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ANTAGONISM ON ROHINGYA IN YOUTUBE COMMENTS: VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF INDONESIA-MALAYSIA NETIZEN

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Abstract

This study explores antagonism in YouTube comments responding to news coverage of protests against Rohingya refugees in Indonesia and Malaysia. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the research combines sentiment analysis, qualitative content analysis, and topic modeling to examine 7428 comments from 7012 user accounts collected between November and December 2023. Using sentiment and Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), this paper identifies dominant themes across comment sections of major media channels. The analysis reveals that commenters predominantly express out-group perspectives through repetitive, capitalized, and derogatory language, often forming bullying or dehumanizing voices. Performative hostility, marked by superlatives and emotive exaggeration, reinforces collective rejection and group identity. The discourse positioned Rohingya refugees as threats for the people in Indonesia and Malaysia, reflecting broader patterns of digital othering and exclusion. Notably, netizens focus more on critiquing refugee presence than evaluating government policy. This study underscores how digital platforms facilitate antagonistic discourse that marginalizes vulnerable groups. These insights underscore the urgent need for digital literacy initiatives and policy interventions to counteract online hostility and promote inclusive public discourse.

Keywords*: Antagonism; YouTube Comments; Rohingya Refugees; Sentiment Analysis; Qualitative Content Analysis*

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Southeast Asia has witnessed significant refugee crises, with the plight of the Rohingya people being one of the most prominent. The Rohingya, an ethnic minority group from Myanmar, have faced systematic persecution and violence, leading many to flee their homeland. Indonesia and Malaysia, as predominantly Muslim countries with a history of Islamic activism, were initially perceived as potential safe havens for these refugees (Faisal, 2020; Khairi et al., 2024; Missbach & Stange, 2021; Smith & Williams, 2021). Both countries have historically supported other Muslim refugee groups, such as those from Palestine (Albanese, 2020; Sultoni & Efendi, 2020), Syria (Haron et al., 2023; Syahrin et al., 2024), and Afghanistan (Adhaniah et al., 2021; Zarkesh et al., 2017). However, the response to the Rohingya crisis in 2023 has been markedly different.

Despite the initial sympathy, a growing wave of anti-Rohingya sentiment has emerged in both Indonesia and Malaysia. This shift in public sentiment is largely driven by online platforms, where negative discourse about the Rohingya refugees has gained significant traction. Alternative News Media, Narasi TV, discovers the actor-network of Anti-refugees activism on TikTok related to the Rohingya refugees (Narasi TV, 2024). It is not just a TikTok bubble, platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and YouTube also came as the arena of discursive conflict. Anti-Rohingya activism has manifested and highlighted the hostile attitudes towards the refugees. Comment sections on popular news channels such as Malaysia's TV3 and TV9, and Indonesia's Kompas Com and Metro TV, have become arenas for expressing and amplifying negative views against the Rohingya community.

The antagonistic responses to the Rohingya crisis in Indonesia and Malaysia are not isolated, but instead reflect broader global patterns of anti-immigrant sentiment. Similar patterns of hostility have been observed in various parts of the world, where immigrant groups are often subjected to exclusionary and xenophobic attitudes (De Rosa et al., 2020; Ergin et al., 2021; Selvarajah et al., 2024; Soral et al., 2020). In Europe, for instance, the rise of anti-refugee political movements has been accompanied by a surge in anti-immigrant rhetoric, particularly targeting refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa (Culloty & Suiter, 2021; Ekman, 2022). In these contexts, anti-immigrant activism has evolved to incorporate a range of rhetorical strategies that resonate with broader audiences, often masking xenophobic attitudes under the guise of protecting national security, economic stability, or cultural identity. These researchers highlight how radicalized beliefs around immigration, once confined to the fringes of society, have now infiltrated mainstream discussions. This phenomenon, described by Mudde (in Vieten & Poynting, 2022) as "pathological normalcy," reflects a broader shift in public attitudes towards immigration, where exclusionary and xenophobic views are becoming more accepted.

On social media platforms, this normalization is further exacerbated by the constant stream of negatively framed news about immigrants and refugees. Studies by Boswell et al. (2021) and Flores (2020) have shown that such narratives are not only pervasive but also persistent, creating a "perpetual" cycle of negative coverage that reinforces public fears and prejudices. This type of coverage often focuses on the perceived "negative characteristics or consequences" of immigrants, such as their alleged threat to national security, economic stability, or social cohesion. As a result, immigrants are frequently subjected to a process of "othering", where they are portrayed as fundamentally different and separate from the host society. The strategic diversification of anti-immigrant rhetoric has also played a crucial role in this process. In recent years, anti-immigrant activists have increasingly refined their discourse to appeal to a broader audience. In France, for example, the extreme activist has strategically removed overt markers of extremism in refugee issues, such as biological racism and antisemitism, from its rhetoric, instead adopting republican vocabulary centered around "social justice," "freedom," and "rights" (Brunner, 2022). These rhetorical shifts reflect a broader trend in the thematic diversification of anti-immigrant discourse, where traditional xenophobic arguments are increasingly replaced with more sophisticated and

seemingly legitimate concerns. This evolution in rhetoric presents added challenges for those seeking to counteract anti-immigrant sentiment, as the language used by anti-refugee activists is designed to resonate with broader segments of the population, making it more difficult to identify and challenge underlying prejudices.

