GLOBAL SOUTH
R E V I E W

Editor's Note

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Welcome to the latest volume of Global South Review! This edition invites readers to explore the evolving dynamics of power, representation, and agency in the Global South. Through these articles, our contributors unravel the intricate connections between governance, culture, technology, and economy, shedding light on how these forces shape and are shaped by the unique contexts of the Global South. Together, they paint a picture of a region that is not just a passive recipient of global trends but an active participant in shaping its trajectory amidst the complexities of globalization and digitalization.

The articles in this issue are united by a shared commitment to understanding how trust, identity, and innovation intersect in ways that profoundly impact policy and society. Ellie Ophelia Delviolin and George Morris William Tangka open the discussion with a rigorous analysis of trust and governance in the Indo-Pacific, using Albert Hirschman's framework of exit, voice, and loyalty. Their work highlights the delicate balance between public satisfaction and governmental performance, offering invaluable insights for policymakers striving to foster a more engaged citizenry. This exploration of trust sets the foundation for examining governance beyond the domestic sphere, connecting seamlessly to Jeniar Nelsus Mooy's study of Indonesia's symbolic narratives in its aid to Pacific Island Countries. Mooy critiques how claims of solidarity and mutual respect in South-South cooperation are leveraged for political ends, revealing a strategic interplay between governance and symbolic diplomacy.

From governance, the volume transitions into the cultural realm, where narratives wield significant power in shaping societal norms and perceptions. Fathanaditya Rianto's exploration of video games as ideological tools offers a fascinating perspective on how digital entertainment products perpetuate or challenge dominant narratives of the Global South. His analysis serves as a reminder of how cultural artifacts can act as subtle yet powerful vehicles for political and social commentary, an idea that finds resonance in Addine Fithrianne Hidayat's study on Boys' Love television series in Thailand. Hidayat demonstrates how these shows have contributed to the normalization and acceptance of LGBT rights, underscoring the role of media representation in challenging discriminatory norms and fostering inclusivity.

The technological and economic dimensions of these discussions are equally compelling. Hayuningrum Citra Maharsi examines the rapid growth of digital payment systems in Indonesia, highlighting the transformative potential of such innovations for small and medium enterprises. Yet, as her analysis reveals, these systems also risk exacerbating regional disparities if access remains uneven. A more structural critique is offered by Muhd Rafli

Ramadhan Warganegara, who scrutinizes cryptocurrencies through the lens of Marxist and Dependency Theory, exposing how these assets can reinforce global inequalities despite their promise of decentralization.

What emerges across these articles is a cohesive narrative of transformation, where trust, technology, and cultural representation are central to the agency of Global South actors. The governance studies illustrate how trust and symbolic narratives can influence both domestic and international relations. In parallel, the cultural and technological analyses show how these domains act as battlegrounds for representation and equity, offering opportunities for empowerment while revealing the risks of entrenching inequalities.

Through this volume, we aim to deepen your understanding of the dynamic and multifaceted realities of the Global South. The discussions herein remind us that agency is never static—it evolves through the interplay of local, regional, and global forces. We hope this issue sparks critical conversations and inspires further exploration of the themes and insights it presents.

Happy reading!

Sincerely,

Mohtar Mas'oed – Editor in Chief
Suci Lestari Yuana – Managing Editor

GLOBAL SOUTH
REVIEW

Exit, Voice, and Loyalty in the Indo-Pacific:

Shaping Future Regional Policies

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This study investigates public behavior in Indo-Pacific countries, employing the Exit, Voice, and Loyalty framework. In an era marked by globalization and interconnectedness, citizen choices and actions in the Indo-Pacific region are increasingly influenced by global trends and international relations. Trust in government plays a pivotal role, affected by public scrutiny in an interconnected world and impacting trust levels. Life satisfaction, a reflection of individual well-being, mirrors government performance and is a critical factor. Quantitative analysis, including multinomial logistic regression, using data from the Asian Barometer Survey 2008 unveils noteworthy results. Lower trust in government reduced life satisfaction, and negative government assessments drive exit behavior, with a 15% increase in the likelihood of citizens choosing to exit when trust is low. Conversely, higher life satisfaction and positive government assessments increase the probability of loyalty behavior by 20%, while voice behavior likelihood decreases by 10%. These findings provide valuable insights into public behavior in the Indo-Pacific, emphasizing the roles of trust, life satisfaction, and government performance, supported by numerical evidence. These insights hold significance in the Indo-Pacific's ever-evolving global landscape, serving as a foundation for policymaking and decision-making. Policymakers and researchers can use this knowledge to enhance governance, promote societal well-being, and deepen citizen-government connections in the dynamic Indo-Pacific region.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific; Exit Voice and Loyalty Framework; life satisfaction; government performance; trust

Introduction

The advent of globalization has dramatically reshaped the socio-economic and political landscapes of the world (Friedman, T. 2005). As societies become increasingly interconnected, there is a marked shift in public perceptions and attitudes towards various aspects of life. This shift is influenced by a complex interplay of multiple factors, including lifestyle, international relations, public trust in government, and life satisfaction (Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. 2003; Diener, E., & Suh, E. 1997).

Lifestyle, which was once largely a local or regional matter, has now been significantly influenced by global trends and

patterns. Similarly, international relations have become a common concern among individuals, as decisions taken in one part of the world can have far-reaching implications in another (Held, D., & McGrew, A. 2007).

Parallelly, public trust in government has become a critical consideration. With an increasingly interconnected world, the scrutiny of government actions has heightened, impacting the level of trust individuals place in their government (Rothstein, B., & Stolle, D. 2008). Furthermore, life satisfaction, a key concern for policymakers worldwide, is often viewed as a measure of individual well-being (Diener, E., & Suh, E. 1997).

