



Netizens' Symbolic Expressions In Digital Health Communication During Medical Conflict on YouTube

Mufti Fauzi Rahman*, Ike Junita Triwardhani, ** Dedeh Dahliah***

**Corresponding author, Faculty of Communication Sciences, Universitas Islam Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia*
Email: muftifauzirahman@unisba.ac.id

***Faculty of Communication Sciences, Universitas Islam Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia*
Email: junitatriwardhani@gmail.com

****Faculty of Social, Universitas Bhakti Kencana, Bandung, Indonesia*
Email : dedeh.dahliah@bku.ac.id

Article Info

Article history:
Received: 20th December, 2025
Accepted: 16th June, 2026
Published: 1st July, 2026

DOI:
10.33102/jicicom.vol6no1.152

ABSTRACT

Social media has reshaped health communication by transforming professional disputes into publicly negotiated digital discourses. In the context of medical professional conflict, communication is no longer confined to institutional settings but increasingly unfolds through participatory interactions among netizens on social media. While previous studies have primarily examined the ethical and regulatory dimensions of doctor influencers and medical promotion, limited attention has been given to how netizens construct symbolic responses and recurring communication patterns surrounding professional medical conflicts in digital spaces. This study examines netizens' symbolic expressions in response to conflicts among medical professionals discussed in monologue content on Deddy Corbuzier's YouTube channel, positioning netizens as key discursive actors in digital health communication. This study employs a qualitative netnographic approach. Data were collected from the comment section of a YouTube monologue video addressing conflicts among medical figures using purposive sampling. From tens of thousands of publicly available comments, 300 comments were selected and analyzed through open coding with the assistance of NVivo 12 software. The analysis is guided by Symbolic Convergence Theory, focusing on dramatizing messages to explore how symbolic expressions recur and form patterned configurations of digital health communication during conflict. The findings identify five dominant forms of symbolic expression: sarcasm, humor, satire, emotional expressions, and personal experience anecdotes. These expressions function as recurring symbolic exchanges that shape patterns of digital health communication, particularly in relation to public perceptions of professionalism, ethics, and credibility within the medical profession. Rather than claiming a fixed collective meaning, this study maps patterned symbolic communication as it emerges and circulates within digital discourse. Analytically, the study extends the application of Symbolic Convergence Theory by demonstrating

how dramatizing messages manifest as patterned symbolic expressions in digital health discourse and highlights the value of netnography for capturing emergent communication patterns and public meaning-making processes surrounding medical professional conflict on social media.

Keywords: *netnography; symbolic expression; dramatizing messages; netizen discourse; digital health communication*

INTRODUCTION

Advances in digital technology have transformed the way physicians practice and interact with the public. Speed and ease of access to information have become key advantages offered by social media (Rahman & Yulianita, 2024)(Rahman & Rachmiatie, 2025). According to DataReportal as of October 2024, YouTube ranks second globally with 2.53 billion users, following Facebook with 3.07 billion active users (Muhamad, 2024). Social media enables the public not only to access health information but also to actively participate in discourse, evaluate authority, and shape collective perceptions of health professions. This shift marks a transition in health communication from a one-way model toward a dialogical and symbolic public communication arena.

Within this context, the medical profession increasingly appears on social media, both as a source of health information and as a public figure engaged in personal branding (Pangesty & Yuningsih, 2022). On the one hand, such visibility may expand the reach of health education. On the other hand, physicians' involvement in promoting health and cosmetic products has generated public debate regarding the boundaries between medical professionalism, ethics, and commercial interests. These debates are not merely normative in nature but also reflect how society constructs expectations, moral judgments, and trust toward the medical profession in digital spaces.

However, despite the growing visibility of physician influencers and public debates surrounding medical promotion, a theoretical problem remains. Existing studies have predominantly approached these phenomena from ethical, legal, and regulatory perspectives, positioning physicians as the primary objects of evaluation. While these studies provide important insights into professional accountability and commercial practices, they offer limited understanding of how medical professional conflicts are interpreted, negotiated, and symbolically reconstructed by audiences in digital environments. Consequently, the communicative and discursive dimensions of medical conflict remain underexplored, particularly regarding how netizens participate in shaping public understandings of medical professionalism through social media interactions.

As a video-based social media platform, YouTube plays a significant role in shaping public discourse. With its massive user base, YouTube functions not only as a content distribution platform but also as a space for social interaction through comment sec-

tions. In this space, netizens actively express opinions, emotions, and personal experiences in response to issues raised in content. Popular content addressing health issues and medical professions often triggers extensive public discourse, regardless of the creator's professional authority.