Antagonism, as observed in the context of media discourse, plays a significant role in shaping public opinion on sensitive issues such as refugees and immigration. Social media platforms enable the formation of large online publics that often harbor explicit anti-democratic values (Štětka & Mihelj, 2024). These spaces can evolve into "anti-publics" (Cammaerts, 2009), where the right to freedom of speech is leveraged to incite hatred, fostering a closed community with an antagonistic agenda towards democratic principles (Daniels, 2018). This antagonism is marked by a conflict over differences in opinion, where those who align with the dominant discourse are perceived as friends, and those who dissent are cast as enemies. This dynamic not only stifles meaningful debate but also undermines any notion of democratic communication (Rosa, 2022), reinforcing the polarization observed in the discourse surrounding the Rohingya refugee crisis in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Digital platforms have played a pivotal role in amplifying these diversified rhetorical strategies. The "connectivity paradigm" of Web 2.0, characterized by user-generated content, has transformed how public discourse is shaped and how social movements are mobilized (Earl & Garrett, 2020; Foxe, 2020; Pearce & Rodgers, 2020; Sanseverino, 2023). The platforms not only foster a sense of community among users but also provide validation and legitimacy to social groups' preferences, thereby facilitating the mobilization of anti-refugee issues and activism. In this context, digital platforms act as "important organizational agents" that help structure and program social movements around key issues such as immigration and crime, ultimately legitimizing the political space where the radical activist can thrive (Marcks & Pawelz, 2022).

Comment sections on news websites and social media platforms have become particularly significant in this regard. These spaces serve as participatory arenas where ordinary users can express their views, engage in debates, and challenge mainstream narratives. As noted by Humprecht et al. (2020) Kolhatkar et al. (2020), Naab et al. (2020) and Salminen et al. (2020), comment sections are among the most popular features of digital news platforms, allowing users to interact with content and with each other. The rise of "emergent counter-public collectives" within these spaces, as described by who highlights the potential of online forums to reveal divergent views and to challenge the dominance of traditional media narratives.

Research on counter-public spaces found, users often adopt the argumentative structures of dominant frames circulating in the political space, co-opting liberal and well-established values to make their rhetoric more palatable and effective (Hart, n.d.; Minkenberg & Végh, 2023; Morgül, 2024). This strategy is evident in the way anti-refugee activists frame their opposition to immigration in terms of protecting national values, security, and social cohesion, rather than through overtly xenophobic language (Jordan, 2021). The adoption of such subdued arguments allows these movements to target larger audiences and to gain broader acceptance within the public sphere.

These trends, the normalization of anti-immigrant sentiment, the strategic diversification of rhetoric, and the role of digital platforms in amplifying anti-refugee discourse reflects a broader shift in how immigration is discussed and contested in the public sphere. This shift poses significant challenges for policymakers, activists, and scholars seeking to promote more inclusive and equitable societies. As anti-immigrant sentiments continue to gain traction, there is an urgent need to better understand the dynamics of online activism, the role of digital platforms, and the broader socio-political context in which these movements operate.

This research analyzes over 7.428 comments from these platforms reveals a pervasive use of uncivil language, reflecting a broader trend of online bullying and hostility, collected over a November-December 2023. Commenters frequently employ impoliteness strategies, explicit attitude markers, and aggressive rhetoric to express their discontent with the presence of Rohingya refugees. This online behavior is not isolated but rather part of a broader phenomenon of digital activism that targets vulnerable immigrant communities. The anti-Rohingya sentiment in these comment sections exemplifies how digital platforms can be used to mobilize and legitimize the discourse of anti refugees, even in countries with strong traditions of Islamic solidarity.

In Indonesia and Malaysia, the anti-immigrant activism related to the Rohingya crisis can be picturized as part of this global trend. Activists in these countries have adopted various demagogic tactics, such as exploiting public resentments and portraying traditional elites as corrupt and disconnected from the needs of the population. This type of activism not only undermines the efforts to support refugee communities but also contributes to the broader normalization of exclusionary attitudes towards immigrants. The mobilization against the Rohingya is particularly troubling given the historical context of Islamic activism in these countries, where support for refugees has traditionally been framed as a moral and religious duty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of traditional and digital media in shaping public perceptions of refugees has been extensively explored by scholars, particularly regarding how media discourse can influence anti-refugee sentiments. Media scholars have consistently found that coverage of migrant-related issues can influence public attitudes, validating the agenda-setting theory (De Blasio et al., 2022; Urso, 2018), which argues that the media, through its reporting, shifts individual perceptions of refugees. Research suggests that heightened media coverage of immigration issues correlates with an increase in anti-immigrant attitudes (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Watson & Riffe, 2013). Although these studies focus primarily on anti-immigrant sentiments in a Western context, similar dynamics can be observed in the portrayal of refugees, including the Rohingya, in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia.

