



DISASTER AS CLICKBAIT: SENSATIONALISM, EMOTIONAL AMPLIFICATION, AND DIGITAL MEDIATION IN TIKTOK COVERAGE OF THE ACEH TAMIANG FLOOD

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how the Aceh Tamiang flood is constructed as a social reality on TikTok through practices of sensationalism, emotional amplification, and algorithm-based digital mediation. The study departs from the understanding that social media no longer functions merely as a channel for information dissemination, but rather as a central arena for the formation of meaning, collective emotion, and public attention toward disaster events. Data were collected through digital observation, content documentation, and monitoring of public conversations using Brand24 to identify emotional patterns, keywords, and the dynamics of audience attention. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, encompassing data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, and was strengthened through data source triangulation. The findings indicate that TikTok coverage of the Aceh Tamiang flood is dominated by dramatic visual representations and emotional narratives emphasizing suffering, solidarity, and humanitarian action. Emotions of sadness, admiration, and joy emerge as the primary affective spectrum shaping audience resonance and driving high levels of engagement. These findings underscore that within the logic of the Network Society, flooding is transformed into clickbait operating as a commodity of attention, in which emotion, algorithms, and audience participation are deeply intertwined in shaping the reality of disaster in the digital public sphere.

Keywords: Digital Sensationalism, Emotional Amplification, Algorithmic Mediation, Tiktok, Aceh Tamiang Flood

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an inseparable part of everyday life in Indonesian society. The rapid development of digital technology has driven the emergence of various social media platforms with increasingly complex characteristics and communicative logics. Within this context, social media no longer functions merely as a medium for entertainment or interpersonal communication, but has evolved into a primary space for the formation of opinion, emotion, and the construction of social reality. Public dependence on social media

is often perceived as a new social phenomenon, in which leisure time is increasingly spent navigating digital spaces rather than engaging in conventional social interactions.

Among the various platforms that have emerged, TikTok occupies a highly dominant position within Indonesia's social media landscape. With approximately 89 million users, equivalent to 34.7 percent of the total population, TikTok possesses significant reach and influence in shaping public perceptions. The characteristics of short-form video content that are highly visual, rapid, and emotionally charged, supported by an attention-based algorithmic system, make TikTok an exceptionally effective medium for disseminating contemporary issues, including natural disaster events.

The flood that struck Aceh Tamiang is not only present as a physical reality manifested in overflowing water, infrastructural damage, and the suffering of affected communities, but also as a mediated reality that is produced and reproduced extensively on social media. The flood rapidly became widely circulated content on TikTok through videos uploaded by residents, media outlets, and independent content creators. Through this process, the disaster is no longer understood solely as a natural event, but as a digital narrative that is consumed by the public in visual and emotional forms (Taryana et al., 2022).

The phenomenon of flood coverage of Aceh Tamiang on TikTok demonstrates a strong tendency toward sensationalist practices. Many contents present extreme visuals such as houses being swept away, strong currents, victims' crying, and scenes of public panic, accompanied by dramatic music and provocative captions. Such modes of presentation position tragedy as the primary attraction to capture audience attention. Contextual information related to the causes of flooding, structural conditions of the affected area, and mitigation efforts is frequently marginalized by dramatic narratives that are more easily rendered viral.

This sensationalism is closely linked to the operational logic of TikTok's algorithm, which tends to amplify content with high emotional intensity. Emotions such as sadness, fear, and anger possess greater circulation power because they stimulate user interactions in the form of likes, comments, and shares. Within this ecosystem, disasters are prone to being treated as clickbait, whereby human suffering becomes an attention commodity that is repeatedly produced for the sake of digital visibility and popularity.

From a constructivist perspective, media is not understood as a neutral mirror that reflects reality as it is, but as an active actor that shapes and frames social reality. Robert Entman explains that media framing operates through processes of selection and salience, highlighting certain aspects of reality while downplaying others, thereby shaping how the public defines problems, evaluates causes, and interprets the meaning of events. In the context of Aceh Tamiang flood coverage on TikTok, dramatic and emotional aspects are more frequently selected and emphasized than structural and policy-related dimensions.

This view aligns with Peter L. Berger's conception of the social construction of reality, which emphasizes that social reality is continuously produced through ongoing social processes. The digital representation of the Aceh Tamiang flood does not appear as an objective reality, but is constructed through content production practices, algorithmic mechanisms, and audience interactions. What the public comes to understand as the reality of the disaster is therefore strongly influenced by dominant visual representations and narratives circulating on social media.

Digital mediation through TikTok positions the platform not merely as a channel for information dissemination, but as an integral part of the formation of collective emotional experience. Emotional amplification in flood coverage can foster empathy and solidarity, while simultaneously generating emotional fatigue among audiences. Over time, this condition has the potential to blur the boundary between humanitarian concern and the consumption of tragedy as digital spectacle (Kiko, 2025).