Notwithstanding the distinct endeavors in individual research pertaining to these facets, there exists a discernible imperative to comprehend their collective influence on public behavior. This necessity is accentuated by the heightened significance of elucidating the interplay of these variables, as it recurrently molds public responses in the domains of vocal expression, disengagement, and allegiance behaviors. Originating from the seminal work of Hirschman (1970), these responses delineate the manners in which individuals react to downturns in entities such as firms, organizations, and states. Their profound implications resonate prominently within the framework of a globalized societal context.

Despite the extensive research undertaken on discrete elements such as lifestyle, international relations, life satisfaction, and trust in government, there exists a notable paucity of studies exploring the collective repercussions of these factors on public behaviors encompassing voice, exit, and loyalty (Hirschman, A. O. 1970). Furthermore, the intricate interplay involving demographic factors in this nexus remains inadequately understood.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the influence of lifestyle, international relations, life satisfaction, trust in government, assessment of government performance, and demographic factors on the choice of public voice, exit, and loyalty behavior. This research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these factors interact to affect public attitude and decision-making.

The research intends to answer the following questions:
"How is the likelihood of citizens choosing voice behavior over exit or loyalty actions in Indo-Pacific countries?"

Understanding the societal view within governmental institutions in the Indo-Pacific holds significant importance as it allows for more effective and inclusive governance. Indo-Pacific societies are diverse, encompassing various cultures, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds. An illegal business is allowed by local police in Japan (Imamura 2013), and a Chinese man who make a government critics group that is nudging the new mayor election (Mori et. Al. 2012), shows that individual action range widely. The circumstances and outcomes of individual actions vary greatly.

By considering the societal perspective, policymakers can gain insights into the specific needs and aspirations of their citizens, ensuring that policies and decisions

are tailored to address their concerns. This approach fosters a sense of ownership, trust, and participation among the people, strengthening the legitimacy of the government and promoting social cohesion. Additionally, considering the societal view helps identify and address the challenges faced by marginalized groups, promoting inclusivity, and reducing disparities. Ultimately, incorporating the societal view leads to more responsive, equitable, and sustainable governance in the Indo-Pacific.

Exposure to Globalization

Globalization, as a broad concept, is defined by the increasing interconnectedness and interdependence of countries, causing remarkable transformations in socio-economic landscapes worldwide (Friedman, 2005). It has led to drastic changes in various aspects of social life, including economic processes, cultural exchanges, and policymaking. As Friedman (2005) elaborates, these changes have resulted in an increased compression of the world, with traditional geographical boundaries becoming less and less relevant.

Moreover, the phenomenon of globalization has engendered a complex entwining of local and global variables, resulting in the manifestation of consequential outcomes and decisions in one geographical realm exerting reverberating impacts across distant regions (Held & McGrew, 2007). This intricate interconnectivity underscores the heightened significance of comprehending international relations and fostering global awareness. Localized predicaments frequently emanate global repercussions, while overarching global trends wield considerable influence on local actualities.

Lifestyle and Attitudes Towards International Relations

The discernible impact of globalization on individual lifestyle preferences and perspectives on international relations is noteworthy. According to Inglehart & Norris (2003), lifestyle choices, traditionally influenced by local or regional factors, are now being significantly molded by overarching global trends and patterns. This paradigm shift in the perception and attitudes toward lifestyle has engendered a heightened sense of global identity, consequently altering individuals' perspectives on international relations.

The intricacies introduced by globalization have elevated international relations to a realm of personal concern for individuals worldwide. As posited by Held & McGrew (2007), the heightened interconnectedness fostered by globalization has bestowed upon international relations a pivotal role in the daily lives of individuals. Decisions or occurrences in distant geographical locations can exert direct or indirect ramifications on their lives. Hence, a nuanced understanding of international relations becomes imperative in navigating the contemporary global landscape.

Public Trust in Government

Public trust in government institutions has become increasingly significant in the discourse on public behavior in the context of an interconnected world. Rothstein &

Stolle (2008) underline that the perceived integrity and accountability of public officials greatly influence this trust. They further argue that the prevalence of corruption or lack of accountability can erode this trust, leading to public disapproval or protest.

The spread of information and the scrutiny of government actions, facilitated by digital media, have also heightened public expectations from government institutions. Thus, governments are under increased pressure to maintain transparency and accountability to retain public trust (Norris, 2001).

Life Satisfaction and Public Perception

Life satisfaction, regarded as a pivotal metric for individual well-being, exerts a noteworthy influence on public perception and behavior. According to Diener & Suh (1997), various socio-economic factors, encompassing income, employment, and health, significantly contribute to an individual's overall life satisfaction. Of particular significance is the discernible impact of government institutions' performance on life satisfaction, a facet that has been subjected to rigorous research.

The nexus between government performance and life satisfaction has been a focal point of scholarly inquiry. The consensus within the academic discourse suggests that the public's perception of good governance, characterized by accountability, transparency, and the effective delivery of public services, plays a pivotal role in enhancing life satisfaction (Diener & Suh, 1997).

Assessment of Government Performance

The assessment of government performance is a multidimensional process that involves the systematic evaluation and measurement of various aspects of government activities, policies, and outcomes. It helps in identifying strengths and weaknesses, setting benchmarks, informing policy decisions, and promoting accountability and transparency in government operations. By employing rigorous research methodologies and considering the key aspects discussed above, researchers can contribute to improving government performance and public service delivery.

Voice, Exit, and Loyalty Behavior

The theories of voice, exit, and loyalty behavior, first introduced by Hirschman (1970), offer a lens to analyze public reactions to dissatisfaction with organizations. "Voice" signifies the expression of dissatisfaction, "exit" symbolizes leaving the organization, and "loyalty" represents continued allegiance despite dissatisfaction.

