*marah-marah*) at her followers. Meanwhile, *Kompas.com* portrays the critic in an innocent role, who simply “wrote a comment” (*menulis komentar*) on a picture Ani posted on Instagram. In the historical context of the family-state, it may be acceptable for a mother to scold her “children” for their wayward behaviour. In this case, however, in light of the ongoing portrayal of her reactive behaviour and the decorous conduct of the public, Yudhoyono’s act violates the norms of nurturing womanhood embodied in the role of first lady. It also represents a violation of the norms governing acceptable conduct on the online realm.

As the online clashes continued, *Kompas.com* used direct and indirect quotes extracted from her Instagram account to showcase Ani’s angered comments and her followers’ comparatively savvy conduct. In the report titled, *Saat Ani Yudhoyono sebut “Bodoh” untuk komentar di Instagramnya ...* (‘The moment Ani Yudhoyono called a comment “Dumb” on her Instagram ...’), *Kompas.com* first uses the headline to highlight Ani’s angered response to a

cynical comment from a member of the public. The comment related to her family's rather awkward appearance in a photograph she posted on Instagram, featuring them clad in formal matching batik as they posed together on an empty beach.

Kompas.com places Ani's use of this word *bodoh* (stupid) in the headline in recognition of its deep-seated social-political salience, as well as the fulfillment of the news value of conflict and transgression. The significance of *bodoh* dates back to the New Order, where the political elite divided the population into two fundamentally separate groups, those who were *masih bodoh* (still stupid or unenlightened), and those who were *insyaf* or *terpelajar* (aware, educated) (B. Anderson 1990: 56). In the democratic era, a member of the elite using this term to address a member of the public appears undemocratic. Moreover, such aggressive language is unbecoming of the conservative norms of the first lady.

In Excerpt (4) *Kompas.com* presents the Instagram user's sardonic response to Ani Yudhoyono. The use of quotation marks maintains an impression of impartiality, while enabling the newspaper to publish a highly cynical remark directed at the first lady:

Erie lalu kembali membalas, "Iya Ibu, saya barangkali memang masuk dalam golongan orang Indonesia yang masih bodoh. Semoga Ibu berkenan memberi saya pencerahan agar kelak saya bisa pintar seperti Ibu."

'Erie then responded, "Yes, madam, I may in fact belong to the category of Indonesians who are still stupid. I hope that you (*Ibu*) are willing to provide me with enlightenment so that I can then become clever like you (*Ibu*)."

Erie's brazen self-identification as both an Indonesian and a member of the *masih bodoh* social category represents a significant challenge to Ani's credibility in the democratic era. Erie's sarcastic request to be "provided with enlightenment" also subtly alludes to the continued divide between the elite and the non-elite along the lines of education and power. His direct address of the first lady nevertheless remains within bounds of politeness, addressing her as *Ibu* (madam), lending him the upper hand in contrast to Ani and her impolite language use.

While *Kompas.com* regularly highlighted the witty counterblows members of the public directed at the first lady, it also positioned them in the role of victim. The seemingly contradictory combination of empowerment and disempowerment inspired a unique blend of respect and sympathy, and ultimately, disdain for the first lady. In a follow up to the report from which excerpt (4) above was derived, excerpt (5) below describes the impact of the conflict upon the Instagram user, Erie:

Setelah Ibu Negara Ani Yudhoyono menyebutnya bodoh di Instagram, Erie Prasetyo, pemilik akun @erie_nya, jadi sering kena bully. Komentar miring dari pendukung Ibu Negara silih berganti menyerangnya.

'After First Lady Ani Yudhoyono called him stupid on Instagram, Erie Prasetyo, the owner of the account @erie_nya, has often suffered bullying. Cynical comments from supporters of the first lady take turns in attacking him.'

As a sign of increasing boldness, *Kompas.com* first allocates full responsibility to Ani Yudhoyono for her negative verbal process of "calling him stupid" (*menyebutnya bodoh*), and names her by her proper name and title. In the next clause, Erie is identified by his full name, which humanizes him, no longer simply a username, but an individual who exists legitimately beyond the online realm. *Kompas.com* constructs Erie as a victim, first as the target of Ani's comments, and then positions him as the target of acts of bullying. Initially, *Kompas.com* does not name those responsible for the bullying, and instead Erie is activated in the mental process of "suffering bullying" (*kena bully*) from an as yet unspecified source. He is then positioned as the target of a coordinated attack conducted by Ani's supporters. *Kompas.com* thus places Erie in a victim role deserving of sympathy, while associating Ani and her cruel supporters with the act of bullying.