This phenomenon attracted the attention of content creator Deddy Corbuzier, who addressed it in his YouTube video titled *"Oh Anda Kebal Hukum? Hayuk!!"*, released on December 20, 2024. The video garnered 6,277,726 views and generated 30,420 diverse comments. It highlights the conflict between Dr. Richard Lee, a physician known for selling skincare products, and Doktif (Doctor Detective), along with netizens' reactions to the dispute.

In this study, Deddy Corbuzier's YouTube channel is positioned not as a source of medical authority, but as a popular medium that facilitates the convergence of diverse public opinions. One monologue video on the channel discusses conflicts among medical figures related to skincare product promotion, prompting extensive netizen responses expressed through thousands of comments ranging from support and criticism to satire and personal narratives. This phenomenon illustrates how professional conflicts that were once confined to internal professional domains are now mediated by social media and openly interpreted by the public.

Previous studies consistently demonstrate that physician influencers face ethical and regulatory scrutiny when engaging in the promotion of health and cosmetic products (Amandha & Sugiyono, 2024; Novoa, 2012; Zengin, 2023). Collectively, these studies contribute important insights into advertising restrictions, consumer protection concerns, and potential conflicts of interest arising from commercial activities on social media. Nevertheless, their primary focus remains on assessing physicians' compliance with professional and legal standards, offering limited attention to how such controversies are communicatively constructed and publicly interpreted within digital spaces.

By positioning netizens as discursive actors rather than passive audiences, this study offers a conceptual contribution to digital health communication research. Drawing on Symbolic Convergence Theory and a netnographic approach, the study examines how recurring symbolic expressions form patterned configurations of digital health communication during professional conflict. In doing so, the study shifts the analytical focus from normative evaluations of medical practice toward processes of symbolic meaning-making and public discourse construction in social media environments.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze netizens' symbolic expressions in response to conflicts among medical professionals mediated through YouTube monologue content. Rather than evaluating the legitimacy of medical practices or judging professional ethics normatively, this study focuses on how netizens express, negotiate, and construct patterned forms of digital health communication through symbolic interaction in online spaces. Accordingly, the medical profession is positioned as an object of social meaning-making within public discourse rather than as a subject of professional judgment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and the Transformation of Health Communication

Social media has significantly transformed health communication practices by providing platforms that enable the wide dissemination of health information while simultaneously encouraging active public engagement. This transformation is marked by a shift from traditional expert-dominated health communication models toward more interactive, dialogical, and user-centered approaches. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X allow communication to occur in real time and reach diverse demographic groups, thereby expanding the circulation of preventive messages, health education, and crisis communication (Thapliyal et al., 2024).

Beyond extending reach, social media also encourages users to actively seek, evaluate, and interpret online health information. Salaschek & Bonfadelli (2020) demonstrate that online health information seeking is accompanied by processes of assessing information quality and credibility, positioning audiences not as passive recipients but as active actors within the health communication ecosystem. This condition reinforces the role of social media as a discursive space in which health information is not merely transmitted but socially negotiated.

A key characteristic of social media in health communication lies in its extensive reach and high levels of engagement. According to Saleem & Jan (2024), social media platforms possess large user bases that allow health messages to rapidly reach broad audiences. While official accounts tend to achieve wider reach, user-generated content and influencer-driven communication often generate higher engagement.

Social media is also utilized as a medium for health communication interventions across different regions. Fayoyin (2016) notes that in Africa, social media has been employed to address a wide range of health issues by targeting diverse population groups beyond younger generations. These findings highlight social media's function as a cross-cultural and cross-demographic communicative space in which health information, personal experiences, and public interpretations are continuously exchanged. Beyond information dissemination, such exchanges create opportunities for audiences to collectively negotiate meanings surrounding health-related issues and professional authority. This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study, which examines how netizens' symbolic expressions emerge and form recurring patterns of digital health communication during medical professional conflict.

Despite its benefits, the use of social media in health communication presents notable challenges. The potential spread of misinformation and the growing demand for credible, high-quality information necessitate strong monitoring systems and clear ethical guidelines. Fayoyin (2016) as well as Saleem & Jan (2024) emphasize that technology should be understood as a tool rather than an end in itself, and therefore must be strategically integrated into broader and more sustainable health communication efforts.