Figure 1. Albert Hirschman's Exit, Voice, and Loyalty Model
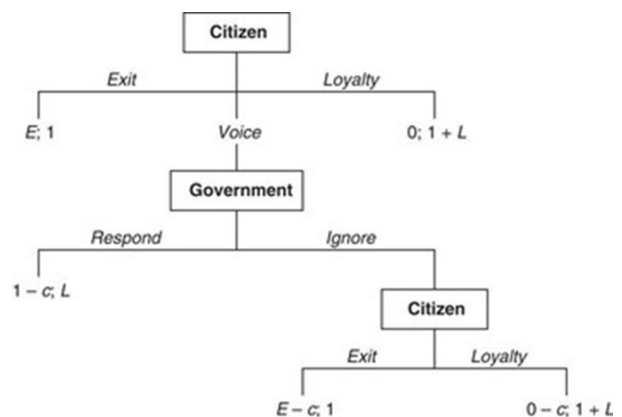
Hirschman's conceptualization of exit, voice, and loyalty, initially introduced within an organizational framework, underwent expansion to encompass broader societal and political contexts. This extended framework can be delineated into two distinct categories: society-centered and state-centered. The society-centered approach, akin to a bottom-up perspective, directs attention towards the grassroots level. In contrast, the state-centered approach assumes a top-down perspective, emphasizing the role of the state in shaping these dynamics.

Noteworthy is the historical prevalence of the state-centric approach within political theory, persisting even in contemporary democracies. This persistence prevails despite the advent of opinion polling, which facilitates the analysis of individual citizens' preferences across various domains such as business, politics, and media.

Interaction of Variables and Public Behavior

Despite the comprehensive individual research endeavors focused on factors such as lifestyle, international relations, trust in government, life satisfaction, assessment of government performance, and demographic factors, a notable lacuna exists in the understanding of their collective interactions shaping public behavior. The current study endeavors to address this gap by delving into the synergistic impact of these variables on voice, exit, and loyalty behaviors. Through this investigation, the aim is to provide a more holistic comprehension of the intricate dynamics that arise when these factors converge, contributing valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge.

Methodology

This research utilizes a quantitative approach to investigate the influence of lifestyle, international relations, life satisfaction, trust in government, assessment of government performance, and demographic factors on the choice of public voice, exit, and loyalty behavior. The quantitative method was chosen due to its objectivity and ability to handle large amounts of data, which is crucial for generalizing the results to the larger population (Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. 2017).

The dataset used in this research is from face-to-face survey result data of the AsiaBarometer Survey 2008 project. The result is collected in an Excel file and the result is to be extracted based on the codebook provided in the project. The countries included in the dataset will be the 3 major countries in Indo-Pacific countries: China, Japan, and India.

The dependent variable in this study is the choice of public voice, exit, and loyalty behavior. This variable is operationalized using the responses to the relevant questions in the dataset. In the survey, respondents will be asked a main question:
"What should a person who needs a government permit do if the response of the official handling the application is: "Just be patient and wait?""

From the Hirschman framework of exit, voice, and loyalty, the investigators have amalgamated six answers into three catego-

ries: "use connections", "write a letter" and "bribe an official" are amalgamated into a voice, "nothing can be done" and "wait and hope" are amalgamated into loyalty, and "act without a permit" as an exit. Thus, the response patterns move closer to the Hirschman framework. The dependent variable will be measured on a nominal scale.

The independent variables include lifestyle, international relations, life satisfaction, trust in government, assessment of government performance, and demographic factors such as age, gender, education, and income. These variables are also obtained from the responses in the dataset. The independent variable will be measured on a nominal scale (binary scale) from 1 to 0 value.

Lifestyles are relevant in determining whether to choose exit, voice, or loyalty. Citizen lifestyle will be capturing the number of public utilities the household of the respondents have of the following public utilities: public water supply; electricity; liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), piped gas; fixed-line phone; mobile phone; facsimile; cable TV.

Exposure to globalization includes their status of living internationally (including international friends and foreign travel). It counts the number of items that apply to the respondent in question: Which, if any, of the following statements apply to you? The six items are the following: (1) A member of my family or a relative lives in another country; (2) I have traveled abroad at least three times in the past three years, on holiday or for business purposes; (3) I have friends from another country who are in [YOUR COUNTRY]; (4) I often watch foreign-produced

programs on TV; (5) I often communicate with people in other countries via the Internet or email; (6) My job involves contact with organizations or people in other countries.

Satisfaction with aspects of daily life examines respondents' satisfaction level with their housing, friendships, marriage (if married), standard of living, household income, health, education, job, and neighbors. The coding is as follows: Very satisfied = 1; Somewhat satisfied = 2; Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied = 3; Somewhat dissatisfied = 4; Very dissatisfied = 5

Trust in social institutions examines trust in state and local government as the nearest government institution to citizens' daily lives. Trust the state and local government takes on the values from 1 to 4 for question: "Please indicate to what extent you trust the central government, state and local government, legal system, and parliament or congress to operate in the best interests of society. If you don't know what to reply or have no particular opinion, please say so." The coding is as follows: Trust a lot = 1; Trust to a degree = 2; Don't really trust = 3; Don't trust at all = 4.

Assessment of government performance includes political corruption that takes on the values from 1 to 4 for the question: How well do you think the [YOUR COUNTRY'S] government is dealing with political corruption, the economy, human rights, and crime? The coding is as follows: Very well = 1 Fairly well = 2; Not so well = 3; Not well at all = 4.

Demographics examine such items as gender, age, level of education, and income.

Female = 1 if the respondent is female; 0 if male. Age is the age of the respondent, then categorized into 5 groups. Level of education is the highest level of education the respondent completed. The variable takes on the values from 1(primary/lower secondary) to 3(higher than upper secondary). Income is the level of household income of the respondent. The variable takes on the values from 1(low) to 3(high).

Multinomial logistic regression is the primary statistical technique used in this study. This method is well-suited to investigate the relationship between one nominal dependent variable (voice, exit, and loyalty behavior) and multiple independent variables (lifestyle, international relations, life satisfaction, trust in government, assessment of government performance, and demographic factors).