In this region, the framing of Rohingya refugees often draws from broader narratives that emphasize "otherness", portraying refugees as outsiders who threaten the social and economic stability of host countries. This process of "Othering" aligns with the theories of intergroup conflict and symbolic politics, where refugees are viewed as an undeserving "other," importing moral and physical contaminants (Jackson, 2002; Keulenaar & Constanza, 2020). Such framings resonate with the theoretical framework of xenophobia, nationalism, and racism, which promote the establishment of boundaries between "us" (citizens) and "them" (refugees), further solidifying the antagonistic discourse that is often found in public debates about refugees.

In Indonesia and Malaysia, anti-refugee sentiments against the Rohingya have become increasingly visible in recent years, and it peaked in late 2023. Both countries, while predominantly Muslim and traditionally welcoming towards fellow Muslims, have seen a rise in anti-refugee rhetoric directed at Rohingya populations. Unlike Western countries, where anti-immigrant rhetoric often revolves around ethnicity and religion, the sentiment in Indonesia and Malaysia is complex, often revolving around economic concerns, fears of social instability, and perceived cultural differences despite religious commonality.

Social media platforms, particularly YouTube, have emerged as significant spaces where anti-refugee discourse is publicly aired and contested. Studies suggest that digital platforms, due to their participatory nature, allow individuals to express sentiments that might not easily emerge in traditional media outlets. YouTube, with

its decentralized nature and comment sections, provides a space for users to react to refugee-related news, contributing to the formation of online communities that echo or challenge mainstream media narratives (Böhme, 2021; Kelling & Monroe, 2023). This dynamic has shifted the focus away from solely the influence of mainstream media towards understanding the broader, user-generated discourse that now shapes public perceptions of refugees. YouTube plays a crucial role in disseminating information about refugees and facilitating discussions around refugee issues, both constructive and antagonistic. As a decentralized platform, YouTube allows for user-generated content to gain significant visibility without the oversight of traditional gatekeepers, thereby democratizing content production and fostering diverse narratives. However, this open nature also allows for the proliferation of hate speech, misinformation, and antagonistic sentiments, particularly in the comment sections of videos related to refugees, including the Rohingya crisis.

Comments on YouTube videos regarding Rohingya refugees often reflect polarized opinions, with many expressing empathy and support for the refugees, while others adopt a more antagonistic stance, framing the refugees as a social and economic threat to host nations. This aligns with the broader pattern observed in anti-refugee discourse, where refugees are frequently cast as the "other," burdening local resources and disrupting societal harmony. Studies on online platforms reveal that YouTube comment sections serve as a microcosm of broader societal debates, allowing users to articulate and reinforce their views, often in starkly oppositional terms (Androutsopoulos & Tereick, 2015; Inwood & Zappavigna, 2023; Murthy & Sharma, 2019). By facilitating these interactions, YouTube becomes a public space where individuals can engage in "everyday conversation" that exposes underlying tensions within society (Bishop, 2018; Lange, 2007). This platform allows ordinary people to act as agents, expressing their opinions and shaping the discourse on refugees, without the traditional oversight of media gatekeepers. These user-led interactions provide valuable insights into how public attitudes towards refugees, particularly the Rohingya, are constructed, reinforced, and contested in real-time.

Antagonism, as seen in YouTube comment sections, is a prominent feature of online discourse surrounding refugees. This antagonism is characterized by the construction of a dichotomy between those who support the refugees and those who view them as a threat. Antagonistic discourse often frames refugees in negative terms, portraying them as burdensome, criminal, or incompatible with the cultural values of the host society. This aligns with the concept of "Othering," where refugees are depicted as outsiders who do not belong and are seen as a threat to the well-being of the "in-group" . Scholars such as Ekman (2022), Peucker and Spaaij (2024), and Walsh (2023) have discussed how social media enables the formation of anti-publics online communities that adopt anti-democratic values and use freedom of speech to propagate hate and antagonism. In the context of YouTube comments, these anti-publics often emerge in response to videos discussing refugee issues. The relative anonymity afforded by the platform allows users to express views that might be socially unacceptable in face-to-face interactions, thereby amplifying the antagonistic discourse.

Antagonism on YouTube is further reinforced by the platform's algorithm, which tends to promote content that generates high levels of engagement, often prioritizing sensational or controversial videos that provoke strong reactions. This creates a feedback loop where videos that spark heated debates or negative sentiments about refugees receive more visibility, leading to a further amplification of antagonistic discourse. As such, YouTube not only serves as a space for the dissemination of news about refugees but also as a platform where antagonistic narratives are amplified and normalized. In the case of YouTube, user comments reflect not just individual attitudes but broader societal trends in how refugees are perceived and discussed. These comments can act as a form of counterpublic discourse (Bodrunova et al., 2021; Toepfl & Piwoni, 2018), where individuals challenge mainstream media narratives and contribute to the formation of alternative narratives about refugees. At the same time, the

presence of antagonistic discourse on YouTube highlights the need for further research into how social media platforms enable the proliferation of anti-refugee sentiments and the formation of "anti-publics", where hate speech and antagonism towards refugees are normalized (Breazu & Machin, 2023; Ekman, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a two-tiered analytical approach to examine the antagonism towards Rohingya refugees in YouTube comments, focusing on both online expression and online conversation. The first level of analysis involves sentiment analysis to explore the online expressions of anti-refugee sentiments present in the comment sections. The second level of analysis investigates online conversations through quantitative content analysis and framed annotation analysis, which together help illustrate the trends and topics that emerge within anti-refugee activism.