The linguistic examples discussed above demonstrate that the strategy of contesting elite-public relations evolved over time. Impersonalising operations, or the removal of the human actor and their agency when conveying conflict initially enabled *Kompas.com* to report on negative events involving a high-profile political figure and navigate constraints on the Indonesian media and its legal landscape. As if building a convincing legal case, intertextual reference, aided by embedded hyperlinks, and direct and indirect quotes presented readers with a growing body of evidence of Ani's misdemeanours. From a commercial perspective, this modern form of intertextuality aided by technology encouraged further engagement with other news reports, increasing the hit rate and advertising revenue. In another form of technologically-based intertextuality, incorporating the voice of the public through direct quotes from Instagram elevated the value of a non-elite perspective, and their ability to challenge the negative behaviour of the elite in the digital realm, an area dominated by young, urban-based, and educated Indonesians.

STRATEGY 2: DELEGITIMATION THROUGH AUTHORITY AND TRIVIALIZATION

Alongside the discursive construction of Ani Yudhoyono's culpability in a string of problematic online interactions, *Kompas.com* undermined her participation in both the political and the online realms through a strategy of delegitimation. This strategy involved a two pronged-approach, employing the practices of authorization and trivialization. Authorization takes the form of an appeal to the voice of authority, or persons in whom institutional authority is invested (Van Leeuwen 2007) to add validity to a viewpoint. *Kompas.com* included the voice of authority figures critical of Ani Yudhoyono and indicated her failure to comply with the norms of the online realm and politics.

The practice of trivialization, on the other hand, is a common tactic used by media organisations to exclude women from the political realm (Adcock 2010;

E. Harmer 2012; Ibroscheva and Raicheva-Stover 2009; E. van Acker 2003). An unnecessary focus on physical appearance is common (J. Anderson, G. Diabah, and A. hMensa 2011; Ibroscheva and Raicheva-Stover 2009; K. Ross 2014; L. Voronova 2014), as is a focus on frivolous, self-centred behaviour (Ahlstrand 2022) in this mode of representation. For Ani Yudhoyono, trivialization served to destabilize her authority by reference to her incongruity with the formal norms of politics. Scrutiny of her body and self-serving actions in public served to both objectify and disempower her as a woman in the masculine political realm. The portrayal of her self-centred frivolity placed her at odds with the people-focused goals espoused by populism.

Excerpt (6) is an example of delegitimation through authority, and was derived from a report with the provocative title, “Ani Yudhoyono not ready to join Cyberspace” (*Ani Yudhoyono belum siap masuk Dunia Maya*). The title is an indirect quote of Heri Budianto, identified later in the report as a political communications expert from Mercu Buana University, who functions as the source of authorization. The report also contains the strategy of *contesting elite-public relations* described above, including intertextual reference to her previous online transgressions; however, it also relies heavily on the voice of an expert to undermine Ani Yudhoyono’s eligibility to participate in the online realm. In the excerpt below, Heri Budianto defines the appropriate code of conduct for the online community, and in turn, determines how Ani should behave.

*Ketika masuk ke komunitas siber, lanjut Heri, **Ani seharusnya bisa** menerima segala konsekuensi termasuk menerima **kritik**. Jika **kritik** itu ditanggapi oleh Ani, Heri melihat hal itu justru merugikan.*

‘When entering the cyber community, continued Heri, **Ani should be able** to accept the consequences, including **criticism**. If the **criticism** is responded to by Ani, Heri sees that as being extremely detrimental.’

Kompas.com activates Budianto in an act of advice-giving, which naturally positions him in a powerful role, in comparison to a subordinate Ani as the target of the advice, albeit unsolicited. By virtue of his status as an academic at a tertiary institution, Budianto takes on the authoritative role of the teacher, which naturally places Ani in the subordinate role of the student despite her age and status. Through use of the double modals *seharusnya* (should be) and *bisa* (able to, can), he implores Ani to behave according to the conditions of the cyber community: “accepting all the consequences” and “taking criticism”. Here Ani is singled out as the novice in the community of practice with the onus placed on her to follow the correct code of conduct. On the other hand, the public are impersonalized through utterance autonomization in *kritik*, thus downplaying their responsibility for the problem, and their need to adjust their behaviour.

In excerpt (7), taken from a report published two months after excerpt (6) above, *Kompas.com* follows a similar pattern, and draws on the voice of another academic, a sociologist from the prestigious University of Indonesia. By using

his voice, *Kompas.com* navigates constraints of objectivity on the press to publish a negative opinion of Ani Yudhoyono and her conduct on Instagram.