Figure 1. Mentions and Reach of Aceh Tamiang Flood Content on TikTok (2025)

The visualization of the temporal trend indicates that public conversations regarding the Aceh Tamiang flood began to increase significantly from late November, coinciding with the initial phase of intensified news coverage and the distribution of disaster-related content on social media. The surge in mentions observed between 27 November and early December marks the momentum at which the flood issue started to attract widespread attention, while the increase in reach peaking around 7 December reflects a phase of maximum amplification, during which content was not only widely discussed but also reached a substantially larger audience. Following this peak period, both mentions and reach gradually declined until mid-December, indicating a waning of public attention in line with the decreasing intensity of new content. This temporal pattern underscores that attention to disasters in digital spaces is inherently transient and highly influenced by the momentum of content distribution, emotional resonance, and the algorithmic dynamics of social media platforms.

The urgency of this study lies in the pressing need to understand how humanitarian disasters are represented, interpreted, and distributed within algorithm-driven social media ecosystems that increasingly dominate the public sphere. As TikTok becomes a primary source of information for large segments of society, practices of sensationalism and emotional amplification in the coverage of the Aceh Tamiang flood risk shaping public awareness in a skewed, reductive manner detached from the structural context of the disaster. Without critical engagement with these processes of reality construction, humanitarian tragedies risk being continuously reproduced as commodities of digital attention rather than as public issues that demand substantive empathy, media responsibility, and sustained policy reflection.

Previous studies indicate that social media plays a crucial role in shaping public responses to natural disasters, particularly during the initial phase of an event. Research analyzing public reactions to the 2018 Sunda Strait tsunami found that Twitter functioned as a primary space for collective expression, on-the-ground condition reporting, and the

circulation of emotions such as fear and sadness. Public responses on social media were shown to be temporal and spatial in nature, with the highest intensity of postings occurring in the early phase of the disaster and gradually declining over time. These findings affirm that social media does not merely operate as an information channel, but also as an arena for the formation of collective emotional responses to disasters.

Other studies within the field of disaster communication have highlighted the role of citizen journalism in the production and distribution of disaster-related information. Research on the coverage of the Palu disaster demonstrates that recordings and reports produced by residents became the primary sources of visual representations of the disaster, which were subsequently adopted by mainstream media outlets. The immediacy and emotional proximity of citizen-generated content were often prioritized over technical quality and contextual depth. This finding illustrates how disaster realities are constructed through the subjective perspectives of citizens, leading disaster coverage to emphasize dramatic and visual aspects as the main appeal for digital audiences.

Meanwhile, more recent research in information systems and disaster communication emphasizes that networked and algorithm-driven social media platforms possess a strong capacity to accelerate the distribution of disaster information, while simultaneously carrying the risk of meaning distortion and the spread of misinformation. Studies on real-time disaster reporting systems based on Twitter reveal that digital community engagement can enhance the speed and reach of information dissemination, yet also demonstrate how content with high emotional intensity is more easily amplified within networked environments. These studies reinforce the argument that disaster realities in digital spaces are shaped by the interaction between content, social networks, and algorithmic logics, rather than solely by factual conditions on the ground.