The sentiment analysis serves as a critical tool to dissect the online expressions found in the anti-Rohingya discourse within YouTube comments. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the emotions and attitudes conveyed by users. Sentiment analysis was conducted by identifying and categorizing comments according to specific affective and epistemic evaluations (Osmani et al., 2020; Putra et al., 2021). The analysis aimed to detect the presence of particular stance markers, such as attitude markers, boosters, hedges, self-mentions, and reader addresses. Therefore, the analysis focused on overtly expressed affective and epistemic evaluations within the comments, excluding cases where the writer's stance was ostensibly neutral. This approach acknowledges that discourse is inherently non-neutral and involves stancetaking. To ensure consistency in the analysis, a set of principles was developed to guide the inclusion and exclusion of features in the dataset. This set of principles is detailed in the appendix.

The second level of analysis, online conversation, is explored through quantitative content analysis and framed annotation analysis. This stage aims to capture the broader discursive patterns and thematic trends in the online conversations related to Rohingya refugees. The comments were coded into six groups, each representing a different aspect of stance: attitude markers, boosters, reader engagement, self-mentions, and stance focus. Examples of the labels used include "cringe" for attitude markers, "repetition" for boosters, "addressing Rohingya refugee" for reader engagement, and "I" for self-mentions. After the initial coding, the most frequently occurring patterns were quantified, allowing for a closer discursive analysis of smaller patterns and nuances that did not warrant coding but were nevertheless significant in understanding the discourse. This combination of quantitative coding and qualitative discursive analysis was essential in addressing the study’s primary research questions: the types of voices construed in the comments and the functions these voice types serve.

The dataset comprised 7.428 comments that had been collected over a November-December 2023, which exhibited a remarkable uniformity in their expression of stance and reader address. The comments predominantly featured continuous, emphatic attitude marking, with evaluations almost exclusively directed at Rohingya refugees. The discourse consistently positioned and characterized Rohingya people as figures of ridicule, and the commenters frequently co-constructed a collective "we" to imply a shared disdain and mockery of Rohingya individuals.

The coding process involved identifying these patterns within the comments and categorizing them according to the pre-defined labels. Following this, the phrases within each group and code were examined more closely to identify subtle discursive elements that contributed to the overall sentiment. This process allowed for a nuanced understanding of how YouTube commenters engage in and perpetuate anti-Rohingya rhetoric.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study uses text analysis based on topic modeling to explore the sentiment of comment. Topic modeling is a text mining technique that identifies recurring keywords to summarize a large collection of textual information. It is used to analyze documents, where each document is represented as a mixture of topics, and each topic is a probabilistic distribution of words (Alghamdi & Alfalqi, 2015, as cited on Bano et al., 2023). In other words, topic modeling is a generative model of documents that applies a probabilistic procedure to generate documents based on word distributions and probabilities (Snyder, 2015).

The topic modeling methods used in this study is Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA). According to AlSumait et al. (2009) LDA is a generative probabilistic model of a corpus, where documents are represented as random mixtures of latent topics, and each topic is characterized by a distribution over words. In text modeling, the topic probability provides an explicit representation of a document (Onan et al., 2016). LDA is particularly useful in classifying comments, as it helps categorize them into appropriate topics, making it easier to understand the themes discussed by social media users. To visualize the results of LDA-based topic modeling, the researcher utilized the LDAVis method. LDAVis is an interactive visualization tool developed by Carson Sievert and Kenneth Shirley to interpret and visualize the topics generated by the LDA model. Sievert and Shirley (2014) explain that LDAVis helps users easily understand LDA results by providing an intuitive and interactive visual display. This method allows users to explore and understand the relationships between words and topics in the LDA model, offering both a global view of topic differentiation and detailed inspection of the words most associated with each topic. This visualization presents a clear representation of how topics differ from one another and highlights the words most closely related to each topic.

Based on these methods, the classification of public opinions using LDA topic modeling simplifies the identification of trending topics in discussions. Identifying the prevalent opinions being discussed often takes considerable time due to the large volume of data (Kinariwala & Deshmukh, 2023; Murshed et al., 2022). The research process begins with data pre-processing, which includes several essential steps to ensure coherence and accuracy: converting all text to lowercase (lowercasing), removing meaningless words (stop-word removal), eliminating numerical characters (number removal), filtering out punctuation using regular expressions (RegEXP filtering), breaking the text into smaller components (tokenization), and normalizing the meaning of these components (text normalization).