Furthermore, the use of multinomial logistic regression allows for the assessment of the relative importance of each independent variable in predicting the choice of public behavior. The statistical software R is used for conducting the analysis.

The hypotheses proposed in Chapter 1 will be tested using the multinomial logistic regression model. The model's coefficient estimates and their statistical significance will provide insights into the influence of the independent variables on the choice of public behavior.

Experiments and Results

The data utilized in this study were derived from the AsiaBarometer Survey 2008 project. We began by preparing the dataset for analysis—this involved cleaning the data, addressing missing values, and recoding categorical variables. Following data preparation, we applied a multinomial logistic regression model to investigate the influence of various factors on public behavior in terms of voice, exit, and loyalty actions.

We carried out a multinomial logistic regression analysis using lifestyle, international relations, life satisfaction, assessment of government performance, trust in government, and demographic factors as predictors. The dependent variable was the public's choice of behavior: voice, exit, or loyalty.

The multinomial logistic regression models were fitted using both mlogit and multinom functions to investigate the relationships between various predictor variables and the three-level response variable. The predictor variables included lifestyle, globalization, life satisfaction, trust in government, assessment of government, gender, age, education, and income.

The results of the mlogit model indicated that life satisfaction, trust in government, globalization, age, and assessment of government were significant predictors when comparing outcomes 2 (exit) and 3 (loyalty) to the reference outcome (voice). The less trust in government led to higher log odds of the response being in exit compared to voice.

For loyalty compared to the reference voice, lifestyle, globalization, life satisfaction, age, and assessment of government were significant predictors. Increased in lifestyle, increased in life satisfaction, higher age, less exposure to globalization, and a more positive assessment of government were associat-

ed with higher log odds of being loyal.

The multinom model yielded similar results, further validating the findings from the mlogit model. The estimates for both models were similar, with life satisfaction, trust in government, and assessment of government being particularly notable predictors for differentiating between the outcomes.

Figure 2. Regression Results

		vel		
Predictors	Odds Ratios	CI	p	Response
(Intercept)	0.02	0.00 – 0.10	**<0.001**	2
lifestyle	2.09	0.35 – 12.41	0.417	2
globalization	1.21	0.31 – 4.76	0.786	2
life satisfaction	2.92	0.69 – 12.41	0.146	2
trust government	6.15	1.59 – 23.81	**0.009**	2
assess government	0.40	0.12 – 1.33	0.135	2
gender	1.01	0.65 – 1.56	0.973	2
age	1.90	0.97 – 3.75	0.063	2
edu	1.17	0.60 – 2.29	0.643	2
income	0.55	0.29 – 1.03	0.063	2
(Intercept)	0.50	0.28 – 0.87	**0.015**	3
lifestyle	2.16	1.11 – 4.18	**0.023**	3
globalization	0.56	0.33 – 0.95	**0.033**	3
life satisfaction	3.49	2.03 – 6.00	**<0.001**	3
trust government	1.54	0.94 – 2.53	0.089	3
assess government	0.36	0.24 – 0.55	**<0.001**	3
gender	1.09	0.93 – 1.28	0.278	3
age	1.85	1.43 – 2.38	**<0.001**	3
edu	1.07	0.84 – 1.37	0.575	3
income	1.01	0.81 – 1.25	0.931	3
Observations	2699			
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.102 / 0.102			

It's important to remember that while these predictors were statistically significant, the practical importance of these effects would need further investigation. More specifically, positive coefficients indicate an increase in the log odds of the outcome (relative to the reference outcome) for a unit increase in the predictor, and negative coeffi-

cients indicate a decrease.

The R-squared for the mlogit model was 0.025041, indicating that the model explains about 2.50% of the variance in the outcomes. The AIC from the multinom model was 4318.823, providing another measure of the model fit taking into account model complexity. Lower AIC values indicate a better-fitting model. Further model diagnostics and analyses will be required to evaluate the model fit and assumptions fully.

These findings provide valuable insights into the relationships between various socio-economic factors and the multi-category response variable, paving the way for further analysis and research in this field.

Figure 3. Log-Odds Coefficient
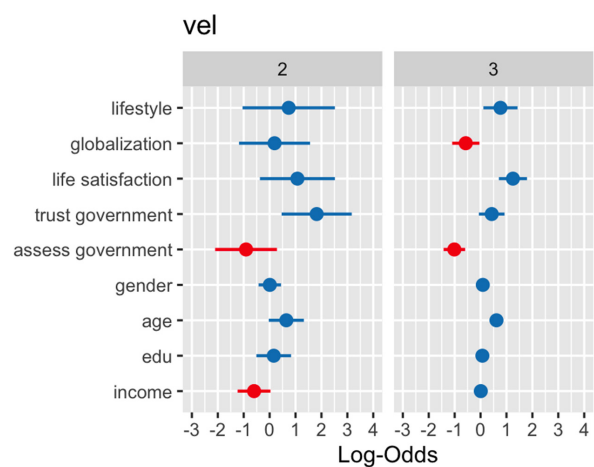
In the plot of the log-odds coefficients, we found a significant negative effect of trust in government on the likelihood of citizens choosing to exit over voice, particularly in Indo-Pacific countries. This suggests that lower levels of trust in government institutions increased the odds of citizens opting for exit behavior.

Figure 4. Odds Ratio Coefficient
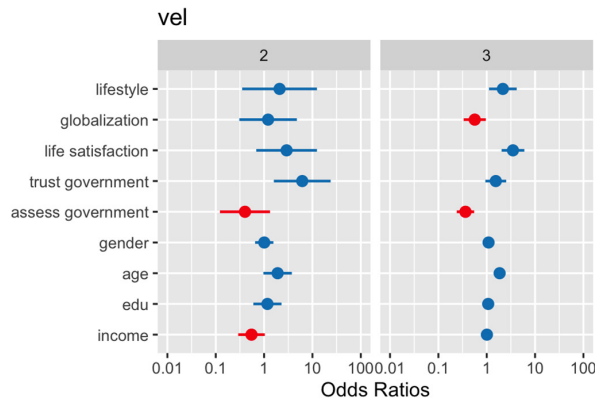
In the plot of the odds ratio coefficients, we found similar results, with lower trust in government significantly increasing the likelihood of citizens choosing exit behavior over voice or loyalty actions.

