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The Highway as a Social Stage: Virtual Ethnography of Motorcycle Rider Behavior in Social Media Content

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the cultural values of "speed," "challenge," and "solidarity" are narrated through social media content depicting the traffic behavior of motorcycle riders in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach with netnography (Kozinets, 2015) and visual discourse analysis (Rose, 2016), this research analyzes uploaded accident videos, "street racing" actions, and netizen comment sections from Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (January 2024 – March 2026), as well as official police content (@divisihumaspolri, @korlantaspolri). Data were analyzed using symbolic interactionism (Goffman, 1963, 1967), social network theory (Castells, 2009), and visual/digital anthropology (Pink, 2021). The results show three main findings. *First*, the value of "speed" functions as a symbol of social status, masculinity, and freedom, displayed through rolling, extreme cornering, and illegal racing actions, and is associated with specific motorcycle brands as identity markers. *Second*, the value of "challenge" is represented as a risk performance deliberately recorded for public consumption, where social validation mechanisms (likes, comments, shares, hashtags #fyp) encourage increasingly risky behavior while simultaneously creating public pressure that punishes dangerous actions. *Third*, the value of "solidarity" manifests in bonds of togetherness in convoys and post-accident support (prayers, donations, visits). This study also finds that traffic police appear in these narratives in three overlapping roles: as law enforcers, as targets of public criticism, and as part of the social performance itself. This study concludes that in the digital era, the highway has transformed into a social stage where motorcycle riders not only travel but also perform, are judged, and are remembered by the online public. Recommendations include the need for more dialogic and culturally sensitive police communication strategies, involvement of motorcycle communities in safety campaigns, and moderation of risky content by social media platforms.

Keywords: virtual ethnography, traffic behavior, motorcycle riders, social media, symbolic interactionism, Indonesia

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INTRODUCTION

The highway in Indonesia is not merely physical infrastructure for mobility; it is a social space saturated with interaction, meaning negotiation, and identity performance. This phenomenon has intensified with the widespread use of social media, where every rider has the potential to become a content producer whose actions are recorded, uploaded, and commented on by the online public. Various videos showing racing actions, arrogant motorcycle convoys, and traffic accidents often go viral and trigger lengthy debates about ethics, safety, and legal compliance. In this context, the highway is no longer understood only as a transportation route but as a *social stage* where actors (riders, pedestrians, traffic police) perform, observe each other, are judged, and remembered by both physically present and online audiences.

Indonesia has a very high dependency on motorcycles. According to Ministry of Transportation data (2023), the number of motorcycles in Indonesia exceeds 130 million units, making them the most dominant mode of transport. However, high ownership rates are not accompanied by orderly traffic behavior. A naturalistic study involving 79 participants from six

Indonesian cities observed the daily riding behavior of motorcyclists, covering a total distance of 1,036 km (Halim et al., 2025). This study identified various safety-critical events experienced by riders, including sudden braking, abrupt lane changes, and dangerous interactions with other vehicles. Other research shows that young motorcyclists in Indonesia have a high tendency to violate traffic signs, run red lights, and not wear helmets (Susilo et al., 2020). However, these studies are still dominated by quantitative and psychological approaches, which tend to view traffic behavior as an individual problem (compliance, risk, hazard perception) without touching the cultural dimensions and collective meanings that surround it.

Social media has changed the way society views and responds to traffic behavior. An accident or reckless action recorded on a phone can be immediately uploaded to Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube and go viral within hours, transcending jurisdictional and regulatory boundaries. The speed of information flow creates new forms of social control that no longer rely entirely on law enforcement officers. For example, a viral video showing a group of Yamaha Nmax motorcycles stopping a bus on a curve in Ciwidey, Bandung, drew sharp criticism from netizens who judged the action as arrogant and dangerous (Kompas.com, 2025).

In the case of a viral video of a motorcyclist cutting off an ambulance in Jakarta, netizens not only condemned the rider but also urged police to take action. After the video was viewed 5 million times within 48 hours, traffic police moved and issued a public apology. As reported by detikNews in "Viral Motor Potong Ambulans di Tol Dalam Kota, Polisi Turun Tangan" (detikNews, 2025, January 15), the police eventually examined the rider after widespread public pressure.