The transformation of health communication through social media also carries important implications for medical authority. Authority that was previously attached to institutions and professional expertise is now increasingly negotiated through public opinion and personal experiences shared online. Social media thus functions as a social arena in which meanings about health and the medical profession are collectively constructed not only through scientific knowledge, but also through narratives, emotions, and symbols exchanged among users. In this context, analyzing public responses and expressions becomes essential for understanding the dynamics of health communication in the digital era.

Physician Influencers, Ethics and Public Discourse

The intersection of physicians' roles as influencers, ethical concerns, and public discourse introduces new dynamics into health communication in the digital era. As physicians become increasingly active on social media, they enter communication spaces that are not solely educational but are also shaped by public expectations, economic interests, and the logic of popularity. This situation places physicians within a complex communicative landscape, where their influence may enhance public health literacy Py (2023) while simultaneously increasing the risk of misunderstanding and controversy.

Regulatory changes and communication policies also influence this role transformation. observes that legal developments in certain contexts have enabled physicians to communicate more openly with the public through digital media, thereby blurring the boundaries between professional communication and advertising practices.

In this context, physicians are no longer perceived merely as providers of medical information, but also as public figures who cultivate personal image, influence, and audiences similar to social media influencers. Hartono (2025) adds that adopting influencer roles may expand the reach of health education, yet it also opens opportunities for the dissemination of information that is not fully evidence-based if not carefully managed.

Ethical issues remain central to the phenomenon of physician influencers. Trust and integrity are foundational to the physician–patient relationship, and a shift toward promotional or advertising practices may affect public perceptions. Nagral (2024) indicates that physicians' involvement in product promotion can generate perceptions of conflicts of interest, ultimately impacting patient trust. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of social media often outpaces existing regulatory frameworks and ethical guidelines, creating the need for policy updates to ensure responsible health communication (Hartono, 2025).

From the public's perspective, physician influencers present a dual dynamic. On one hand, social media promotion and communication can increase public access to health information. On the other hand, concerns arise regarding the accuracy, credibility, and

reliability of disseminated content, particularly when information is presented in persuasive and popular formats (Nagral, 2024). These concerns become more pronounced when exposed audiences include vulnerable groups who may make health decisions based on message appeal rather than adequate scientific consideration.

Nevertheless, much of the existing literature continues to focus on normative and regulatory aspects, such as physicians' compliance with ethical codes and the legal implications of medical promotion on social media. This approach tends to position physicians as the primary actors under evaluation, while public responses, interpretations, and meaning-making processes receive relatively limited attention. Yet within the social media ecosystem, public perception plays a central role in shaping the legitimacy, image, and social authority of the medical profession.

Public discourse surrounding physician influencers is shaped not only by professional statements, health institutions, or formal regulations, but also by netizen conversations occurring in social media comment spaces. This discourse is dynamic, emotionally charged, and symbolically rich, requiring communication-based approaches to understand how social meanings about the medical profession are produced, negotiated, and reproduced. By positioning netizens as discursive actors, communication studies can capture the symbolic and cultural dimensions that complement ethical and regulatory approaches in understanding the phenomenon of physician influencers in the digital era.

Netnography and the Study of Netizen Discourse

Netnography provides an interpretive framework for understanding culture and social interaction within online communities (Kozinets et al., 2020). In social media environments, comment sections constitute meaningful communication data because they contain texts, emotions, personal narratives, and symbolic expressions through which users publicly respond to and interpret social issues. Rather than functioning merely as reactions to content, online comments represent communicative practices in which meanings are continuously produced, negotiated, and circulated among participants.

Previous studies indicate that netizen comments are embedded within broader processes of social construction rather than being isolated individual responses (Bungin, 2023; Eriyanto, 2021). Through repeated interactions, comments develop narrative regularities and shared orientations toward particular issues. As noted by Maryani et al. (2024), communication patterns emerge through repeated interactions among actors within a community. This perspective suggests that digital discourse is fundamentally symbolic and relational, as users continually exchange interpretations, emotions, and experiences that contribute to patterned forms of communication.