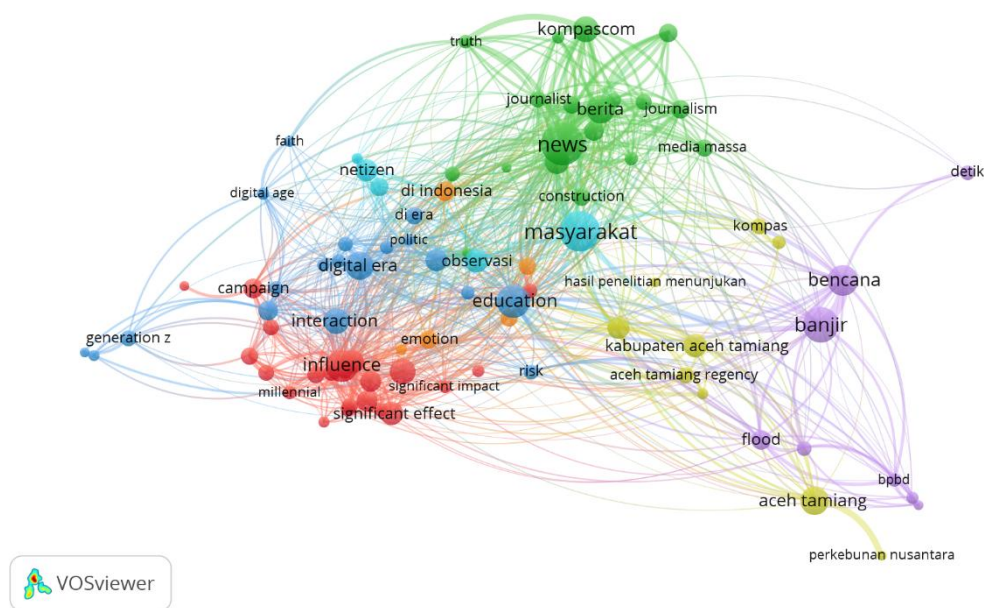


Figure 2. Network Visualitation

The network visualization indicates that discourse surrounding the Aceh Tamiang flood is formed through a complex interconnection between disaster-related issues, media reporting practices, and the dynamics of digital society. The clusters labeled “news,” “journalism,” and “mass media” occupy central positions, signaling the dominant role of media in constructing and distributing flood narratives, while simultaneously functioning as the primary link between disaster facts and public perception. The close connections among nodes such as “flood,” “disaster,” “Aceh Tamiang,” and “BPBD” demonstrate that disaster issues do not stand alone, but are embedded within specific institutional and geographical contexts. At the same time, the emergence of nodes such as “digital era,” “netizens,” “emotion,” and “influence” reveals that flood coverage operates within a logic of digital mediation that is heavily infused with emotional content and audience interaction. This network underscores that the reality of the Aceh Tamiang flood in the digital public sphere is not merely the outcome of factual reporting, but a social construction produced through the interplay between media, digital platforms, collective emotions, and public participation.

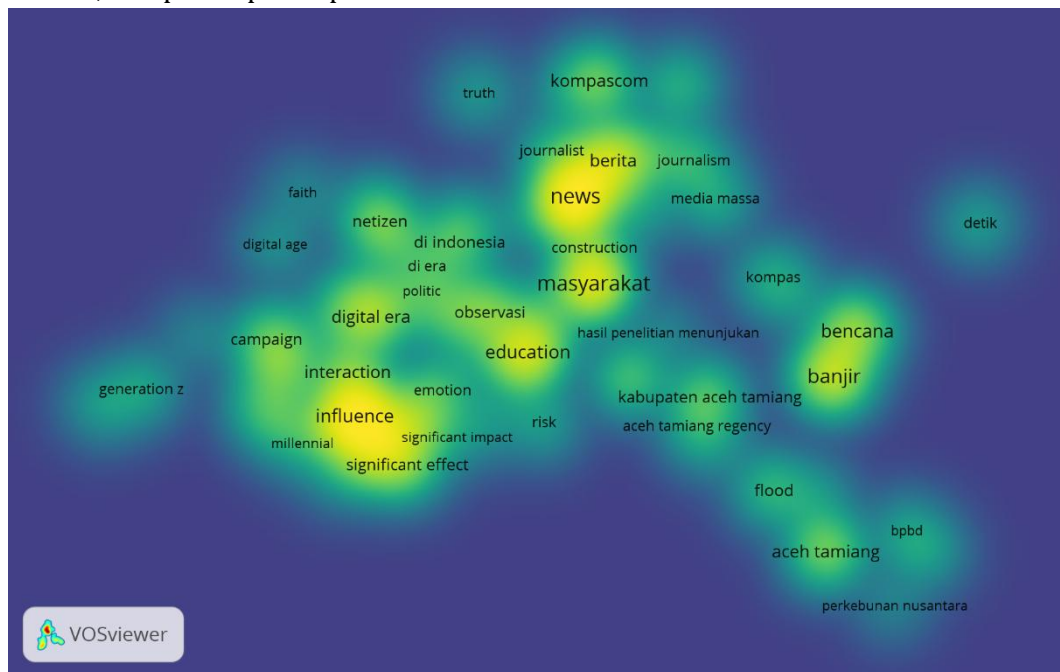


Figure 3. Visualisation Indensity

The density visualization reveals that discourse on the Aceh Tamiang flood in the digital sphere is concentrated around several intersecting centers of meaning. Areas of highest intensity appear around the nodes “news,” “society,” and “flood,” indicating that disaster reporting operates as a central axis in the formation of public reality. The density surrounding the terms “journalism,” “mass media,” and “news reporting” reflects the dominance of journalistic logic in constructing disaster narratives, while the presence of terms such as “digital era,” “netizens,” “interaction,” and “emotion” signals the strong role of digital mediation and affect in the circulation of the issue. The concentration of geographical terms such as “Aceh Tamiang,” “Aceh Tamiang Regency,” and “BPBD” illustrates how disaster realities are anchored in local contexts while simultaneously being expanded into the national public sphere. This density pattern underscores that the reality

of the Aceh Tamiang flood is not formed in a neutral manner, but is constructed through the convergence of reporting practices, digital societal dynamics, and the intensification of emotion within social media ecosystems.