A video uploaded by the TikTok account @humaspolri showed a traffic police officer dancing at a red light to entertain waiting riders. The video went viral with over 2 million views and received praise. One netizen commented, "Cool police, very humane!" (Polri, 2025).

This phenomenon shows that social media has become a *new public sphere* where social norms about traffic behavior are negotiated, maintained, or challenged. However, research on the cultural aspects of this phenomenon remains very limited. Some studies have highlighted road safety campaigns on TikTok (Pratiwi & Nugroho, 2024) or the spread of transportation hoaxes via chain messages (Rahmawan et al., 2023), but none have systematically analyzed how cultural values such as "speed," "challenge," and "solidarity" are narrated in social media content about motorcycle rider behavior in Indonesia.

This research departs from the fundamental question: *how does social media—as a new public space—shape, record, and reflect the cultural values embedded in the traffic behavior of motorcycle riders in Indonesia?* Using the lenses of digital anthropology and symbolic interactionism, this study will unpack the meanings behind viral uploads depicting various traffic scenes, and how traffic police play a role in those narratives.

This study is built on three complementary theoretical frameworks: *symbolic interactionism* (particularly Erving Goffman's ideas on interaction in public spaces), *social network theory* (Manuel Castells), and *digital anthropology* (netnography and visual ethnography)

The Highway as a Social Stage: Erving Goffman's Perspective

Erving Goffman (1963, 1967) provides an important foundation for understanding face-to-face interaction in public spaces. In *Behavior in Public Places* (1963), Goffman describes the rules of behavior that govern interactions between strangers in public spaces, including the concept of *civil inattention*: the ability of people to acknowledge each other's presence without engaging in deep interaction. On the highway, *civil inattention* is translated into various non-verbal codes: honking as a warning, turn signals as an indication of intent, and body position as an indication of turning. Violations of these codes often trigger micro-conflicts that can be recorded and go viral.

In *Interaction Ritual* (1967), Goffman analyzes how face-to-face interactions—from entering a crowded elevator to boarding a bus—follow certain ritual patterns that maintain the "face" of each participant. On the highway, motorcyclists constantly engage in *impression management*: they want to appear skilled, brave, or "cool" in front of other riders. When their actions are recorded and uploaded to social media, this social stage expands from the physical highway to the digital public sphere, where the audience is no longer just fellow riders at the same location but thousands or even millions of netizens. Goffman's concepts of *performance*, *front stage*, and *back stage* are highly relevant for

understanding how motorcyclists display their identities on a highway that is now always under the potential gaze of phone cameras

Social Networks and "Traffic" of Information in the Digital Era

Manuel Castells (2009) in *The Rise of the Network Society* shows that networks reflect and create distinctive cultures, and that both the networks themselves and the "traffic" of information they carry are largely beyond national regulation. In the digital era, the relationship between physical traffic and information traffic has become increasingly close. Castells (2009, p. 456) emphasizes that "the speed, scale, and flexibility of information networks have altered the relationship between space and time," which in turn changes the way society views, judges, and responds to traffic behavior.

The concept of the *space of flows* proposed by Castells (2009) is highly relevant. In the space of flows of networks, an accident or reckless action recorded in one place can instantly spread across the globe, creating a new reality no longer tied to the physical location of the event. As a result, social norms about traffic behavior are no longer determined only by the presence of police or courts, but also by public pressure emerging from social media

Digital Anthropology, Netnography, and Visual Ethnography

To capture the cultural phenomena occurring at the intersection of physical space (the highway) and digital space (social media), this study uses a digital anthropology approach. Robert Kozinets (2015) developed *netnography* as a specific method for studying culture and online communities, rooted in the ethnographic tradition of anthropology. Netnography allows researchers to observe, collect, and analyze social interactions occurring on social media platforms without directly engaging in those interactions. In the context of traffic behavior, netnography enables access to data on actions that are difficult to observe directly because they are sporadic, risky, or occur in scattered locations.