From an epistemological perspective, netnography is particularly suitable for examining these dynamics because it enables researchers to interpret meanings as they emerge through naturally occurring digital interactions. Within communication research, netnography facilitates the analysis of how audiences collectively construct

symbolic understandings surrounding controversial issues mediated by popular content. Accordingly, the analysis of netizen comments provides an appropriate analytical entry point for identifying recurring symbolic expressions and patterns of digital health communication in contexts of medical professional conflict.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a netnographic approach to analyze netizens' opinions expressed in the comment section of Deddy Corbuzier's YouTube monologue content. Netnography, as conceptualized by Kozinets et al. (2020), involves the collection and analysis of various forms of online traces, including images, photographs, visual symbols, videos, text, emojis, and engagement metrics, in order to construct structures of cultural meaning and to understand conversations occurring on social media platforms.

Data were collected from the comment section of the YouTube video titled "*Oh Anda Kebal Hukum? Hayuk!!*" on Deddy Corbuzier's official channel. From a total of 30,420 publicly available comments, the researchers selected comments using purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) relevance to the conflict between Dr. Richard Lee and Doktif (Doctor Detective); (2) the presence of verbal expressions containing symbolic meaning; and (3) exclusion of spam, commercial links, or emojis without contextual meaning. Following this selection process, 300 comments were retained for further analysis. The YouTube channel was positioned as an arena of public discourse that facilitates social interaction, rather than as a source of medical authority or health reference. The primary unit of analysis was netizen comments, with netizens understood as discursive actors who actively express, negotiate, and construct meaning through symbolic interaction in digital spaces.

Data analysis was conducted through open coding procedures using NVivo 12 software. All comments were read repeatedly to identify meaningful units related to *dramatizing messages*. The coding process was then refined by grouping sub-nodes into five patterns of expression: sarcasm, humor, satire, personal experience, and emotion. This process was audited through cross-cycle coding checks to ensure consistency in categorization.

All quotations were labeled using the format NC(number/platform), where NC refers to netizen comments, the number indicates the comment's sequential order in the dataset, and the platform (YouTube) identifies the data source. For example, NC219/YouTube refers to the 219th comment collected from YouTube. This coding system was applied to maintain data traceability while protecting anonymity and adhering to research ethics.

Table 1 presents the coding framework used in this study, including the main topic category, subtopics, operational definitions, and representative examples of netizen comments. The table serves as an analytical guide for organizing and interpreting symbolic expressions identified in the dataset.

Table 1: Categories, Subtopics, Definitions, and Example Comments on Deddy Corbuzier's YouTube Channel

Main Topic Category	Main Subtopics	Definition	Example Comments
Dramatizing Messages	Patient anecdotes, sarcasm toward physicians, humor, emotions	Dramatic or emotional expressions in netizens' comments that trigger collective resonance.	"Once admired, now disgusted," "The doctors are debating for Ad-Sense."

The analytical framework of this study is grounded in Symbolic Convergence Theory developed by Ernest Bormann (1985), which explains how group cohesion and shared meaning are formed through the exchange of dramatized symbolic messages. Bormann (1985) defines *dramatizing messages* as messages containing dramatic elements—such as emotions, satire, humor, or personal stories—that are capable of triggering collective resonance and fostering shared meanings. In this study, dramatizing messages were identified through an iterative coding process that focused on comments containing expressive, evaluative, or narrative elements capable of evoking symbolic resonance. During open coding, comments were examined for indications of sarcasm, humor, satire, emotional expressions, and personal experience anecdotes, in accordance with Bormann's characterization of dramatized symbolic messages. Expressions that conveyed criticism, affective reactions, or personal narratives beyond factual statements were subsequently categorized as dramatizing messages and grouped into recurring patterns of symbolic expression.

This category is therefore central to understanding how netizens construct perceptions, reinforce opinions, and shape the dynamics of inter-professional medical conflict in digital spaces. In this study, netizen comments are not treated as isolated individual reactions, but as components of a symbolic system that forms social narratives within digital discourse on medical professional conflict. As noted by Morissan (2024) and Suryadi (2010), Symbolic Convergence Theory is based on the premise that group cohesion emerges through the exchange of shared fantasies. Accordingly, *dramatizing messages* are operationalized as forms of netizens' symbolic expression appearing in YouTube comments.