To determine the appropriate number of topics, the researcher used topic coherence. Topic coherence measures the semantic similarity between words in a topic and helps distinguish meaningful topics from statistically related ones. The number of topics with the highest topic coherence score is chosen for modeling to avoid under- or overestimating the number of topics. In this study, a maximum of ten topics were selected with calculations focusing on topics two through ten. After determining the number of topics, the next step is interpreting the data based on the most relevant topics. This can be visualized by examining the distance between topics using multidimensional scaling. The larger the circle representing a topic, the higher the percentage of that topic in the overall corpus, indicating that it is frequently discussed.

Data analysis was conducted using Orange Text Mining, a tool chosen for its user-friendly interface that allows data analysis without the need for coding. The software enables interactive data analysis through a visual workflow, making it easy to work with. The data examined in this study consist of public comments on YouTube and Facebook regarding Rohingya refugees. Several Indonesian and Malaysian media outlets provided the data, including YouTube videos about Rohingya refugees published by TV3 Malaysia, TV9 Malaysia, Kompas Com, and Metro TV.

The comments analyzed in this study reflect a wide array of public sentiments toward Rohingya refugees in Indonesia and Malaysia, ranging from sympathetic views to strong antagonism. YouTube, as a public forum, serves as a platform for both news dissemination and public discussion, but it also becomes a space where hostile and anti-refugee sentiments can flourish. Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) revealed several recurring themes in the comments, with topics related to national security, religious identity, and economic burden frequently appearing. In the case of Malaysia, where the majority of refugees reside, the discourse often touches on perceived threats to national sovereignty and concerns over the economic costs of hosting refugees.

Many comments reflect frustrations over the government's handling of refugee issues, with users citing the social inequality between local people and refugees, the strain on public services, and the perceived preferential treatment of refugees over local citizens. In Indonesia, religious identity plays a significant role in shaping public opinion. Given that the majority of both the Indonesian population and Rohingya refugees are Muslim, some comments express solidarity based on religious affiliation. However, this sympathy is counterbalanced by comments reflecting xenophobia and fear of cultural dilution. Users often highlight fears that refugees might disrupt social harmony, lead to increased crime, or overburden local resources.

Based on the results of Marginal Topic Probability using Multidimensional Sampling (MDS) visualization, two primary topics emerged from the data analysis. These were Topic 1 (27.78%) and Topic 4 (16.6%). In the LDAV is visualization of YouTube comments on TV3 Malaysia's coverage of the Rohingya refugee crisis, Topic 1 highlights discussions where the Malaysians are commenting about refugees in a different country. Meanwhile, Topic 4 reflects the discourse of Malaysian citizens urging their government to reject Rohingya refugees from entering Malaysia (Figure 1).

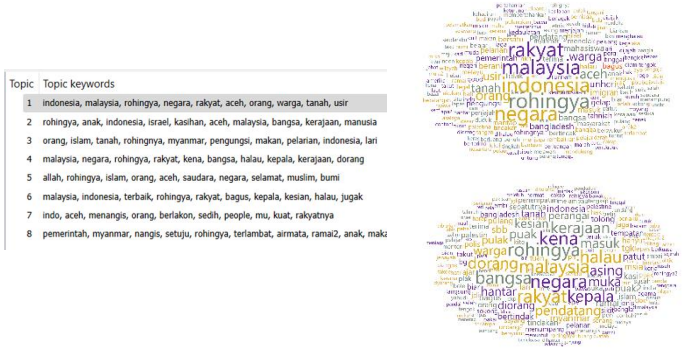

Figure 1: Sentiment Analysis on TV 3 Malaysia's Youtube Commentary Section. (Source: research analysis)

With the same topic clustering, comments on TV9 Malaysia's YouTube channel regarding the Rohingya crisis also predominantly convey negative sentiment. In Topic 1, the public expresses opposition to Rohingya refugees entering both Malaysia and Indonesia, while Topic 2 shows a more aggressive stance, with comments calling for the immediate expulsion (or "hantar balik" in Bahasa Melayu) of these refugees (Figure 2).

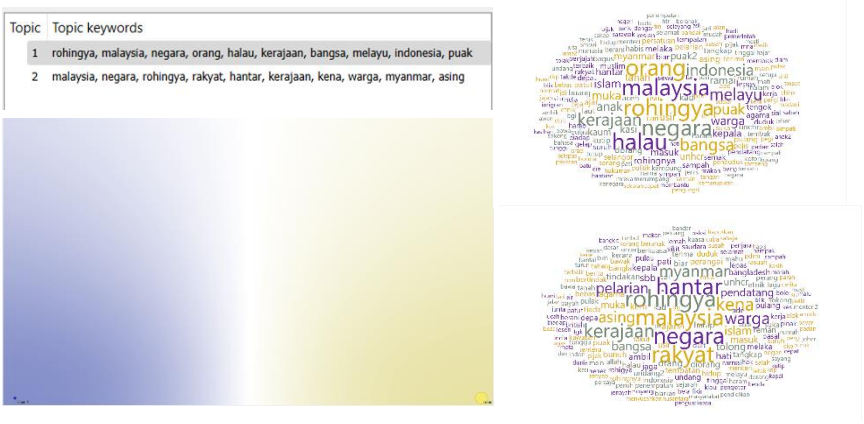

Figure 2: Sentiment Analysis on TV 9 Malaysia's Youtube Commentary Section. (Source: research analysis)