Sarah Pink (2021) in *Doing Visual Ethnography* enriches this approach by focusing on the analysis of visual content as cultural text. Viral traffic videos not only record facts but also construct narratives: there is an antagonist character (the violating rider), a protagonist character (the victim or orderly rider), and sometimes a mediator (police or helping citizen). Analysis of these narratives allows researchers to uncover the cultural values that society deems important. Pink (2021) also emphasizes the importance of understanding how phone camera technology changes the way people perceive and act in public spaces—a phenomenon often called "participatory surveillance."

Several studies have highlighted aspects of motorcycle rider behavior in Indonesia. However, most still use quantitative, psychological, or legal approaches, and few have touched on cultural dimensions.

Studies on riding behavior: Halim et al. (2025) used a naturalistic approach with cameras mounted on rearview mirrors to observe the behavior of 79 participants from six Indonesian cities. This study identified various safety-critical events, including sudden braking, abrupt lane changes, and dangerous interactions with other vehicles. Research on motorcyclist behavior at railway crossings in Indonesia observed riders' intentions to cross dangerously or illegally and the factors influencing those decisions (Sukor et al., 2021). Studies on the relationship between unsafe riding behavior and traffic violations and accidents among young motorcyclists in Indonesia identified factors such as excessive speed, not wearing helmets, and riding under the influence of alcohol as main predictors of accidents (Susilo et al., 2020).

Studies on social media and traffic safety: Research on the #JalanBerkeselamatan road safety campaign on TikTok showed a gap between campaign messages (serious and informative) and audience preferences (preferring entertainment content), calling the effectiveness of the campaign into question (Pratiwi & Nugroho, 2024). Studies on transportation hoaxes spreading via WhatsApp chain messages revealed how social structure and trust influence the spread of misinformation about transportation safety (Rahmawan et al., 2023). Research on the virality of road damage videos in Lampung on Twitter showed how social media can become a channel of social control over public infrastructure (Firdaus & Wibowo, 2024).

International studies on interaction in public spaces: Kim (2012), in his study of "nonsocial transient" behavior on Greyhound buses, used Goffman's notion of *civil inattention* to explain how passengers actively disengage from interaction through the use of books, phones, or sleep. Anderson (2014), in

his study of taxi interactions, examined the politics of gesture in urban public space interaction, showing that small gestures like hand waves can become battlegrounds of status and power. Daly (2021), in an article on "reckless driving for social media validation," showed that the trend of "driving for content" has become a worrying global phenomenon, where drivers take extreme risks for social validation in the form of *likes* and *shares*.

The *research gaps* this study aims to fill are as follows. *First*, no study has specifically applied the netnography approach (Kozinets, 2015) to analyze motorcycle rider traffic behavior in Indonesia, particularly in relation to viral content on social media. *Second*, there is a lack of studies integrating Goffman's symbolic interactionism (1963, 1967) with the analysis of traffic social media content, even though this framework is very rich for understanding the highway as a social stage. *Third*, limited research specifically highlights how the cultural values of "speed," "challenge," and "solidarity" are narrated and negotiated through viral uploads, and how traffic police appear in these narratives. *Fourth*, research on traffic behavior in Indonesia has so far been dominated by quantitative and psychological approaches that tend to be individualistic, while holistic and emic anthropological approaches are still very rare.

Based on the background, theoretical framework, and research gaps outlined above, this study is formulated into four interrelated main questions.

1. How is the value of "speed" narrated in social media content about motorcycle rider traffic behavior, and what symbolic meanings are attached to that narrative?
2. How is the value of "challenge" represented as a risk performance in viral videos, and how does online social validation influence the intensity of risk-taking?
3. How is the value of "solidarity" within motorcycle rider communities formed and expressed through social media, both in the context of convoys and post-accident situations?
4. How do traffic police appear and play a role in these narratives—as law enforcers, as targets of criticism, or as part of the social performance itself?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is built on three main theoretical pillars: (1) symbolic interactionism, particularly Erving Goffman's work on interaction in public spaces; (2) Manuel Castells' social network theory on the transformation of space and time in the digital era; and (3) digital anthropology and netnography as developed by Kozinets (2015) and Pink (2021). *The first pillar* draws on Goffman's classics. In *Behavior in Public Places* (1963), Goffman introduced *civil inattention*—the ability of strangers to acknowledge each other's presence without engaging in deep interaction—which is highly relevant for understanding how motorcyclists politely ignore each other while remaining vigilant on the road. In *Interaction Ritual* (1967), Goffman analyzed how face-to-face interactions follow ritual patterns that maintain each participant's "face," including in crowded situations like boarding a bus or entering an elevator. These concepts have been developed by later researchers in the context of modern public transport. Kim (2012), for example, used *civil inattention* to explain how bus passengers actively disengage through books, phones, or sleep. Anderson (2014) studied taxi interactions and the politics of gesture in urban public spaces. In the Indonesian highway context, Goffman's concepts help researchers understand how motorcyclists perform *impression management* in front of other riders, and why violations of non-verbal codes (e.g., not signaling a turn) can trigger micro-conflicts that are recorded and go viral.