Figure 1: YouTube content by Deddy Corbuzier addressing skincare promotion and the conflict between Dr. Richard Lee and Doktif

This study adheres to ethical principles of qualitative research in digital environments. All analyzed data were drawn from publicly accessible comments without direct interaction with users. Netizens' identities were not disclosed, and quoted comments were presented anonymously to protect individual privacy. Furthermore, this study does not aim to judge or evaluate medical professional practices or the actors involved in the content, but rather to understand netizens' symbolic expressions as forms of social meaning-making within media-mediated discourse.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Netizens' Symbolic Expressions toward Inter-Professional Medical Conflict on YouTube

Netizen comments in the YouTube comment section of Deddy Corbuzier's channel reveal diverse forms of symbolic expression in responding to discourse on inter-professional medical conflict mediated by social media. Based on open coding results using a netnographic approach and the framework of Symbolic Convergence Theory, these expressions can be understood as *dramatizing messages* that form patterns of collective symbolic exchange. Data analysis identifies five dominant patterns of symbolic expression: sarcasm, humor, satire, personal experience anecdotes, and emotional outbursts.

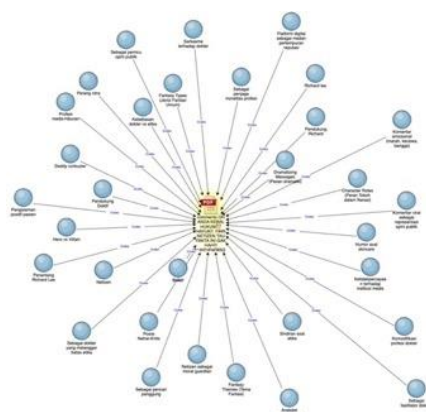


Figure 2: Relationships among Codes of Dramatizing Messages in NVivo 12

The relationships among comments and coding categories indicate that netizens' expressions do not stand alone but instead form a network of meanings that resonate with one another. NVivo visualizations show that professional medical conflict, YouTube content, and netizen comments influence each other in a circular manner. Through this interactional process, symbolic expression patterns are continuously reproduced, reinforcing public discourse concerning the medical profession in digital spaces. These interactions ultimately crystallize into the five dominant expression patterns identified in this study.

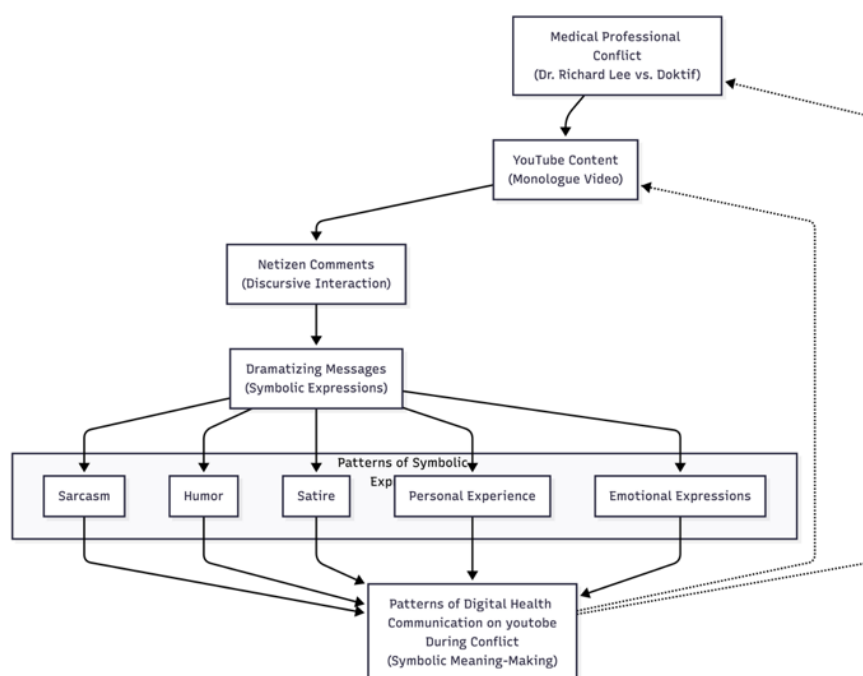


Figure 3: Patterns of Netizen Comment Expressions in the Conflict between Dr. Richard Lee and Doktif

This figure illustrates the dynamic interaction flow within the netnographic site of Deddy Corbuzier's YouTube channel in the context of inter-professional medical conflict. The diagram demonstrates the reciprocal and cyclical relationship among three core elements: medical professional conflict, YouTube monologue content, and netizen comments as forms of discursive interaction. Conflict is mediated through YouTube content and subsequently negotiated through audience responses, indicating how digital platforms function as arenas where professional issues are publicly discussed and contested.