In contrast to previous studies that tend to position social media primarily as a channel for public response, citizen journalism, or disaster information distribution systems, this study conceptualizes TikTok as a central arena for the construction of disaster reality operating through the logics of sensationalism, emotional amplification, and algorithmic mediation. The analysis goes beyond examining how disaster information is disseminated or responded to, by interrogating how the Aceh Tamiang flood is represented, selected, and foregrounded as attention-oriented content that prioritizes emotional engagement. By integrating network and discourse density visualizations, this study demonstrates that disaster reality is not shaped solely by lived experiences or the speed of information distribution, but by complex relations among reporting practices, digital network structures, collective emotions, and platform algorithmic mechanisms. Accordingly, this study offers a conceptual contribution by shifting the analytical focus from responses to disasters toward the processes through which disasters are constructed as clickbait within short-video-based social media ecosystems.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with an interpretive orientation to gain an in-depth understanding of meanings, representational patterns, and the processes through which disaster reality is constructed in the coverage of the Aceh Tamiang flood on TikTok. The qualitative approach is adopted because the study is not directed toward quantitative measurement or causal testing, but toward interpreting media content as a social and cultural product. Within this framework, disaster coverage is understood as the outcome of processes of selection, salience, and interpretation of reality that are shaped by the logic of digital media and the dynamics of audience interaction in online public spaces.

Content analysis is used as the primary analytical approach to systematically and interpretively examine the messages embedded in TikTok content. This approach enables the identification of dominant themes, visual symbols, narratives, and emotional tones presented in the coverage of the Aceh Tamiang flood. Content analysis in this study goes beyond a literal reading of texts by interpreting the meanings embedded in visuals, audio elements, and message structures that contribute to sensationalism and emotional amplification. Through this perspective, TikTok is positioned as a space for the construction of disaster reality operating within an algorithm-driven digital ecosystem.

The main data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data are derived from TikTok social media content related to the reporting and representation of the Aceh Tamiang flood, including videos, visuals, captions, background music, hashtags, and patterns of audience interaction such as view counts, comments, and emotional responses. Content selection is based on thematic relevance to the disaster, the intensity of audience engagement, and the presence of sensationalism and emotional amplification. Secondary data are obtained from scholarly literature, media reports, disaster-related documents, and previous studies relevant to disaster communication and

digital mediation, which serve to strengthen the theoretical context and empirical analysis.

Data collection is conducted through digital observation and documentation. Digital observation involves systematically tracing and examining TikTok content related to the Aceh Tamiang flood, with particular attention to visual representation patterns, emotional narratives, and modes of disaster presentation. Documentation is carried out by archiving videos, screenshots, captions, hashtags, and content metadata that indicate levels of audience engagement. In addition, data collection is supported by the use of Brand24 as a digital media monitoring tool to track public conversations, keywords, and emotional sentiment evolving alongside the distribution of disaster-related content, thereby providing a broader picture of public attention dynamics.

Data analysis follows the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2016), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation is conducted by selecting and focusing on content relevant to sensationalism, emotional amplification, and digital mediation. Data display is presented through analytical narratives, thematic mapping, and categorization tables to illustrate patterns and relationships among findings. Conclusion drawing is carried out iteratively through in-depth interpretation by linking empirical findings with the theoretical framework employed, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of disaster reality construction.

Data credibility is ensured through data triangulation by comparing the results of digital observation, content documentation, and public conversation monitoring data obtained from Brand24. To facilitate analysis, the data are categorized according to themes of disaster representation, forms of sensationalism, types of emphasized emotions, patterns of digital mediation, content production actors, audience responses, and modes of disaster meaning-making. This categorization enables the identification of dominant tendencies in the construction of the Aceh Tamiang flood reality on TikTok, as summarized in the following table.

Table 1. Categorization of Aceh Tamiang Flood Coverage Content on TikTok

No.	Main Category	Analytical Indicators	Categorization Description
1	Disaster Representation	Flood visuals, damage, victims	Content displays the physical conditions of flooding such as submerged houses, strong currents, damaged public facilities, and the direct impacts on affected communities
2	Sensationalism	Provocative titles, dramatic music, extreme visuals	Content employs hyperbolic narratives, emotional music, dramatic camera angles, and attention-grabbing captions
3	Emotional Amplification	Expressions of sadness, fear, panic, empathy	Content highlights the emotions of victims or audiences through crying, panic scenes, suffering narratives, and affective symbols
4	Digital Mediation	Algorithms, hashtags, viral patterns	Content utilizes popular hashtags, short-video formats, and distribution patterns that enhance visibility on TikTok
5	Content Production Actors	Media, citizen journalists, individual users	Content is produced by various actors with different perspectives and interests

6	Audience Response	Likes, comments, shares	Forms of audience engagement indicating emotional resonance
7	Disaster Meaning-Making	Informational or consumption of tragedy	Disasters are framed either as humanitarian issues or as clickbait content

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Patterns of Flood Coverage and Visual Representation on TikTok

This study finds that coverage of the Aceh Tamiang flood on TikTok is dominated by visual content depicting extreme conditions and the immediate impacts of the disaster. The majority of videos emphasize submerged houses, strong water currents, and resident evacuation activities, presented in short-video formats with brief textual overlays and high-contrast visuals. (Kusumawati et al., 2024).