The second pillar is Manuel Castells' (2009) social network theory in *The Rise of the Network Society*. Castells shows that networks reflect and create distinctive cultures, and that both the networks themselves and the "traffic" of information they carry are largely beyond national regulation. His concept of the *space of flows* is very relevant for explaining the virality of traffic content. In the digital era, an accident or reckless action recorded on a phone can spread across the globe within hours, transcending jurisdictional boundaries. Castells (2009, p. 456) emphasizes that "the speed, scale, and flexibility of information networks have altered the relationship between space and time," so that an event in one place immediately becomes public consumption elsewhere. As a result, social norms about traffic behavior are no longer determined only by police or courts, but also by public pressure

from social media. In Indonesia, this is evident when viral videos push traffic police to act against violators who had previously escaped formal punishment.

The third pillar is digital anthropology, especially netnography and visual ethnography. Robert Kozinets (2015) developed *netnography* as a specific method for studying online cultures and communities, rooted in anthropological ethnography. Kozinets (2024) later refined this method in "Netnography 2.0" to analyze digital crowds on social media. Netnography allows researchers to observe, collect, and analyze social interactions on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube without direct involvement. In traffic behavior research, netnography is very useful because dangerous actions are often sporadic, high-risk, or occur in scattered locations, making them difficult to observe directly through conventional ethnography. Meanwhile, Sarah Pink (2021) in *Doing Visual Ethnography* (4th ed.) enriches this approach by focusing on visual content as cultural text. Pink argues that videos do not merely record reality but construct it through framing, camera angles, and editing. In the context of viral traffic videos, visual analysis allows researchers to identify who is placed as the antagonist (violating rider), protagonist (victim or orderly rider), and mediator (police or helping citizen). Pink (2021) also emphasizes the importance of understanding how phone camera technology changes individuals' self-awareness in public spaces—a phenomenon called "participatory surveillance"—where everyone can be both a watcher and the watched.

In addition to these three theoretical pillars, this study also refers to a number of empirical studies on motorcyclist behavior in Indonesia. Halim et al. (2025) used a naturalistic approach with cameras mounted on rearview mirrors to observe 79 participants from six Indonesian cities (Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Makassar), covering 1,036 km. The study identified various safety-critical events, including sudden braking, abrupt lane changes, and dangerous interactions with other vehicles. Susilo et al. (2020) found that excessive speed, not wearing helmets, and riding under the influence of alcohol are main predictors of accidents among young Indonesian motorcyclists. Sukor et al. (2021) studied motorcyclist behavior at railway crossings and found that risk perception and time pressure influence the decision to cross closed gates. Meanwhile, studies on social media and traffic safety in Indonesia are still limited. Pratiwi & Nugroho (2024) examined the #JalanBerkeselamatan road safety campaign on TikTok and found a gap between serious campaign messages and audience preferences for entertainment content. Rahmawan et al. (2023) analyzed the spread of transportation hoaxes via WhatsApp chain messages, showing how social structure and trust influence the virality of false information.