Figure 5. Probability Plots of Life Satisfaction Variable

Figure 6. Probability Plots of Assessment Towards Government Variable
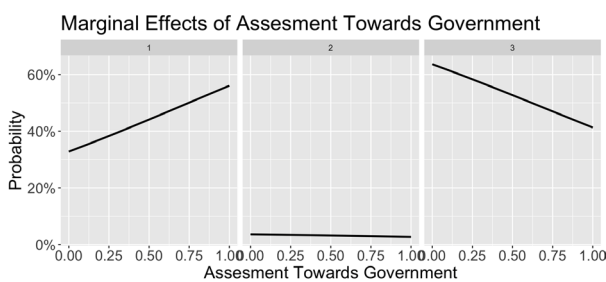
We also produced probability plots for the variables of life satisfaction and assessment towards the government. These plots revealed that as life satisfaction and positive assessment of government performance increased, the probability of citizens choosing loyalty behavior also increased. In another way, as life satisfaction and positive assessment of government performance increased, the probability of citizens choosing voice behavior decreased.

Discussion of Results

The outcomes of the analysis affirm our initial hypotheses, revealing a robust influence of various factors on public behavior. Trust in government, life satisfaction, lifestyle, globalization, age, and the evaluation of government performance were identified as significant contributors to these behavioral patterns. Notably, diminished levels of trust in government correlated with an increased propensity for citizens to adopt exit behavior. Conversely, an advanced lifestyle, elevated life satisfaction, higher age, limited exposure to globalization, and a favorable assessment of government performance were associated with an augmented likelihood of citizens exhibiting loyalty. These findings contribute valuable insights to the understanding of the nuanced interplay of these factors in shaping public behavior.

The findings significantly contribute to an enhanced comprehension of the determinants impacting public behavior within Indo-Pacific countries. Specifically, the results underscore the pivotal role played by public trust in government and life satisfaction in

influencing citizen responses to government institutions. These insights illuminate the nuanced dynamics that underlie the interactions between individuals and governmental entities in the Indo-Pacific region, thereby offering valuable perspectives for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to navigate and comprehend the intricacies of public behavior within this geographical context.

In this study, we aimed to investigate the influence of various factors on public behavior in Indo-Pacific countries, specifically focusing on the choices of voice, exit, and loyalty. By analyzing data from the AsiaBarometer Survey 2008 project and conducting multinomial logistic regression analysis, we obtained valuable insights into the relationship between key variables and public behavior. These findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics involved in shaping citizen responses to government institutions.

Implications and Contributions

The results of this study have significant implications for policymakers and researchers in the fields of sociology, psychology, and political science. Understanding the factors that influence public behavior is crucial for designing effective governance strategies and policies. By recognizing the role of trust in government, life satisfaction, and assessment of government performance, policymakers can tailor their approaches to address the concerns and needs of citizens.

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the combined impact of various factors on public behavior in Indo-Pacific countries. By utilizing the AsiaBarometer Survey 2008 data, we offer insights specific to the Indo-Pacific context, which can inform decision-making processes and policy formulation in the region.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study has shed light on the relationship between trust in government, life satisfaction, assessment of government performance, and public behavior, there are opportunities for further research. Future studies could explore additional variables and their influence on public behavior, such as political ideology, media exposure, and social networks. Moreover, longitudinal studies can provide a deeper understanding of how these factors evolve and their long-term impact on public behavior.

Moreover, broadening the scope of this research to encompass diverse regions or countries would facilitate comparative analysis, allowing for the exploration of cultural and contextual variations in public behavior. This comparative approach holds the potential to enrich our understanding of the intricate dynamics operating within distinct socio-political environments. By examining how these factors manifest and interact across varied cultural contexts, scholars and policymakers can gain deeper insights into the nuanced influences that shape public behavior globally. This expansion of the research framework promises to enhance the applicability and generalizability of the findings, thereby contributing to a more robust

and nuanced comprehension of the complexities inherent in public behavior across diverse settings.

Conclusion

In summary, this study has shed light on the intricate interplay among trust in government, life satisfaction, assessment of government performance, and public behavior within Indo-Pacific countries. The results underscore the significance of these factors in molding citizens' decisions regarding voice, exit, and loyalty. These insights provide a valuable foundation for policymakers and researchers to formulate evidence-based strategies aimed at bolstering trust, enhancing citizen satisfaction, and fostering positive evaluations of government performance.

A deeper understanding of the intricacies of public behavior enables societies to cultivate stronger bonds between citizens and their governments. This, in turn, paves the way for more effective governance and contributes to overall societal well-being. The implications of this study extend beyond academic discourse, offering practical guidance for those engaged in governance and policy development within the complex socio-political landscape of the Indo-Pacific region.

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Symbolic Claims in Indonesia's Aid to Pacific Island Countries

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Within the discourse of aid in the global South, where a developing country provides foreign aid to another developing country, emerged discussions on the extent to which the symbolic claims presented by the donor to the public (e.g. the aid as being driven by the donor's sense of mutual respect, horizontality, inclusivity, and solidarity with the recipient) reflect the real motivations behind the aid. Using the case study of Indonesia's aid to Pacific Island countries (PIC), this research assesses the relations between symbolic claims and critical aid drivers. This research uses a qualitative method and secondary data, which rely mainly on official statements and publications of the Indonesian government. This research found that whilst symbolic claims in Indonesia's aid narratives could strengthen the sense of Southern solidarity and identity with PIC – which is in line with the spirit of South-South empowerment that Indonesia has been championing since the Asia-Africa Conference in 1955, these claims are used mainly to obscure Indonesia's internal political-security motive. The symbolic claims mask the critical political driver of the aid, which is closely related to Indonesia's interest in maintaining its sovereignty over West Papua province and influencing the stance of PIC about this issue.