At the visual level, video thumbnails produced by news accounts and citizen journalists tend to employ dramatic camera angles and text that emphasizes emergency conditions. The use of terms such as “paralyzed,” “submerged,” and “severe flooding” emerges as a common pattern in titles and captions, functioning to capture audience attention from the initial visual presentation of the content. (Puspita & Suciati, 2020).

Beyond visuals of physical damage, representations of residents’ suffering also emerge as a dominant element in the coverage. Content depicting victims’ emotional expressions, rescue activities, and evacuation conditions appears repeatedly and becomes a defining feature of how the Aceh Tamiang flood is represented on TikTok.

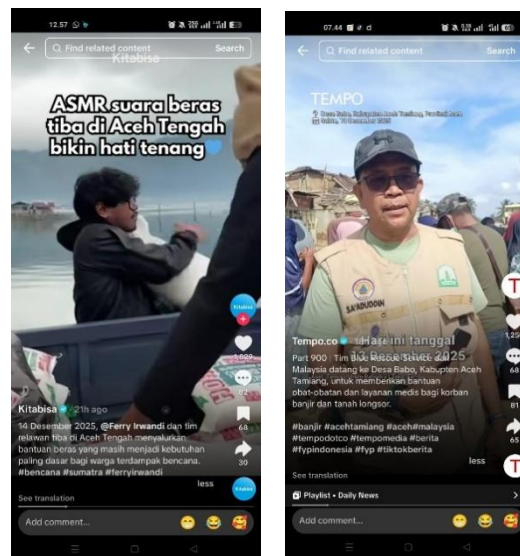


Figure 4. Thumbnails of Aceh Tamiang Flood Coverage on TikTok

The two TikTok contents illustrate different patterns of visual representation of the Aceh Tamiang flood, yet both operate within the logics of attention and emotion. The first content, uploaded by the Tempo media account, presents an institutional authority figure within the disaster context, marked by the use of official attributes and an informative

The keyword visualization indicates that discourse on the Aceh Tamiang flood in the digital sphere is dominated by terms associated with disaster, solidarity, and emotional appeals, such as “flood,” “disaster,” “help,” and “donation,” which appear with high frequency. The dominance of hashtags such as #fyp, #prayforaceh, and #flashflood illustrates how disaster narratives are not solely oriented toward information delivery, but are also optimized for algorithmic visibility and the expansion of content reach on TikTok. This pattern is consistent with the previously analyzed TikTok content, in which dramatic visuals and humanitarian narratives are combined with calls for empathy and solidarity, enabling public emotions to function dually as triggers of concern and as mechanisms for attention amplification. The interconnection between word choices, popular hashtags, and visual representations underscores that coverage of the Aceh Tamiang flood is constructed through emotional strategies that are systematically aligned with the logic of content distribution on social media.

With a sample size of 30 students, an average increase of 17.45 points was seen, which indicates a fairly strong change after the socialization intervention.

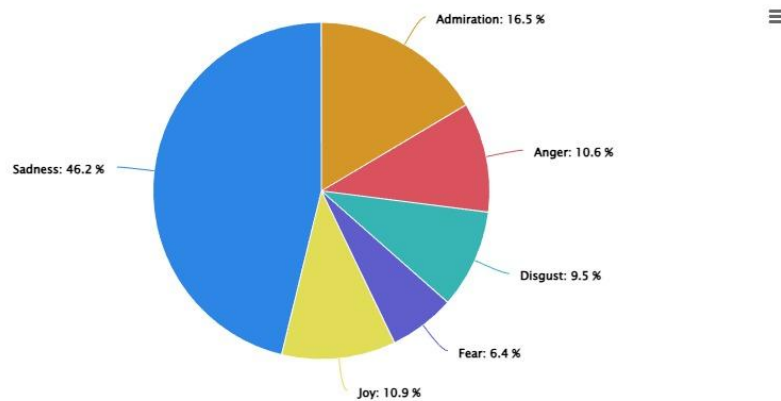


Figure 6. Distribution of Emotions in Flood Disaster Content on TikTok (2025)

The distribution of emotions dominated by sadness, admiration, and joy indicates that Aceh Tamiang flood content on TikTok constructs an interwoven affective spectrum rather than a single emotional register. Sadness emerges as the most dominant emotion, as the content consistently portrays residents’ suffering, damaged homes, and narratives of loss that readily elicit empathy. Admiration develops through representations of volunteers, humanitarian actions, and civic solidarity positioned as morally positive figures amid the crisis. Joy appears more limited, manifested in content that highlights the arrival of aid, community togetherness, and moments of hope within the disaster context. These three emotions are produced simultaneously through visual choices, narrative framing, and content aesthetics that are aligned with the logic of audience engagement on social media.