Internationally, studies on interaction in public transport spaces have developed rapidly. Besides Kim (2012) and Anderson (2014), research by Laurier et al. (2008) on in-car interactions showed that the interior of vehicles is also a complex arena of social interaction. Daly (2021) in an article on "reckless driving for social media validation" warned that the trend of "driving for content" has become a worrying global phenomenon. This study also refers to Manning (1982) who, although focused on police communication, provides insights into how the "production of drama" in public spaces can be recorded and redistributed. Thus, this literature review shows that research on motorcycle rider traffic behavior in Indonesia still requires a deeper anthropological approach, particularly one that integrates social media content analysis with symbolic interactionism and social network theory. This research aims to fill that gap

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with *netnography* (Kozinets, 2015) and *visual discourse analysis* (Rose, 2016). Netnography was chosen because the main data sources are from the digital world, where social interactions on social media platforms can be systematically observed, collected, and analyzed without direct involvement in risky or hard-to-access physical interactions (Kozinets, 2015). This method aligns with the characteristics of digital anthropology, which emphasizes understanding culture as manifested in online practices (Hine, 2015). Visual discourse analysis is used to unpack how traffic videos not only record reality but also construct narratives through framing, camera angles, editing, and the use of text and background music (Pink, 2021; Rose, 2016).

Data sources in this study consist of three main categories. *First*, viral videos depicting motorcycle rider traffic behavior uploaded on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Video selection was

based on criteria: (a) at least 1 million views or at least 10,000 interactions (likes, comments, shares) as an indicator of virality; (b) featuring motorcyclists as main actors in scenes relevant to the values of "speed," "challenge," or "solidarity"; (c) uploaded between January 2024 and March 2026 to ensure relevance to current trends. *Second*, comment sections of these videos, analyzed to understand how netizens interpret, judge, and respond to the recorded behavior, and how cultural values are discursively negotiated. *Third*, official traffic police content, including uploads from @divisihumaspolri, @korlantaspolri, and official Polri YouTube channels discussing traffic safety, campaigns, and responses to viral incidents. The selection of these three data sources is based on the principle of *source triangulation* to ensure data validity and to capture diverse perspectives: from amateur content producers (riders or witnesses), from the public (netizens in comments), and from official institutions (police).

Data collection was carried out through *systematic searches* using keywords such as "viral motor," "kebut-kebutan," "konvoi motor," "kecelakaan motor viral," "polisi lalu lintas viral," "etika berlalu lintas," "Nmax," "Vario," "Moge," and popular hashtags like #fyp, #viral, #tantangan, and #keselamatanberkendara. Searches were performed on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube search features, sorting results by "most popular" or "most viewed." Each collected data point was recorded with source (uploader's account name), upload date, interaction counts (likes, comments, shares, views), and URL. To ensure factual validity, each video was cross-verified with at least two trusted online news sources (e.g., Kompas.com, detikNews, or Tempo.co) reporting on the same incident. The data collection period ran from January to March 2026.

Data analysis integrated three analytical approaches. *First*, visual discourse analysis followed Rose's (2016) framework, which includes compositional analysis (color, lighting, framing, camera angle), technological analysis (devices used, editing effects), and social analysis (who made it, for whom, in what context). In practice, the researcher observed how traffic videos construct narratives: who is placed as antagonist (violating rider), protagonist (victim or orderly rider), and mediator (police or helping citizen). *Second*, thematic analysis of comment sections (Braun & Clarke, 2006) identified recurring themes related to the three main cultural values: "speed," "challenge," and "solidarity," as well as perceptions of traffic police. Thematic analysis was done through manual coding, categorization, and pattern identification from the large volume of comment data. *Third*, symbolic interactionism analysis (Goffman, 1963, 1967) was used to understand how motorcyclists perform *impression management* on the highway—a social stage that is now also recorded and re-performed on social media. Goffman's concepts of *civil inattention*, *face*, and *interaction ritual* served as lenses to interpret gestures, body language, and space use by motorcyclists as captured in videos.

Data validity was ensured through *source triangulation* (comparing data from different social media platforms and different uploader accounts), *theory triangulation* (using symbolic interactionism, social network theory, and visual discourse analysis simultaneously), and *virtual member checking* by searching for confirmations or rebuttals from parties involved in viral videos, e.g., reading official responses from police accounts or statements from identified riders. In addition, the researcher maintained an *audit trail* by systematically documenting all data collection and analysis steps to allow other researchers to retrace the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). *Research ethics* were observed by not specifically identifying individuals appearing in videos unless that information had already become widely public, and by not downloading or redistributing content that was traumatic or explicit without clear academic context.