Sosiolog dari Universitas Indonesia (UI) Musni Umar mengkritik sikap Ibu Negara Ani Yudhoyono yang kerap kali mengeluarkan komentar reaktif di akun Instagramnya. Menurut Musni, sikap istri Presiden Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) itu menggelikan.

‘Sociologist from the University of Indonesia (UI) Musni Umar has criticized the attitude of First Lady Ani Yudhoyono who frequently makes reactive comments on her Instagram account. According to Musni, the attitude of the wife of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) is ridiculous.’

Describing the first lady’s attitude as ridiculous constitutes an audacious act, particularly in a national newspaper; however, the reference to expert authority provides a warrant to publish the criticism. A close analysis also reveals that rather than the first lady herself, it is her “attitude” (*sikap*) described as ridiculous, thus showing a small degree of deference. Nevertheless, reiterating her negative actions while identifying her in the same clause as “First Lady Ani Yudhoyono,” and “the wife of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono” reinforces the inappropriateness of her behaviour as both the first lady and wife of the president.

In addition to authorization, *Kompas.com* also engaged trivialization to undermine Ani Yudhoyono’s legitimacy as first lady. Trivialization in *Kompas.com* reports transformed Ani into an object of surveillance, drawing attention to her body and frivolous behaviour to delegitimize her participation in the political realm. Excerpt (8) comes from a report on the seemingly inconsequential matter of her use of a mini fan when attending official public events in the tropical Indonesian heat. The report scrutinizes Ani’s visit to a technology fair in minute detail, including her movement around the stalls, her clothing, and in particular, her use of the fan. It also highlights the role of her assistant in operating the fan on her behalf, pointing to Ani’s privilege.

Tentu bukan pekerjaan yang mudah. Si ajudan harus bisa menjaga jarak secara konsisten. Terlalu jauh, embusan angin tak akan terasa di tubuh Ani. Terlalu dekat, bisa-bisa putaran kipas mengenai punggung Ibu Negara.

‘It certainly wasn’t an easy job. The aide had to maintain a constant distance. Too close, the breeze wouldn’t be felt on Ani’s body. Too close and the rotating blades would come into contact with the first lady’s back.’

While scrutinising Ani’s use of the fan, *Kompas.com* objectifies her, which has the effect of alienating her from the scene and downplaying her perceived human agency. In *embusan angin tak akan terasa di tubuh Ani* (the breeze won’t be felt on Ani’s body), the agentless passive verb *terasa* (felt) removes Ani as the direct participant at the scene. Moreover, in *tubuh Ani* (Ani’s body), somatization occurs, representing her by reference to a part of her body rather than her actual self (Van Leeuwen 2008). Somatization occurs again in the next sentence,

referring to *punggung Ibu Negara* (the first lady's back), which carries the same alienating effect as "Ani's body". This mode of representation through close scrutiny of the woman's body as she participated in the public realm was also evident in disempowering *Kompas.com* representations of Democratic Party of Struggle Chair Megawati Soekarnoputri (Ahlstrand 2022: 76, 79).

Aside from using somatization, trivialization also involved activating Ani in social processes that did not have a direct impact on others or the surrounding social context. Behavioural processes are the actions that relate to demeanour or conduct, and do not have an impact on a person or thing (Van Leeuwen 2008). These processes are generally grammatically intransitive, in that they were devoid of a direct object, thus obscuring the tangible impact of the action. Mental processes involve activation in relation to thoughts and feelings (Van Leeuwen 2008), and provide insight into the mind of a social actor. While activation in both processes may help humanize them, in the strategy of delegitimation, *Kompas.com* emphasized Ani's incompatibility with, and limited impact on the political realm through her frivolous actions. Excerpt (9) was derived from a report covering a large public Democrat Party campaign event held in the lead up to the 2014 legislative election, which Ani Yudhoyono attended as a representative of her husband and party leader.

Ibu Negara Ani Yudhoyono terlihat riang dan berjoget-joget seraya menikmati irama musik dalam kampanye Partai Demokrat di Lapangan Pukon, Magelang, Jawa Tengah, Minggu (16/3/2014).

'First Lady Ani Yudhoyono **appeared cheerful and danced around enjoying the rhythm of the music** in the Democrat Party campaign in Pukon Field, Magelang, Middle Java, Sunday (16/3/2014).'