When examined through Stuart Hall's audience reception theory, the dominance of sadness and admiration reflects a strong dominant reading, in which audiences accept and affirm the humanitarian and solidarity-oriented messages as intended by content producers. Expressions of prayer, support, and appreciation for volunteers indicate the internalization of meanings that align with the content's framing. Meanwhile, the emergence of joy can be interpreted as part of a negotiated reading, whereby audiences do not focus solely on suffering but also negotiate the meaning of the disaster by foregrounding hope and the positive values of collective action. This pattern underscores that audience reception of flood coverage on TikTok is active and layered, with emotion functioning as a primary medium in the decoding of disaster meanings within the digital public sphere.

Audience Responses and Reception through Comments

Audience responses to the coverage of the Aceh Tamiang flood on TikTok are not only reflected through engagement metrics such as view counts, likes, and shares, but also through the comments left by users. The comment section functions as a space of symbolic interaction in which audiences express emotions, attitudes, and interpretations of disaster-related content. Through comments, audiences do not merely respond to messages, but actively participate in the process of meaning-making surrounding the presented flood reality, thereby positioning audience reception as an integral component of the construction of disaster discourse in the digital sphere. (Sukmawati & Fatmawati, 2023).

Within the context of this study, audience comments are understood as reflections of the decoding process as articulated in audience reception theory. Each comment represents a range of meaning-making positions, from full acceptance of the presented narrative, to negotiated interpretations, and to critical opposition toward the ways in which the disaster is represented. Accordingly, the analysis of audience comments enables an understanding of how coverage of the Aceh Tamiang flood is interpreted, negotiated, and contested by the public within the TikTok social media ecosystem. (Ichsan et al., 2023).

Table 2. Collection of Comments on TikTok Posts Related to the Aceh Tamiang Flood (2025)

No.	Audience Reception Category	Comment Characteristics	Representative Comments	Meaning of Reception
1	Dominant Reading	Full acceptance of the content narrative, expressions of empathy, prayers, moral support, and appreciation for volunteers	"Terimakasih bang Ferry atas bantuannya", "MasyaAllah orang-orang baik", "Semoga Allah balas kebajikannya"	Audiences accept the humanitarian and solidarity message as intended by the content, without questioning the framing or actors involved
2	Dominant Reading	Encouragement of participation and willingness to be directly involved	"Pengen bantu tapi gak punya biaya", "Open donasi lagi bang"	The content successfully mobilizes empathy and encourages symbolic or concrete action from audiences
3	Negotiated Reading	Acceptance of the humanitarian message accompanied by criticism of the state or system	"Rakyat bantu rakyat karena pemerintah sibuk", "Negara udah bantu apa?"	Audiences accept the disaster reality while negotiating its meaning by adding structural criticism

4	Negotiated Reading	Support for volunteers accompanied by concerns about aid distribution	"Semoga bantuan tepat sasaran", "Takut ada oknum"	Audiences accept the solidarity narrative but continue to question aid governance
5	Oppositional Reading	Rejection of official narratives or state symbols	"Wapres ngapain aja?", "Presiden bikin kecewa tiap hari"	Audiences reject institutional framing and reinterpret the disaster as a failure of the state
6	Oppositional Reading	Politicization of the disaster and collective anger	"Pemerintah serakus itu", "Negara juara bantu luar tapi rakyat sendiri tidak"	The disaster is interpreted as a symbol of political and economic injustice

The tabulation indicates that the majority of audience comments fall within the dominant reading position, in which TikTok content is interpreted as a representation of humanitarian values and solidarity that deserves appreciation. Nevertheless, the presence of negotiated and oppositional readings demonstrates that the comment space is not homogeneous, but rather functions as an arena for meaning negotiation and the expression of tensions among empathy, structural critique, and distrust toward state institutions. This pattern underscores that coverage of the Aceh Tamiang flood on TikTok not only evokes emotional responses, but also triggers ideological debates concerning state responsibility, the role of volunteers, and the relationship between citizens and power.