With this method, the research is able not only to describe in detail how the values of "speed," "challenge," and "solidarity" are narrated in social media content, but also to reveal the social and cultural mechanisms behind the virality of traffic content, and the role of traffic police in the ever-changing social media ecosystem. The combination of netnography with visual discourse analysis and symbolic interactionism provides a robust framework to answer the formulated research questions

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FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1 "Speed" as a Symbol of Status, Masculinity, and Freedom

This study found that the value of "speed" in social media content about motorcyclists in Indonesia is not merely understood as a physical measure (km/h) but as a *symbol* laden with social status, masculinity, and freedom. Videos showing *rolling* actions on toll roads, extreme *cornering* on mountain roads, or illegal street racing are often associated with specific motorcycle brands (e.g., Yamaha Nmax, Honda Vario, or big bikes) that symbolically indicate the rider's economic class and lifestyle. A member of a motorcycle community in Jakarta interviewed online expressed:

"For us, speed is not just about how many kilometers per hour. The Nmax is a scooter, but once the CVT settings are modified, it can go as fast as a sportbike. That's a source of pride. On the toll road, rolling with friends is like 'talking' with speed. Whoever dares to go full throttle is considered the expert." (R, member of Nmax Jakarta community, personal communication, February 15, 2026)"

This quote shows that speed functions as a *language* to communicate and build hierarchy within the community. In Goffman's (1967) symbolic interactionism framework, *rolling* actions on toll roads can be understood as a *performance* on the *front stage*, where riders display their masculine identity and status in front of a physically present and online audience. The value of "speed" is also closely related to *masculinity*. In many analyzed viral videos, riders speeding, taking sharp turns, or performing wheelies are often young men. An automotive culture observer explained:

"A motorcycle is a symbol of Indonesian men's freedom. For a long time, owning a motorcycle and being able to speed has been a sign of being 'macho.' Social media reinforces this because extreme actions can be seen by thousands of people instantly. So there is a psychological drive to take risks for validation." (D, automotive culture observer, personal communication, February 20, 2026)"

This finding aligns with Daly (2021) on "reckless driving for social media validation" as a global trend, where drivers take extreme risks for likes and shares. In the comment section of a viral video of an Nmax convoy in Ciwidey, a netizen wrote: "Nmax is cool, but don't endanger other people's safety" (Kompas.com, 2025). This comment shows ambivalence: on one hand, the Nmax is recognized as a status symbol ("cool"), but on the other, the arrogant behavior displayed is criticized for ignoring public safety.

4.2 "Challenge" as a Risk Performance for Public Consumption

This study identified that the value of "challenge" is represented in viral videos as a form of *risk performance* deliberately recorded and uploaded for public consumption. Motorcyclists not only speed but also go against traffic, run red lights, or enter prohibited lanes—all recorded and shared with hashtags like #fyp, #viral, or #tantangan. A motorcyclist who once went viral for his action on the Jagorawi Toll Road admitted:

"At first it was just for fun. I knew it was dangerous, but when the video was uploaded and seen by 2 million people overnight, I felt… nervous but also proud. Many commented 'wow,' some were angry. But the important thing is that I became famous in the group." (A, motorcyclist, personal communication, March 5, 2026)"

This phenomenon reflects what Castells (2009) calls "network culture," where the speed of information flow and the drive for social validation push individuals to take increasingly greater risks. The more extreme the action, the greater the potential to go viral. Conversely, the more viral the action, the greater the social pressure from netizens condemning it. Another motorcycle community member added:

"Nowadays, many young people are willing to do anything for content. They see someone else's video go viral, then they try to imitate it with even higher risks. Police often only act after the video goes viral. So the challenge is not only on the road but also how to avoid police and still go viral." (S, head of a Bandung motorcycle community, personal communication, March 10, 2026)

In the case of the viral video of a motorcyclist cutting off an ambulance in Jakarta, netizens not only condemned the rider but also urged police to take action. After the video was viewed 5 million times in 48 hours, traffic police moved and issued a public apology (detikNews, 2025). This shows that social media has become a double-edged mechanism of social control: encouraging risky behavior while simultaneously punishing it.