Taken from the lead sentence of the report, *Kompas.com* objectifies Ani Yudhoyono as a target of scrutiny through the verb *terlihat* (appeared) and focuses on her emotional state in the adjective "cheerful" (*riang*). It then continues by describing her behaviour of "dancing around" (*berjoget-joget*), and her mental state of "enjoying the rhythm of the music" (*menikmati irama musik*). While political campaigns are generally festive in Indonesia, her actions appear unbecoming of a dignified first lady. Later in the report, *Kompas.com* describes Ani Yudhoyono's clothing choices as she takes to the stage, along with her failed attempt at interacting with the crowd of everyday people. While some studies have shown that focusing on fashion can help to humanize and build the public profile of a female political figure (P.G. dos Santos and F. Jalalzai 2014; M. Hüstebeck 2013), in this case, the coverage of Ani Yudhoyono's appearance and behaviour at a political event serves to objectify her and detract from her legitimate political participation as first lady. As a representative of her husband, the coverage also has the knock-on effect of undermining the SBY presidency and his party leadership.

The dual-pronged strategy of delegitimation through reference to an authority figure and the act of trivialization enabled *Kompas.com* to present a

convincing and seemingly objective case against Ani Yudhoyono as a credible participant in both the online and offline realms. Given the legal constraints and historical practice of self-censorship in media organisations, the strategic concealment of responsibility through objectifying representations, the limitation of her agency, and the use of the voice of authority enabled *Kompas.com* to publish reports damaging to her reputation. Delegitimation took on a patronising tone, inviting university-based male experts to dole out advice to Ani on how she should conduct herself on social media. The use of the experts shielded *Kompas.com* for voicing harsh criticism of the first lady, while reinforcing gendered structures of power. Trivialization delivered the second blow to Ani, using typically gendered tactics of representation to portray her as an object of scrutiny and ridicule in the political realm.

DISCUSSION

The exemplars discussed above have demonstrated how the mainstream online news media site, *Kompas.com* engaged language strategically to undermine Ani Yudhoyono as a woman participating in both the political and online realm. The representations also functioned to empower the public while undermining her husband's presidency in the context of growing anti-elite sentiment. Ani was extremely susceptible to media scrutiny due to the incongruity of her gender and her proximity to political power. As shown in previous research from across the world (Adcock 2010; C. Bucciferro 2014; Ibroscheva and Raicheva-Stover 2009, 2014; Van Acker 2003; C. Walsh 2000; C. van Dembroucke 2014), media representations of women in politics tend to reinforce the masculine structure of the political sphere, by filtering portrayals through gender stereotypes. On one hand, such representations celebrate women for fulfilling motherly virtues of selflessness and sacrifice, while on the other, trivialize them by highlighting their frivolity and incongruity with the unwritten masculine norms of politics.

Although on the surface, *Kompas.com* appeared to present an objective representation of Ani Yudhoyono, the analysis revealed an underlying bias against her as a woman in a position of political influence. Nominating Ani consistently as "first lady" or "wife of President Yudhoyono" in association with negative representations of her social actions served a twofold function; it reinforced the gendering of the political realm by alerting readers to her violation values of submissive, nurturing wifeness and motherhood as first lady or the "mother of the nation", and also linked her diva-like behaviour to her husband's flailing the presidency. Unlike the case of Cherie Booth Blair as discussed by Page (2003), at the time *Kompas.com* did not offer an alternative positive representation to balance out the negativity, and thus undermined Ani Yudhoyono's media persona, and by association, her husband's claim to authority.

Studies of political women highlight a range of delegitimising discursive tactics deployed by the mass media that perpetuate their alienation from the political and public sphere. Among these tactics, trivialization through a

focus on personal appearance, while emphasising the women's frivolity tend to dominate (Ahlstrand 2022; Dos Santos and Jalalzai 2014; Harmer 2012; Ibroscheva and Raicheva-Stover 2009; Ross 2014; Van Acker 2003; Voronova 2014). This paper has provided new linguistic evidence of a systematic effort to undermine Ani Yudhoyono through trivialization. In addition to trivialization, it also demonstrated how authority figures can be called upon as a powerful source of delegitimization, which also upheld an impression of objectivity.

The ongoing and coordinated media portrayal of Ani Yudhoyono reflects the excessive scrutiny imposed upon women in the political domain. Such acute surveillance inhibits their ability to move freely on equal terms with men by imposing tight sanctions on acceptable behaviour, while reinforcing their outsider status. While at times, intense scrutiny may help build a women's media profile, such as in the case of former minister, Susi Pudjiastuti (Ahlstrand 2022), the acute surveillance increases the possibility of highlighting transgression and opportunities for ridicule, such as in the case of Megawati Soekarnoputri (Ahlstrand 2022). The analysis of the *Kompas.com* portrayal of Ani Yudhoyono's activity both online and offline upheld such findings.