Through netizen comments, symbolic expressions emerge in the form of dramatizing messages, which appear as recurring patterns of symbolic expression, including sarcasm, humor, satire, personal experience, and emotional expressions. These patterns do not represent isolated reactions but reflect regularities in public responses to medical conflict in digital spaces. Their convergence forms patterns of digital health communication during conflict, which continuously shape and reinforce public discourse on medical professionalism. This model does not claim a fixed collective meaning, but maps recurring patterns of symbolic communication as they emerge and circulate within digital health discourse.

Sarcasm as Symbolic Critique

The first and most prominent pattern is sarcasm. Sarcasm appears in comments expressing disappointment and irony toward the image of the medical profession on social media, such as:

"Doctors nowadays are just about business, not a call of duty (NC6/YouTube)."

Other comments include:

"Are there any tips for finding a sincere doctor? (NC17/YouTube)"

"I'm a pharmacist and I'm sad to see some doctors acting superior (NC49/YouTube)."

"This is sarcasm too—some future doctors just want to be rich, not help people (NC91/YouTube)."

These statements go beyond humor and reflect social irony, as netizens perceive a shift in the social function of the medical profession—from ethical professional service toward personal branding and product marketing. Sarcasm thus operates as a form of *dramatizing message* that triggers collective resonance among other netizens.

Humor as a Negotiated Form of Criticism

The second pattern is humor, often conveyed through light-hearted narratives related to skincare usage. Humor enables netizens to express criticism without direct confrontation, for example through narratives contrasting simple skincare routines with physician-promoted products:

"I never use skincare because I'm afraid it'll damage my skin, so I just use baby powder and "Viva" moisturizer (emoticon smile) (NC82/YouTube)."

Such humorous messages demonstrate how criticism is socially negotiated in more acceptable forms within digital spaces. Humor functions symbolically to build social solidarity while implicitly conveying evaluative judgments.

Satire toward Publicized Professional Conflict

The third pattern is satire directed at the public display of conflict between doctors on social media. Netizens criticize conflict resolution methods that are perceived as inconsistent with public expectations of scientific and ethical medical professionalism. For instance:

"I'm just an ordinary person, but I feel these two doctors are attacking each other and validating each other's mistakes (NC33/YouTube)."

"A real doctor wouldn't shout like Doktif and DRL... promoting them only makes them richer, they're both selling products anyway, so why fight in front of all Indonesia? (NC31/YouTube)"

These satirical comments reflect tensions between expected professional norms and communication practices performed in public digital spaces. Satire here illustrates that netizens are not merely evaluating individuals, but also interpreting how professional conflict should be appropriately managed.

Emotional Expressions and Affective Engagement

The fourth pattern involves emotional outbursts, including negative emotions such as sadness and disappointment, as well as positive emotions such as pride and appreciation. Some comments express sorrow over phenomena perceived as undermining the humanitarian values of medicine:

"My tears fell hearing this... thank you to all doctors who truly fight for poor patients (NC26/YouTube)."

Others express disappointment:

"That's right, Om Ded... I feel sorry for doctors who truly uphold their oath (sad emoticon) (NC85/YouTube)."

Conversely, many comments express pride and appreciation based on personal experiences with sincere physicians:

"Thank you Dr. Tutit Lazuardi in Tulungagung, East Java. She is truly a very kind person (love emoticon) (NC6/YouTube)."

"Dr. Surya Angkasa in Bandung is one of the most sincere doctors (proud emoticon) (NC24/YouTube)."

"In Jayapura, Papua, there's Dr. FX Soedanto, known as the 'one-thousand-rupiah doctor.' Long life to our doctor (NC9/YouTube)."

"In East Kalimantan, in my husband's hometown, there was a doctor who charged only five thousand rupiah. I was shocked when I moved there in 2010. This is a real doctor (NC20/YouTube)."

These emotional expressions demonstrate that netizen discourse is not homogeneous but reflects a wide spectrum of experiences and perceptions. Emotion functions as a dramatized message that strengthens symbolic attachment within digital communities.

Personal Experience Anecdotes as Moral Narratives

The fifth pattern consists of personal experience anecdotes. These narratives refer to netizens' direct interactions with physicians, either as patients or as members of surrounding communities, and serve as moral and symbolic references within public discourse:

"Stay healthy, Dr. Yosi Hidayati, who helped treat my husband. After more than a year of treatment, thank God my husband can work again (three emoticon love) (NC37/YouTube)."