Keywords: aid; Global South; symbolic claims; solidarity; Indonesia-PIC relations

Introduction

As a developing country, Indonesia has been among the significant foreign aid recipients in the world. In 2019, for example, Indonesia was Australia's second largest foreign aid recipient, with approximately USD 4 billion (Massola & Rompies, 2019). In October 2019, just a few months after the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) conveyed a petition to the United Nations Human Rights Chief demanding severe attention given to the issue of West Papua's independence from Indonesia, the Indonesian government for the first time launched the Indonesian AID — a government body tasked to manage Indonesia's endowment fund and distribute it as an aid to other developing countries (Indonesian MoFA, 2019). From 2020 to 2023, two PIC[1], namely Fiji and Palau, are among the

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1 PIC spread across three sub-regions, namely Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Melanesia is located on the eastern side of Indonesia and consists of countries such as Fiji, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Salomon Island and Papua New Guinea. Micronesia comprises small countries: Nauru, Palau, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, the Marianas, and the Caroline Islands. Polynesia is located in the east-central region of Oceania. It consists of countries such as the Hawaiian Islands, Easter Island, Cook Islands, Samoan Islands, Marquesas Islands, Niue Island, and

top five largest recipients of aid distributed by Indonesian AID. The amount of aid delivered to PIC since 2019 amounted to USD 37 million, or around 30 per cent of the total aid distributed by Indonesian AID to developing countries in the world in this period (Indonesian AID, 2023).

The significant amount of aid given by Indonesia to the PIC amidst the apparent support by some of them at the UN forums to investigate the West Papuan independence issue prompted questions among some experts on whether the aid was part of Indonesia's more extensive diplomatic strategy to strengthen relations with PIC and influence their view on the West Papua issue (Darmawan, 2022). The Indonesian government, however, strongly emphasized that Indonesia's aid to the PIC, just as its aid to other developing countries in the world (e.g. aid to Palestine or Myanmar), is driven by a strong sense of equality, solidarity, and mutual respect with other countries in the global South. Aid to PIC is also provided to assist these countries in facing common global challenges, such as climate change (Wardhani & Dugis, 2020).

In 2012, Mawdsley argued that aid in South-South Cooperation (SSC) is mainly driven by the donor's national interests, which supersede its intention to jointly address common challenges or lighten the development burdens of other developing countries. These interests, however, are obscured under the symbolic claims that a Southern donor often presents to the world (e.g., the

aid is driven by a sense of solidarity, equality, shared identity and challenges with other countries in the global South). These claims mask the real motivation behind the aid but are presented to the public to create a positive image of the donor (Mawdsley, 2012). Contrary to Mawdsley's argument, Ndlovu and Tiara (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Tafira, 2018), reflecting on aid from Brazil to countries in Africa, argued that foreign aid in SSC is strongly driven by a spirit of solidarity and shared goal among donor and recipient to shift centres of economic and political power from the global North to the global South.

The contention over the state of symbolic claims in aid in the global South and the extent to which it reflects the critical drivers of the aid prompted the author to conduct this research. The main research question this research attempts to answer is "What is the relation between symbolic claims in Indonesia's aid to PIC and the real motivation for the aid?". The author will attempt to identify symbolic claims used by Indonesia and interpret their functionality concerning possible key drivers of aid, especially West Papua's independence issue. This research will reveal which key drivers are unfolded or strengthened through the symbolic claims and which are obscured.

While previous research has assessed symbolic narratives in aid in the global South, they focus mainly on aid from a BRICS member to countries in Africa. Research by Cabral & Shankland (2013), for example, evaluates how the narrative of aid as being

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Tonga (Foster & West, 2023).

driven by the sense of "solidarity" in Brazil's aid to Mozambique is used to mask the real motivation of the aid, which is to improve Brazil's trade relations with Mozambique, especially in the agricultural sector. The research does not incorporate political, security or social factors as factors that could be masked under the symbolic narratives. Another research by Doman and Pryke (2017) assesses the development of aid to PIC in the last two decades, with a focus on aid from traditional global North donors, such as Australia and New Zealand, thus overlooking the recent development of aid from non-traditional donors (especially non-BRICS member such as Indonesia) to the Pacific. Research on Indonesia's aid to PIC, such as the one by Wardhani and Dugis (2020), focuses on ethnic similarities as a possible cultural driver behind Indonesia's aid to PIC, thus absent in evaluating the symbolic dimensions of the aid and its relations to possible political-security or economic drivers of the aid. This research, therefore, will fill the gap by focusing on symbolic claims in Indonesia's aid to PIC, especially after the establishment of Indonesian AID, and its relations with the real motivation of the aid.

This paper will use a conceptual framework built upon previous literature on symbolic claims in aid in the global South, including Mawdsley (2012) and critical drivers of aid and Lancaster (Lancaster, 2007). The methodology used in this research is qualitative, with secondary data collection. The paper will outline findings related to symbolic claims in Indonesia's aid to PIC and possible real motivations behind the aid before analyzing the relationship between the two and how this research can contribute to the broader literature on symbolic and discursive dimensions of aid in the global South.

Literature Review
Symbolic Claims in Aid in the Global South

Previous literature discusses narratives used by donors to aid developing countries. For example, Nye (2005, p.20) argued that developed nations used symbolic gestures such as portraying the aid as being driven by a sense of altruism to enhance its reputation on the global stage. Milner (1999), on the other hand, looked at how symbolic claims are influenced by domestic politics. She highlighted how claims such as aid driven by developed countries' concern towards human rights in recipient countries are shaped by their internal politics, which prioritises the promotion of democracy.