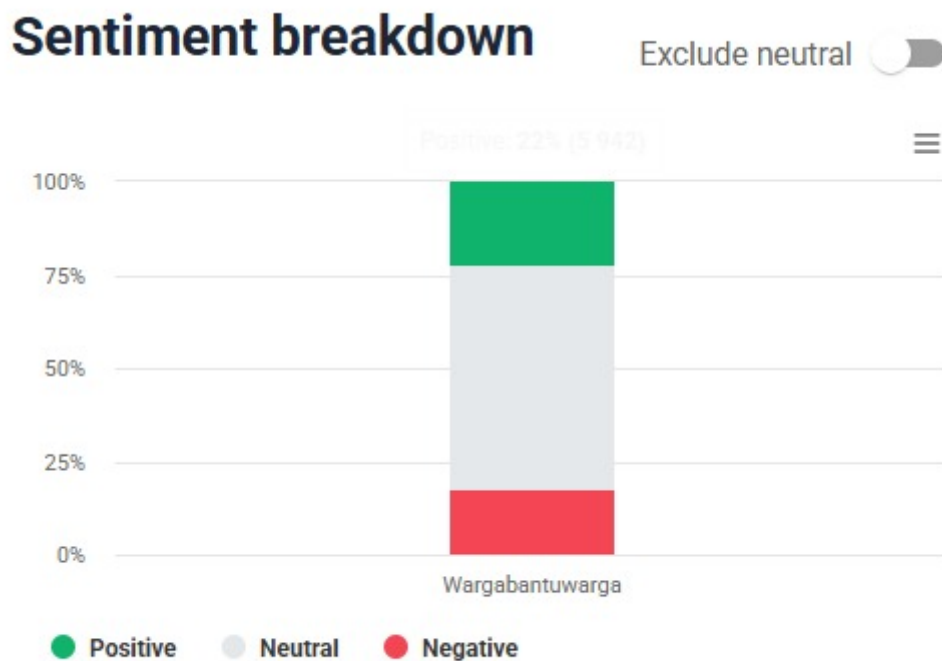


Figure 7. Sentiment Toward Aceh Tamiang Flood Content on TikTok (2025)

The sentiment visualization indicates that public conversations themed around warga bantu warga within the context of the Aceh Tamiang flood are dominated by neutral and positive sentiments, with a relatively significant proportion of positive sentiment compared to negative sentiment. The dominance of neutral sentiment suggests that most

conversations function as channels for information sharing, documentation of aid activities, and the dissemination of on-the-ground updates, while positive sentiment reflects expressions of empathy, appreciation for volunteers, and moral support from audiences. The presence of negative sentiment, although smaller in proportion, signals the existence of criticism and disappointment, particularly directed toward institutions or the governance of disaster management. This pattern underscores that warga bantu warga narratives on TikTok do not merely evoke sympathetic emotions, but also serve as a space for articulating diverse public attitudes in responding to the reality of the disaster.

Construction of Disaster Reality in Social Media

The construction of disaster reality on TikTok does not occur in a neutral manner, but through social processes involving content production, algorithmic distribution, and audience interaction. The Aceh Tamiang flood, which initially constituted a physical and localized event, undergoes a transformation of meaning when represented through short-form videos, dramatic visuals, and emotional narratives. Through this process, the disaster is no longer present solely as a natural occurrence, but as a symbolic reality that is consumed, interpreted, and collectively negotiated within the digital sphere. (Gora et al., 2022).

From the perspective of Peter L. Berger (2023), social reality is formed through a dialectical process encompassing externalization, objectivation, and internalization. The stage of externalization is evident in the production of disaster-related content by media organizations, citizen journalists, and TikTok creators who express particular experiences, viewpoints, and interests in recording and presenting the flood event. Visuals of submerged houses, victims' expressions, and volunteer activities constitute forms of subjective expression released into the digital public sphere as representations of reality (Noorikhshan et al., 2023).

The stage of objectivation occurs when these disaster representations are repeatedly circulated, widely disseminated, and gain legitimacy through platform algorithms and audience interactions. Viral content related to the Aceh Tamiang flood establishes dominant narrative patterns centered on suffering, solidarity, and crisis, making the disaster reality appear objective and taken for granted. At this stage, what frequently appears on TikTok timelines is perceived as a general depiction of disaster conditions, despite the fact that this reality results from the selection and emphasis of certain aspects of a complex event.

The process of internalization takes place when audiences absorb and interpret these disaster representations as legitimate realities. This is reflected in audience comments expressing empathy, motivations to provide assistance, and criticism directed at the state and institutions. Through symbolic interaction in the comment sections, audiences do not merely consume content but also internalize the meaning of the disaster in accordance with their own knowledge frameworks, experiences, and ideological positions. Consequently, the reality of the Aceh Tamiang flood is formed through the convergence of media representations and audience reception.

The construction of disaster reality on TikTok demonstrates that social media plays an active role in shaping how the public understands disasters, rather than merely transmitting information. In line with Berger's framework, disaster reality in the digital sphere constitutes a social reality continuously produced through ongoing social

processes. Within this context, TikTok functions as a primary arena in which disasters are constructed, legitimized, and contested, such that public understanding of the Aceh Tamiang flood is profoundly influenced by social media logic, visual aesthetics, and the dynamics of collective emotion.