Personal experience comments are often used to reinforce arguments or evaluations expressed by netizens. Stories about low-cost medical services, sincere doctors in certain regions, or consultations perceived as product-oriented function not as objective data, but as symbolic narratives representing public values, hopes, and disappointments regarding the medical profession.

These findings confirm that netizen comments constitute a coherent symbolic system rather than isolated or random reactions. Through the exchange of dramatized messages, netizens construct symbolic convergence that shapes collective meanings concerning professionalism, ethics, and the credibility of the medical profession. In this context, the YouTube comment section functions as a cultural arena where social values are negotiated and reproduced through repeated symbolic interaction.

It is important to emphasize that these findings are not intended as normative judgments of medical professional practices. Rather, they represent an interpretation of how the public makes sense of professional conflict discourse mediated by social media. By positioning netizens as primary actors in meaning-making processes, this study illustrates how digital culture shapes and circulates collective perceptions of the medical profession in the era of digital communication

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study demonstrates that conflicts among medical professionals mediated by YouTube content are not merely understood as individual events or technical professional issues, but are collectively interpreted through netizens' symbolic expressions in digital spaces. Through a netnographic approach and the framework of Symbolic Convergence Theory, the findings reveal that netizen comments form consistent and recurring patterns of symbolic exchange, reflecting how the public negotiates meanings of professionalism, ethics, and the credibility of the medical profession in the social media era.

The five dominant patterns of symbolic expression—sarcasm, humor, satire, emotional expressions, and personal experience anecdotes—indicate that netizens do not simply react spontaneously, but are engaged in broader processes of social meaning-making. Sarcasm and satire function as symbolic critiques of practices perceived as deviating from professional values, while humor serves as a social mechanism for conveying criticism in more socially acceptable ways. Emotional expressions, both positive and negative, highlight the public's affective engagement in health discourse, whereas personal experience anecdotes operate as symbolic narratives that provide moral legitimacy to the judgments expressed.

These findings affirm that YouTube comment sections function as cultural arenas where netizens construct symbolic convergence through the exchange of dramatized messages. Within this arena, individual experiences are transformed into collective meanings that frame public perceptions of the medical profession. This process illustrates that medical authority in the digital era is shaped not only by institutions and professional expertise, but also negotiated through public discourse rich in symbols, emotions, and personal narratives.

It is important to emphasize that this study does not aim to normatively evaluate or judge medical professional practices. Instead, the analysis focuses on netizens' meaning-making processes as discursive actors within digital culture. By positioning professional conflict as a discursive context, this study contributes to understanding how the public produces and reproduces social meanings through symbolic interaction on social media. Theoretically, this study extends Symbolic Convergence Theory by demonstrating that symbolic convergence can emerge through asynchronous and text-based interactions in digital environments. The findings suggest that dramatizing messages do not merely generate shared meanings but also give rise to recurring patterns of symbolic communication that shape public understandings of professionalism and medical authority. In the context of social media, symbolic convergence is therefore manifested not only through the sharing of fantasies within face-to-face groups but also through the circulation and resonance of symbolic expressions among dispersed

digital participants. This perspective broadens the applicability of Symbolic Convergence Theory to contemporary digital health communication and highlights its relevance for examining public discourse in networked communication environments.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Universitas Islam Bandung, and the Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Bhakti Kencana, for their academic support throughout this research. The authors also thank all colleagues who provided valuable feedback during the development of this manuscript.

AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

Mufti Fauzi Rahman conceived the study, collected and analyzed the data, developed the methodology, prepared the visualizations, and drafted the manuscript.

Ike Junita Triwardhani supervised the research process, contributed to the theoretical framework and methodological refinement, and critically reviewed the manuscript.

Dedeh Dahliah contributed to the literature review, validated the findings, assisted in manuscript revision, and reviewed the final version. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of digital research. The data were obtained exclusively from publicly accessible comments on YouTube without any direct interaction or intervention involving users. User identities were anonymized during data collection and analysis to protect privacy and confidentiality. As the study relied solely on publicly available online data and did not involve human participants through interviews, surveys, or experiments, formal ethical approval was not required under the institutional research guidelines applicable to the authors.