While Nye (2004) and Milner's (1998) arguments on symbolic gestures and claims focus primarily on aid from a developed country to a developing country, Mawdsley (2012) looked at the use of symbolic claims in the global South, where a developing country provides aid to another developing country. She viewed symbolic claims as a set of narratives a Southern donor uses to describe what drives its aid to the recipient. The claims often used by the Southern donor include aid driven by solidarity, equality, mutual interest, shared experience, and a spirit of win-win cooperation. The donor reiterates the claims in its official statements, publications and documents, which are disseminated to the public. For this writing, the

author will use the concept and definition of symbolic claims presented by Mawdsley as it suits the nature of Indonesia's aid to PIC (i.e. aid from a Southern donor to a Southern country), and it focuses on how narratives are deployed to create certain impressions of the donor.

Mawdsley (2012) argued that symbolic claims in aid in the global South could strengthen the donor and recipient's "Southern" identity. The symbolic claims can accentuate the sense of shared experience among the donor and recipient as fellow "victims" of repression by the West during the colonialism era and the current unfair international system, thus deepening the sense of Southern solidarity among the two. In some cases, such as in aid from China to African countries, the symbolic claim of "mutual benefit" is used to openly reflect the donor's expectations for the aid to positively impact its economic and trade relations with the recipient (Ibid.).

However, symbolic claims can also obscure donors' national interests. According to Mawdsley (2012), narratives of the aid as being driven by a sense of equality, mutual respect and shared identity with the recipient are often promoted to hide the donor's real political-economic motives behind the aid. The symbolic claims can also mask the development gap between the donor and recipient despite both countries' status as developing countries. In the case of China's aid to countries in Africa, for example, the claims blur the reality of an imbalance of power between donor and recipient and the donor's "superior" position relative to the recipient

(Ibid.). According to Mawdsley (2012), symbolic claims in aid in the global South often hide the donor's intention to augment a sense of "national virility" and to restore national honour through its status as a "donor".

In addition to Mawdsley (2012), other literature has looked at relations between symbolic narratives and donor's national interests. For instance, Campbell (1992, p.61) examines how language in foreign policy discourse represents a donor's national identity. He highlighted how the United States often uses narratives such as masculinity and moral righteousness to justify its intervention in the Middle East. Hansen (2006, p.32) went further by looking at the Bosnian War, where the portrayal of victims through images and narratives influenced the international community to intervene and assist the victims of the conflict. Bleiker (2000), corresponding to Hansen (2006), underscored how narratives could be used to counter existing discourse and dominant ideologies, such as in the case of SSC, where narratives are used to embolden the "Southern" identity and sense of self-empowerment.

Within the broader discourse of symbolism in International Relations (IR) itself, some literature has discussed how symbolic claims shape diplomacy and the extent to which emphasis on the global South creates a distinct view of symbolism in IR. Leheny (1999, p.248), observing the role of historical narratives in Japan's diplomacy pre-World War II, argued that symbols and gestures could be used to shape perceptions of its legitimacy and authority on the global stage. Faizullaev (2013), in accord with Leheny

(1999), argued that symbolism could be strategically deployed to cultivate a developing country's relations, soft power, and geopolitical interests. Linklater (2013, p.72) dives deeper into the dynamics of symbolism in SSC and highlights how narratives are presented to promote an alternative vision of diplomacy that prioritizes dialogue, cooperation and mutual recognition instead of superiority and competition, which are sometimes found in North-South Cooperation (NSC).

Drivers of aid

Whilst it is essential to identify the symbolic claims and their discursive meaning in aid in the global South, it is equally important to analyze the possible vital drivers of the aid in order to assess the discrepancy between claims that the donor promotes to the public and the actual real motivations behind the aid. There has been previous research on possible drivers behind an aid. For example, research by Alesina and Dollar (2000) found that political interests become the primary factor that encourages a country to give aid. From 1970 to 1994, for example, aid by Japan to developing countries in the world was mainly given to countries that supported Japan's stance at UN forums. Another example was aid given by France in the 1990s, mainly distributed to France's former colonies in the global South to maintain its political influence on these countries (Ibid.). Riddel (2014), however, argued that in the 2000s, more countries started to give aid due to economic motivation. In 2006, for example, over 60 per cent of bilateral aid

from developed countries to landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) was tied to aid, which means the aid must be spent on goods or services provided by the donor countries (Ibid.).

While Alesina and Dollar (2000), as well as Riddel's (2014) research, provide ideas of possible key drivers behind aid, it does not look into more profound and more fundamental drivers of aid that could stem from domestic political arrangements of the donor countries. Lancaster (2007) argued that a decision to give aid results from interactions of ideas and values of the elites and the broader public in a donor country. Aid from China to countries in the East Asia region, for example, is strongly driven by the public perception and belief that the country needs to improve its leadership performance and increase its presence in the region (Ibid.).

Besides ideas, three other domestic political factors are influential to a country's decision to give aid, according to Lancaster (2007), namely opinions of the parliament, views of interest groups at the grassroots level in a donor country, and the role of aid agencies in a donor country (Lancaster, 2007). This research, therefore, will use Lancaster's (2007) concept of domestic political factors that shape aid, namely ideas (widely shared values and worldviews among elites and the public in a donor country), institutions (the way the governance structure, electoral rules, and parliaments' opinion influence the decision to give aid), interests (aspirations of private organizations and business communities), and agency (influence of a country's aid agency in decision-making process related to

aid). The author will attempt to assess which of these four factors is the most influential in Indonesia's aid to the PIC and its relations to symbolic claims used by Indonesia.

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative method with secondary data collection. Data used in this research are derived mainly from official Indonesian government documents and statements. Additional data is taken from grey literature (including news and commentaries). This research will first identify symbolic claims used in Indonesia's aid to the PIC before analyzing possible critical drivers behind the aid. The author will then assess the relations between the former and the latter to find out which motive(s) the Indonesian government tries to reveal through the symbolic claims and which is obscured. This research tends towards discourse analysis, focusing on specific texts or statements and analyzing their implicit and hidden meanings. This research intends to contribute to the broader literature of aid narratives in the global South and its functionality to donor countries' real motivation behind aid.