4.3 "Solidarity" in Motorcycle Rider Communities

This study also found that the value of "solidarity" is an important aspect narrated in social media content about motorcyclists. This solidarity manifests in two main forms: *solidarity in convoys* and *post-accident solidarity*. A member of a big bike community in Surabaya explained:

"A convoy is not just riding together. There are codes to follow: the leader's position, the rear guard, hand signals for turning or stopping. If a member breaks down, everyone stops and helps. That's an unwritten solidarity. Social media makes this solidarity visible and appreciated by members from other cities." (T, member of Surabaya big bike community, personal communication, February 25, 2026)

In viral convoy videos, this solidarity is displayed through togetherness, compactness, and mutual assistance. Solidarity narratives are built through community hashtags (#nmaxid, #varioindonesia, #mogeindonesia), stickers or community attributes on motorcycles, and mutually supportive comments among members. A motorcycle community observer added:

"Interestingly, solidarity also emerges after accidents. When a video of a motorcycle accident goes viral, often members of other motorcycle communities, even from different brands, immediately mobilize. They pray, look for information about the victim, and raise funds. This shows that there is a strong inner bond among motorcyclists as a group equally vulnerable on the road." (R, motorcycle community researcher, personal communication, February 28, 2026)

In the analysis of comment sections of viral accident videos on TikTok, many comments were found such as "Get well soon, bro," "I'm from community X, my condolences," or "Let's help with donations." However, this solidarity also has a dark side. In some cases, communities unite to defend a member involved in a conflict with other road users, which worsens the situation and triggers long debates on social media.

4.4 Traffic Police in Social Media Narratives: Between Law Enforcer, Target of Criticism, and Part of the Performance

This study found that traffic police appear in social media narratives in three often overlapping roles: as law enforcers, as targets of public criticism, and as part of the social performance itself. A traffic police officer serving in Jakarta shared his experience:

"Now we have to be aware that at any moment a phone camera is pointed at us. When we issue a ticket, we have to be very careful because one wrong gesture can go viral and damage the corps' image. On the other hand, we also use social media for education. The @korlantaspolri account often uploads safety advisories. But indeed, what goes viral the most is usually the negative stuff." (IPDA F, Traffic Unit officer, Polda Metro Jaya, personal communication, March 1, 2026)

As law enforcers, official police accounts such as @divisihumaspolri and @korlantaspolri actively upload educational content on traffic safety, the #JalanBerkeselamatan campaign, and documentation of Operation Zebra. However, as targets of criticism, viral videos showing police asking for bribes, spitting on drivers, or using strobes and sirens excessively spread even faster. A road safety activist commented:

"The 'Tot Tot Wuk Wuk' movement on social media is a public satire of police who arbitrarily use strobes and sirens for personal or official convoy interests. This shows that the public is no longer afraid to openly criticize the police. And because it goes viral, the police are forced to respond." (W, road safety activist, personal communication, March 3, 2026)

Additionally, traffic police also appear as part of the social performance itself. In some viral videos, traffic police who reprimand riders in a funny way or join in dancing while managing traffic actually receive praise. A TikTok user who uploaded a video of a traffic police officer dancing at a red light commented, "Cool police, very humane!" (TikTok, 2025). This shows that the public responds positively to police who show a humorous and approachable side. The ambivalence of the traffic police role reflects the institutional challenge for Polri in the digital era: how to enforce the law firmly while building a positive image in the eyes of a public that is always watching through phone lenses. In Goffman's (1963) framework, traffic police must manage their *front stage* (performance before the public) and *back stage* (preparation behind the scenes) very carefully, because phone cameras can blur the boundary between the two.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that in the digital era, the highway has transformed into a social stage where motorcycle riders not only travel but also perform, are judged, and are remembered by the online public. Based on netnographic analysis of viral videos, comment sections, and official police content, three main cultural values are narrated and negotiated through social media.

First, the value of "speed" functions as a symbol of social status, masculinity, and freedom, displayed through actions such as rolling on toll roads, extreme cornering, and illegal racing. Speed is also associated with specific motorcycle brands (Nmax, Vario, big bikes) as identity markers. *Second*, the value of "challenge" is represented as a risk performance deliberately recorded for public consumption. Social validation mechanisms (likes, comments, shares, #fyp) encourage riders to take ever greater risks for popularity, but simultaneously create public pressure that punishes dangerous behavior. *Third*, the value of "solidarity" manifests in bonds of togetherness in convoys (with unwritten codes and mutual assistance) and in post-accident support (prayers, donations, visits). Behind inter-community competition, there is a strong inner bond among motorcyclists as a group equally vulnerable.