REFERENCES

- Amanda. (2020). Komunikasi Antarpribadi dengan ODAPUS (Orang Dengan Penyakit Lupus). *Journal of Advertising*, 1(1), 117–124.
- Bungin, B. (2023). *Netnography: Social Media Research Procedure, Big Data & Cyber-community* (1st ed.). Kencana.
- Eriyanto. (2021). *Metode Netnografi: Pendekatan kualitatif dalam Memahami Budaya Pengguna Sosial* (N. Asri, Ed.; 1st ed.). Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Fayoyin, A. (2016). Engaging Social Media for Health Communication in Africa: Approaches, Results and Lessons. *Journal of Mass Communication & Journalism*, 6(6). <https://doi.org/10.4172/2165-7912.1000315>
- Hartono, P. (2025). Medical doctor on social media: Skill knowledge and ethical issue. *Surabaya Medical Journal*, 3(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.59747/smjidisurabaya.v3i1.102>
- Kozinets, R. V., Maddox, A., O'Leary, K., Robert V. Kozinets, Rossella Gambetti, U. G., Maribel Suarez, and C. R., Eriksson, M. S.-E. and H., Donna L. Schuman, Donald L. Schuman, Natalie Pope, and A. J., Villegas, D., Toledano, M., Mura, R. T. and P., Casper, M. B. and C., Royo, J. C.-R. and R. C., Anna Marchuk, Stefan Biel, Volker Bilgram, A., Jensen, S. W. L., Rossella Gambetti, Robert V. Kozinets, U. G., Accardo, P., Bovera, L., Howard, L., Ashman, ... Gambetti, R. (2020). Netnography Unlimited. In R. V. Kozinets & R. Gambetti (Eds.), *Netnography Unlimited*. Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003001430>
- Maryani, A., Triwardhani, I. J., & Yulianti, Y. (2024). Investigating Interpersonal Dynamics among Researchers and Innovators: An Ethnographic Study of Communication's Role in Fostering Innovation. *KnE Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v9i24.16833>
- Morissan. (2024). *Teori Komunikasi Individu Hingga Massa* (6th ed., revised). Prenada Media Group.
- Muhamad, N. (2024). Daftar Media Sosial dengan Pengguna Terbanyak 2024, Facebook Teratas. *Databoks Katadata*. <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/teknologi-telekomunikasi/statistik/673c45767b8da/daftar-media-sosial-dengan-pengguna-terbanyak-2024-facebook-teratas>
- Nagral, S. (2024). Should Doctors Advertise? An Old Debate in a New Context. *Journal of Medical Evidence*, 5(2), 152–155. https://doi.org/10.4103/jme.jme_90_24
- Novoa, F. (2012). Cosmetic medicine and medical practice: what is the physician's obligation? *Medwave*, 12(06), e5435–e5435. <https://doi.org/10.5867/med-wave.2012.06.5435>
- Pangesty, W. P., & Yuningsih, A. (2022). Impression Management Dokter di RSUD Kab Tangerang. *Bandung Conference Series: Public Relations*, 2(1), 496–503. <https://doi.org/10.29313/bcspr.v2i1.1895>
- Py, B. (2023). Les médecins, la communication et l'influence en santé après la loi du 9 juin 2023. *Médecine & Droit*, 142(40), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.med-dro.2023.08.001>

- Rahman, M. F., & Rachmatie, A. (2025). Meaning-Making of Paid Da'wah Among Indonesian Social Media Netizens. *Al-i'lam - Journal of Contemporary Islamic Communication and Media*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.33102/jcicom.vol5no2.136>
- Rahman, M. F., & Yulianita, N. (2024). Gaya komunikasi kesehatan apoteker di media sosial: Analisis semiotika Roland Barthes pada akun Instagram @apoteker_rahmato. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi Indonesia*, 4(3), 135–148. <https://doi.org/10.53866/jimi.v4i3.594>
- Salaschek, M., & Bonfadelli, H. (2020). Digital health communication and factors of influence. *Bundesgesundheitsblatt - Gesundheitsforschung - Gesundheitsschutz*, 63(2), 160–165. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00103-019-03086-7>
- Saleem, S. M., & Jan, S. S. (2024). A Mix-method Study Leveraging Social Media for Health Behavior Change: From Tweets to Transformation. *Journal of Nature and Science of Medicine*, 8(1), 41–48. https://doi.org/10.4103/jnsm.jnsm_68_24
- Suryadi, I. (2010). Teori Konvergensi Simbolik. *Jurnal Academica Fisip Untad*, 2(2), 426–437.
- Zengin, G. (2023). How Influencer Doctors Use Social Media? A Content Analysis on Marketing Communications, Patient Privacy and Ethics. *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 50, 273–286. <https://doi.org/10.52642/susbed.1227295>