The portrayal of Yudhoyono's aggression towards the public not only placed her at odds with historically gendered norms, but also norms governing acceptable behaviour in the digital realm as a community of practice. All communities of practice bring with them unarticulated but shared knowledge, including ways of acting, and overarching expectations of acceptable ways of writing, thinking and speaking, while precluding others (C. Lewis and J. Ketter 2011: 13). Anyone who initially seeks membership in a community of practice therefore faces additional interdiscursive demands, particularly when their own discursive habits conflict or contrast with those of the new community (Wenger 1999), in this case a younger, educated, and technologically literate generation. The coverage of Ani's problematic engagement on Instagram pointed to a potential shift in the balance of power between the political elite and non-elite, which was reflected by the *Kompas.com* portrayal of Ani as a disempowered and objectified elite figure. The representations of Ani within this political context of rising populism also reflected and fuelled a desire to not only narrow the elite-public divide, but also to empower the public to stand up to elite tyranny.

CONCLUSION

Studies have shown that maintaining a proper, uncontroversial public persona, alongside a good relationship with the media are key to the stability of the role of the first lady, as well as the president (M. Kahl 2009; Page 2003). Ani Yudhoyono's unfiltered online participation created the possibility for greater public engagement, but also subjected her to intense scrutiny. Rather than winning the hearts of the people, her online reactions provided fuel for a media campaign that became increasingly dichotomous, reminiscent of the treatment of Hilary Rodham Clinton in the US (Ritchie 2013; Vasby Anderson 2004). The increasingly bold representations of Ani Yudhoyono's online

misdemeanours and self-serving actions, coincided with the simultaneous portrayal of the inculpability of the public. Through the strategic allocation of agency to participants in the conflict, concerted efforts to establish an ongoing polarized narrative of deviance.

The dichotomous reporting became a micro-representation of the broader social-political context as the SBY presidency reached its end and the 2014 presidential election campaign gained traction. While the immediate political context undoubtedly influenced the nature of reporting, the broader historical context of post-authoritarianism shaped the representations of Ani Yudhoyono as first lady and the relations of power between her and the public. The coverage of Yudhoyono's online blunders highlighted her failure to uphold the historically gendered norms of the kind and nurturing "mother of the nation". The reporting also called attention to the perpetuation feudal relations of power between the elite and non-elite, in violation of the egalitarian democratic values of post-authoritarian Indonesia. Thus, somewhat contradictorily, *Kompas.com* upheld conservative gendered structures of power, while confronting undemocratic elite-non-elite relations of power.

The findings from the analysis of the *Kompas.com* reports not only revealed latent and emergent political discourses, but also demonstrated the importance of the digital realm as an annex of public realm in the democratic era. In the 2014 presidential election, Indonesia's urban middle-class began to convincingly occupy the online space, and for the first time, political campaigning was conducted digitally. While seemingly trivial events, the reporting and distribution of Ani Yudhoyono's shortcomings in this increasingly populated online space became fuel for a populist movement linked to political polarization. Ani Yudhoyono's personal efforts to bridge the gap and engage with Indonesia's tech-savvy youth through her participation on Instagram backfired, demonstrating the volatile and precarious nature of online participation.

EPILOGUE

In September 2014, having served the maximum two-terms in office, Ani Yudhoyono and her husband left the presidential palace with minimal fanfare, leaving the turmoil of the past twelve months behind them. Beyond the timeframe of this study, in the lead up to her departure, the news reports took a gentler stance towards Ani Yudhoyono, portraying her in a more vulnerable, submissive, and overall, more palatable version of the first lady as she prepared to leave the presidential palace. The transformation of coverage likely reflected a change in public attitude, no longer regarding her as a threat to the political status quo as she and her husband willingly relinquished their power. In September 2014, Joko Widodo was sworn in as Indonesia's new president, and the country was introduced to a new first lady, Iriana, who, possibly having learned from the experience of Ani Yudhoyono, projected a far more reticent public image, and explicitly avoided social media.

After Ani Yudhoyono and her husband departed from the presidential palace, they vanished from media headlines. Five years later, however, in February 2019, Ani returned to the media spotlight when news broke of her leukemia diagnosis. Despite undergoing intensive treatment in a private hospital in Singapore, she only lived for four more months. A cursory glance at the news media coverage reveals a stark difference between her portrayal in her final twelve months as first lady, and five years later, in the final four months of her life. In this case, Ani became a vulnerable victim of cancer, and highly respected former first lady. The revisionist, eulogising portrayal of Ani under these conditions is worthy of subsequent analysis, especially considered in contrast to the scathing representation as a member of the elite.

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