On the Indonesian side, YouTube comments on Kompas Com's coverage of Rohingya refugees depict a similar trend. Topic 1 focuses on the Rohingya arriving in Aceh being framed as illegal immigrants, with many commenters calling for their expulsion. Additionally, this cluster highlights the role of the Indonesian Navy (TNI AL) in preventing Rohingya boats from landing in Aceh. Topic 2, on the other hand, draws attention to the perceived disparity in treatment, where the Indonesian government is seen as providing better facilities to the Rohingya refugees than to the local Acehnese population (Figure 3).

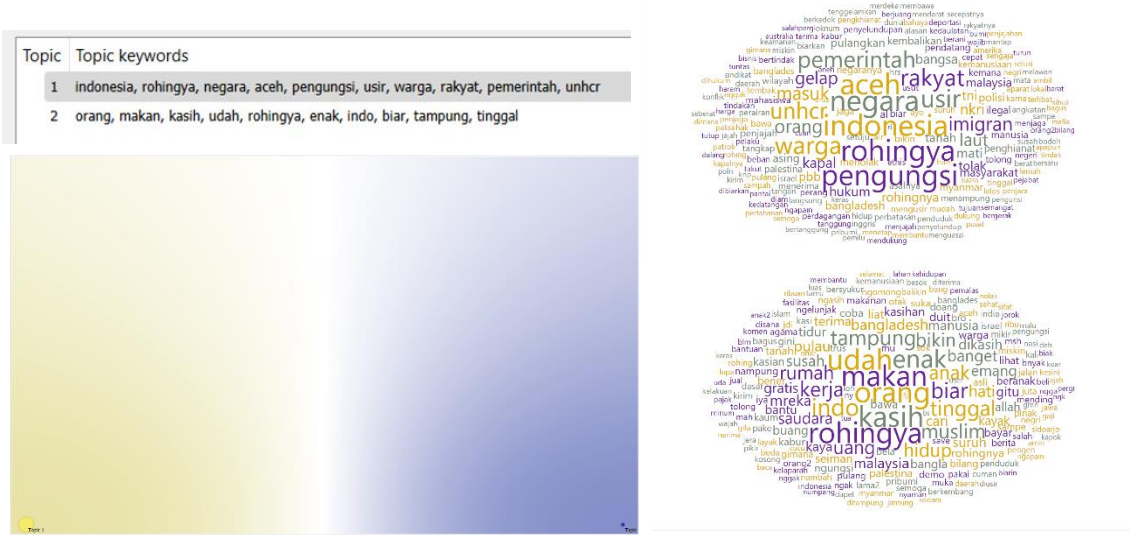

Figure 3: Sentiment Analysis on Kompas Com Youtube Commentary Section. (Source: research analysis)

Similarly, two clusters in YouTube comments on Metro TV echo these sentiments. Topic 1 discusses the demand for the expulsion of Rohingya refugees and emphasizes the Indonesian government's and TNI AL's efforts in safeguarding Indonesia's maritime borders. Topic 2 highlights criticism towards the fact that Rohingya refugees in Aceh receive food and aid, while some Indonesian citizens continue to suffer from hunger (Figure 4).

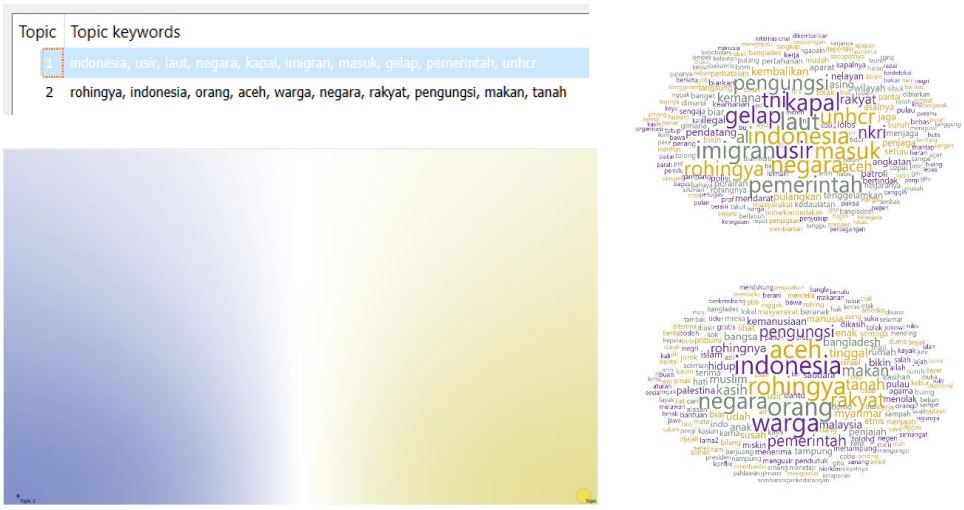

Figure 4: Sentiment Analysis on Metro TV Youtube Commentary Section. (Source: research analysis)

This analysis illustrates the broader antagonism on YouTube regarding the Rohingya refugee crisis, particularly between Malaysia and Indonesia, underscoring a complex interplay of humanitarian concerns and nationalistic sentiments across social media platforms.