Floods as Clickbait within the Logic of the Network Society

The Aceh Tamiang flood within the TikTok social media ecosystem does not appear merely as a disaster event, but also functions as an attention commodity produced and circulated within the logic of digital networks. In this context, the disaster is transformed into clickbait, namely content designed to rapidly attract attention, emotion, and audience interaction. Provocative titles, dramatic visuals, emotional music, and the use of popular hashtags indicate that flood representations are tailored to the demands of visibility within a highly competitive flow of information (Özbaş Anbarlı, 2021).

From the perspective of the Network Society as articulated by Manuel Castells, power in networked societies operates through control over information flows and attention. Social media platforms such as TikTok function as key nodes that connect content producers, audiences, and algorithms within a dynamic network system. Within this system, content capable of generating high emotional engagement has a greater likelihood of being widely distributed. Floods, with their strong visual and emotional appeal, become highly compatible material within this logic.

Clickbait practices in flood coverage do not always take the form of information manipulation, but more often appear through the selective emphasis of certain aspects of disaster reality. Visuals of suffering, humanitarian narratives, and symbols of solidarity are prioritized because they are effective in eliciting empathy and affective responses from audiences. This pattern demonstrates that disasters are produced as narratives deemed “worthy of going viral,” while structural aspects such as mitigation policies, environmental governance, and institutional responsibility tend to be marginalized (Muhammad Alan Juhri & Hidayah Hariani, 2023).

Within networked society, audiences no longer occupy a passive role, but actively become part of the amplification mechanism. Interactions in the form of likes, comments, and shares strengthen the position of disaster content within algorithmic distribution networks. Accordingly, clickbait is not solely a strategy employed by content producers, but the outcome of collaboration between audience preferences and platform logic. The Aceh Tamiang flood thus becomes a point of convergence between humanitarian concern and the attention economy operating simultaneously in digital spaces.

The phenomenon of floods as clickbait underscores that disaster reality on social media is shaped by complex network relations among media, technology, and collective emotions. Within the logic of the Network Society, the meaning of disasters is determined not merely by the extent of damage or social impact, but by the degree to which events resonate within digital communication networks. In this sense, coverage of the Aceh Tamiang flood on TikTok reflects how disasters are mediated, commodified, and negotiated in societies increasingly dependent on network-based information flows.

The novelty of this study lies in positioning the Aceh Tamiang flood not simply as a disaster event reported on or responded to through social media, but as an object of digital reality construction operating within the clickbait logic of TikTok’s algorithm-driven

ecosystem. In contrast to previous studies that predominantly emphasize social media as channels of information, citizen journalism, or early emotional responses to disasters, this study integrates analyses of visual representation, emotional amplification, audience reception, and Network Society logic to demonstrate how disasters are produced, circulated, and commodified as digital attention. The use of Brand24 as a tool for monitoring collective emotions and attention dynamics, combined with Stuart Hall's reception analysis and Peter L. Berger's social construction of reality, enriches the understanding of disasters as symbolic realities that are not neutral, but are shaped through the interplay of emotion, algorithms, and audience participation. Accordingly, this study offers a conceptual contribution to disaster communication research by shifting the analytical focus from "how the public responds to disasters" toward "how disasters are constructed and function as attention commodities within networked society."

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that coverage of the Aceh Tamiang flood on TikTok operates as a complex process of reality construction, in which the disaster is not merely represented as a natural event, but is framed through dramatic visuals, emotional narratives, and content aesthetics aligned with the attention logic of digital platforms. Sensationalism and emotional amplification play a significant role in enhancing content visibility, as reflected in the dominance of emotions such as sadness, empathy, and solidarity within public conversations and audience responses. Audience reception reveals that disaster reality is interpreted in diverse ways, ranging from full acceptance of humanitarian narratives, to negotiated meanings accompanied by structural criticism, and to oppositional readings that reject institutional framing. Within the logic of the Network Society, floods are transformed into clickbait operating within digital network flows, positioning disasters simultaneously as humanitarian issues and as attention commodities within social media ecosystems.

Based on these findings, media organizations and content creators are encouraged to develop more balanced disaster reporting practices by not only emphasizing emotional and dramatic aspects, but also by providing structural context, mitigation information, and relevant disaster education. Such an approach is expected to foster substantive empathy and enhance public literacy, preventing disasters from being reduced to mere emotional spectacles. Future research is advised to broaden the scope of analysis by comparing multiple social media platforms or examining disaster reality construction over longer timeframes, as well as by employing digital ethnography or algorithmic analysis to deepen understanding of the role of technology in shaping public attention toward disasters.

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