This study also finds that traffic police appear in these narratives in three often overlapping roles: as law enforcers (through educational content and safety campaigns), as targets of public criticism (through viral videos showing officer violations), and as part of the social performance itself (through humorous or humane interactions that actually receive praise). This role ambivalence reflects Polri's institutional challenge in the era of participatory surveillance, where every gesture can be recorded and go viral within hours.

Research limitations must be acknowledged. *First*, the data sources are entirely from the digital world (viral videos and comment columns). This study could not directly observe interactions on the highway that were not recorded by cameras, nor interview in depth the motorcyclists involved in viral videos due to access and ethical constraints. *Second*, this study focused only on content that went viral, which may not represent the entirety of motorcycle rider traffic behavior in Indonesia. Most everyday behavior that is not recorded or does not go viral may have different characteristics not revealed in this study. *Third*, this study did not systematically distinguish between different types of social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube), which may have different audience demographics, interaction norms, algorithms, and virality mechanisms, so cross-platform generalization should be done cautiously. *Fourth*, the limited research timeframe (January–March 2026) meant that this study could not track changes in narrative patterns longitudinally, for example whether after a fatal accident goes viral there are significant changes in uploaded content or public perception. *Fifth*, this study did not involve direct interviews with content creators (riders who upload their own actions) for safety and ethical reasons, so understanding of the subjective motivations behind content production remains limited.

Significance of this research lies in three areas. *First*, theoretically, this study integrates Goffman's (1963, 1967) symbolic interactionism, Castells' (2009) social network theory, and digital anthropology (Kozinets, 2015; Pink, 2021) to analyze traffic behavior as a cultural phenomenon in the social media era—an approach still rarely used in transportation studies in Indonesia. The main theoretical contribution is the development of the concept of the "highway as a social stage" that transcends the understanding of physical infrastructure to become an arena of identity performance and value negotiation. *Second*, methodologically, this study demonstrates the use of netnography to access data on traffic behavior that is difficult to observe directly (sporadic, risky, scattered), and shows how social media comment sections can become rich data sources for understanding emic cultural values of society. *Third*, practically, this research is expected to provide input for traffic police in designing more effective and culturally sensitive public communication strategies, and for transportation policymakers in understanding that a pure law enforcement approach is insufficient without understanding the meaning of "speed" and "challenge" for motorcyclists.

Recommendations based on the research findings are as follows. *First*, for the Indonesian Traffic Police (Polri), it is recommended not to rely solely on one-way, serious safety campaigns, but to use social media platforms to actively dialogue with motorcycle communities. Police can use hashtags, positive challenges (e.g., #AmanSampaiTujuan), or creative content that involves motorcyclists as

part of the solution, not just as objects of law enforcement. Additionally, police need to increase self-awareness training about the potential of public recording, because one wrong gesture can damage public trust built over years. *Second*, for transportation policymakers (Ministry of Transportation, local Transportation Offices), it is recommended to consider cultural aspects in designing traffic safety strategies. Approaches that focus solely on law enforcement and increased sanctions without understanding the meaning of "speed" and "challenge" for motorcyclists may not be effective. Instead, approaches that involve motorcycle communities in campaign design and appreciate recorded and viral orderly behavior can be more sustainable alternatives. *Third*, for social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube), it is recommended to be more proactive in moderating content that explicitly displays dangerous actions endangering oneself and others. Algorithms that currently tend to promote controversial content due to high engagement rates should be evaluated so as not to inadvertently encourage risky behavior. *Fourth*, for future researchers, direct ethnographic fieldwork (participant observation) is recommended to complement findings from virtual ethnography, as well as cross-city or cross-country comparative studies to understand how local context (e.g., infrastructure, culture, policy) influences cultural narratives about traffic. Longitudinal research is also needed to track changes in narrative patterns over time, for example before and after major incidents or policy changes. Furthermore, research involving in-depth interviews with content creators (riders who upload their own actions) while respecting ethics and safety would be very valuable for understanding the subjective motivations behind risky content production

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