The Qualitative Content analysis of YouTube comments related to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Indonesia and Malaysia reveals a distinct pattern of antagonistic discourse, which can be characterized as a performance of group dominance. This pattern of commenting mirrors what has been described as a 'bullying voice,' wherein participants collectively enforce norms of ridicule and rejection, often targeting the refugees themselves. The repetitive, exaggerated, and overt incivility displayed in the comments suggests a performative stance, echoing the dynamics of group power that both ridicules and dismisses the subject at hand in this case, the Rohingya refugees and their plight (Table 1).

Table 1: The Pattern of Antagonistic Discourse in Rohingya Crisis

Stance focus	Number of evaluations
Being ‘less civilized’ (culturally backward)	4.122
Being ‘social-crum’	1.540
Being cognitively impaired	641
Being dislikeable	104
Being pathetic	876
Being ridiculous	145

The first and most prevalent voice type is bullying and derision, with a significant focus on mocking and ridiculing the Rohingya refugees. This bullying voice is particularly visible in the comments from TV3, where Topic 1 (27.78%) centers around Malaysian netizens criticizing Rohingya refugees, not just within Malaysia but also in Indonesia. The comments display a performative nature, repetitively insulting the refugees with terms like "scum," "culturally backward," "stupid," and "idiot." Such expressions often take on a childish tone of "playground" teasing, where group members use exaggerated emoticons, capitalizations, and exclamation marks to intensify the hostility. For example, comments like "*Usir*!!!" or "*BUANG*!!!" (throw them out) reflect a clear bullying stance, reinforced

by collective repetition. The repetition of emotive and exaggerated language in comments, such as capitalized exclamations, insults, and derisive emoticons, was a consistent feature of bullying voices across all channels, particularly in discussions on TV3 Malaysia. These patterns suggest a collective stance that reinforces rejection and ridicule of the Rohingya refugees, often framed in overtly mocking terms.

The uniformity of the comments raises the possibility that these negative responses could be artificially generated, potentially by bots or coordinated fake accounts. However, considering the viral nature of the videos and the widespread use of this kind of antagonistic discourse online, the comments still merit close analysis. As shown in the data, explicit attitude markers and boosters dominate the discourse, with 6544 boosters compared to a significantly lower frequency of hedging (884 occurrences). This stark imbalance amplifies the emotional intensity of the comments, giving them an air of finality and authority. Instead of engaging in debate or persuasion, the comments project an emphatic rejection, reinforcing a collective stance that mirrors bullying behavior.

The second voice type centers on ethnic and cognitive dehumanization, and this is particularly evident in Topic 4 (16.6%) of TV3's data, where Malaysian commenters call on their government to reject the Rohingya refugees entirely. Here, comments frequently reduce the refugees to derogatory slurs like "scumbag" or "spoiled ugly bunch," focusing on their ethnicity and appearance as a basis for rejection. These comments often collocate with insults aimed at mental abilities, such as calling them "crazy," "psycho," or "tard." This dehumanizing language strips the Rohingya of any complexity as individuals, framing them as a homogeneous and undesirable group. On Kompas' YouTube channel, Topic 1 also highlights this dehumanization, as Indonesian netizens describe the refugees landing in Aceh as "illegal immigrants" and demand their expulsion, amplifying this rejection with statements about the refugees being a burden on the local community.

The content of these comments overwhelmingly consists of negative critique and ridicule, often accompanied by emoticons, abbreviations for laughter or shock, and profane or derogatory name-calling. Frequently occurring terms and phrases such as "scum," "useless," and "idiot" construct a shared in-group lexicon that signals membership in a collective opposition to Rohingya refugees. Repetition, a common boosting strategy, includes repeated words, letters, punctuation marks (e.g., "*Usir!!!*"), and capitalized letters (e.g., "*KELUARRR!!!*"). The boosting strategies, such as repeated letters, capitalizations, and multiple exclamation marks, were used extensively to intensify the emotional tone of comments. These elements emphasized the commenters' negative stance and amplified the overall aggression expressed in the discourse.

The use of hyperbolic superlatives (e.g., "the worst face I've ever seen") and expressions such as "nobody cares" or "everybody hates you" further constructs a unanimous social judgment, presenting the commenters as representatives of a larger societal consensus against the refugees. Hyperbolic phrases such as 'the worst face I've ever seen' or 'everybody hates you' appeared frequently in the data. These expressions were often used alongside group-referencing terms, suggesting a shared framing of rejection among commenters. Additionally, the repeated use of direct address terms, such as "Rohingya gang," combined with capitalized exclamations and abbreviations (e.g., *"BUANG!!! Usirrrr*!") underscores the hostile tone and creates a performative aspect of group solidarity against the refugees.

The evaluation of the comments reveals that the overwhelming majority of the stances expressed were directed specifically at the Rohingya refugees themselves, rather than focusing on broader concerns such as the urgency of their resettlement. This sharp focus on the Rohingya as a target of hostility further reinforces the pattern of bullying and collective rejection discussed earlier. Among the various negative stances, derogatory remarks about cognitive ability, appearance, and ethnicity were prominent, suggesting a deeper layer of dehumanization and marginalization.

The third prominent voice type is one of group power and social conformity, where the commenters align with a collective stance against the Rohingya, often emphasizing the role of their respective governments and militaries in controlling or expelling the refugees. On TV9, a related theme emerges, where Topic 2 sees public comments demanding that the Rohingya refugees be sent back ("hantar balik") or removed from both Malaysia and Indonesia. This collective voice is reinforced by discussions of governmental actions, such as the Indonesian military's (TNI AL) efforts to block Rohingya boats from entering Aceh's waters, which is a recurring theme in Topic 1 of Kompas and Metro TV's comments. The commenters frequently position themselves as defenders of their nation's sovereignty, demanding that authorities reject the refugees. Comments characterized as bullying frequently used repetitive, exaggerated, and mocking language, such as emotive punctuation and capitalized imperatives (e.g., 'USIR!!!'). These features were widely present in responses to TV3 coverage, indicating a consistent tone of ridicule and rejection toward the Rohingya refugees.

In Metro TV's comments, Topic 2 further intensifies this group conformity by focusing on the perceived injustice that Rohingya refugees receive better treatment than local Indonesians in Aceh. Comments here highlight a sense of resentment, claiming that the Indonesian government is prioritizing the refugees over its own citizens. Comments reflecting resentment toward government aid for Rohingya refugees frequently highlighted a perceived disparity between local needs and refugee treatment. These expressions were often paired with calls for government accountability or refugee expulsion.

The final voice type is rhetorical deflection, where some commenters attempt to shift the focus away from the refugee crisis by introducing other societal issues. On TV3, a smaller portion of the comments in Topic 2 (focused on broader migration issues) expressed the stance of "but what about...?" to downplay the urgency of the refugee situation. These comments typically reference other problems such as local poverty or corruption, using these arguments to divert attention from the plight of the Rohingya. Comments categorized as rhetorical deflection often redirected attention to unrelated societal issues such as local poverty or corruption. While not overtly antagonistic, these responses downplayed the urgency of refugee support by shifting the focus to domestic concerns. On Kompas, this rhetorical strategy was also evident in Topic 2, where commenters questioned why the Indonesian government seemed to provide better resources to the refugees than to its own struggling citizens.

Supportive voices, though rare, often took a cautious approach, attempting to balance an agreement with the collective judgment of the group and the news narrative on the Rohingya crisis. These comments, while less aggressive, still revealed the pressure to conform to the dominant discourse, further highlighting the social dynamics at play. This dynamic underscores how online spaces can act as echo chambers, where even moderated stances are framed in ways that align with the prevailing negativity.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of 7428 comments surrounding the Rohingya refugee crisis on YouTube channels from Malaysia (TV3, TV9) and Indonesia (Kompas, Metro TV) reveals distinct and recurring patterns of antagonistic voices. These comments are not just individual expressions of discontent, but rather collective performances of group-driven hostility and rejection. The antagonism expressed in the comments manifests across multiple dimensions, including bullying, dehumanization, expressions of group power, and rhetorical deflection. By analyzing comments clustered into different topics, a clearer picture emerges of how these voices are constructed and reinforced in the discourse surrounding the Rohingya refugees.

Quantitatively, the most common expression involved pejorative reference, labeling the Rohingya as "culturally backward" (4122 occurrences), often signified by hate emoticons, angry abbreviations, and dismissive name-calling. Insults targeting ethnicity were also prevalent, with commenters referring to the refugees as a “scum gang” or “spoiled ugly bunch of people.” This use of collocations linking cognitive ability with appearance created a deeply derogatory narrative, reducing the refugees to a caricature of disdain. The repeated use of terms such as “stupid,” “dumb,” and “idiot,” alongside slurs like “-tard,” further entrenched the refugees as an unworthy, inferior group, while insults like “crazy” and “psycho” emphasized mental illness as a basis for exclusion.

Rational or empathetic responses were rare. Only 884 expressed the issue in critical argumentation. Even these comments often employed a dismissive tone, frequently framed as "but what about...?" to shift focus onto other global issues, effectively downplaying the concerns about the Rohingya refugee crisis. This rhetorical strategy served as a subtle alignment with the prevailing negative sentiment while avoiding overt confrontation with the group consensus.

These findings underscore the critical role of digital platforms in shaping public sentiment on refugee issues, particularly through unregulated comment spaces where antagonism flourishes. Addressing this challenge requires more than just moderating content. It also demands digital literacy initiatives, platform-level interventions, and cross-cultural engagement strategies to foster more inclusive online discourse. Future research should investigate the interplay between algorithmic visibility, political discourse, and offline consequences of digital hostility toward marginalized populations.

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