Discussion

Indonesia's foreign aid engagement

Indonesia has been an aid recipient since its independence in 1945. From 1945 to 1998, Indonesia mostly received aid from Western countries, including the United States, through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Indonesian MoFA, 2019). With the fall of President Soeharto in 1998, however, Indonesia under-

went major political-economic reform, and its foreign policy priority evolved to demand a more active role on the global stage. Indonesia then started to become a donor to other Southeast Asian countries. Since the era of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2010, Indonesia increasingly emphasized SSC as one of the key pillars of its foreign aid engagement, mainly through its role as a "donor" (Ibid.).

Previous research on Indonesia's aid and SSC, such as the one by Prabowo (2020), argued that Indonesia's commitment to Southern solidarity mainly shapes its engagement in a South-South and Triangular Cooperation. This argument corresponds with Engel (2017), who highlighted Indonesia's commitment to Southern solidarity and desire to assert itself as a prominent voice among developing nations and as a driver for its involvement in SSC. Winanti and Alvian (2019) dived deeper into the interplay between normative and material interests in Indonesia's approach to SSC. They argued that material interests (i.e. aid to pave the way for market access, investment opportunity and resource exchanges) and geopolitical interests (i.e. enhance presence in the global and regional arena) could also shape Indonesia's decision to provide aid.

Since its establishment in 2019 as a body that managed Indonesia's endowment fund and distributed it as an aid to other developing countries, Indonesian AID has disbursed over USD 37 million to PIC, making it the most significant aid recipient so far, followed by Nigeria (at USD 30 million) and India (at USD 7,83 million) (Indonesian

AID, 2023).

Indonesia's relations with the PIC

Indonesia has provided grants and technical assistance to PIC since 1999 (Wardhani & Dugis, 2020). The aid was distributed amidst political dynamics created by the ULMWP, which, since the 1990s, demanded the separation of West Papua from Indonesia (Wangge, 2021). In 2013, for example, several months after ULWMP applied for an observer status at Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG)[2], Indonesia's then president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, paid a visit to Fiji — the first visit by Indonesia's Head of State to the Pacific (Wyeth, 2018). During the visit, Indonesia pledged to increase the value of aid to Fiji to USD 1 billion. In 2016, a few months after seven PICs raised concerns at the 71st UN General Assembly over possible human rights abuse in West Papua, which some media reported as a result of the lobby by ULMWP, Indonesia distributed a significant amount of aid (including a grant worth USD 3 million) to Fiji (Ibid.).

In the following years, Indonesia provided capacity-building training to Samoa and Nauru. Indonesia's effort to promote closer relations with the PIC resulted in a more positive tone for several PICs regarding Indonesia's sovereignty in West Papua. In 2018, for example, at the 50th Anniversary of Nauru, the President of Nauru mentioned that his country fully supported each step taken by Indonesia to improve the prosperity of the people of West Papua (Wangge, 2021).

In 2019, after ULMWP conveyed a petition to the UN Human Rights Chief to demand recognition of West Papua's independence from Indonesia, Indonesia set up the Indonesian AID with an initial fund of USD 1 billion to be distributed to other developing countries. In 2020, Indonesia provided aid in the form of two boats to Nauru (worth USD 2,5 million), grant for school reconstruction in Fiji, and grant for Conference Hall construction in Tuvalu (Ibid.).

Symbolic Claims in Indonesia's Aid to PIC

According to the Director for Technical Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia (Indonesian MoFA) in 2017, Indonesia's aid to the PIC is driven by a sense of equality and solidarity, as well as the spirit to establish mutually beneficial relations (Wardhani & Dugis, 2020). In research by Mooy (2022), her key informant from the Indonesian MoFA added that mutual respect and inclusivity principles also guide the aid.

The official website of Indonesian AID (2023) states that Indonesia, as a donor, sees its recipient as being on equal footing. Indonesia recognized shared challenges among developing countries and, therefore, sought to offer aid that could reduce the development burdens of recipient countries. Indonesia's Government Regulation Number 57 in 2019 also stipulates that aid from Indonesia shall be distributed on a "demand-driven" basis. Countries interested in receiving aid shall convey a detailed proposal to Indonesia on the expected aid areas, their value, and

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2 MSG is an intergovernmental organization in the Pacific. Its members are Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS). The organization facilitates economic and political cooperation among its members (Indonesian MoFA, 2022).

their modalities. Indonesia will, after that, consider providing aid that is most suitable to the recipients' needs (Indonesian AID, 2023). Based on the government regulation, aid from Indonesia shall also be inclusive in that Indonesia is open to receive 'proposal for aid' from all countries in the world. At this juncture, the provision of aid from Indonesia to PIC corresponds to Bleiker's (2000) and Hansen's (2006) argument that symbolic claims in SSC could be deployed to support the donor's interest in differentiating the aid from aid in NSC. The claims of equality and inclusivity represent Indonesa's interest as one of the strong supporters of Southern emancipation in the world, to showcase aid driven by shared responsibility instead of power imbalance, as often found in aid in NSC.

Besides being driven by equality and inclusivity, aid from Indonesia to PIC is often described as driven by solidarity. In 2016, during a speech by Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs during his working visit to PNG, he repeatedly mentioned that Indonesia possesses cultural affinities with countries in the Pacific (Fardah, 2016). Highlighting the fact that over 11 million residents of West Papuan province have the same Melanesian ethnicity as the people in the Pacific, the Minister underscored the importance of intensifying people-to-people contacts, including through the provision of aid by Indonesia to PIC. The Minister also highlighted the challenges faced by both sides due to climate change and, therefore, emphasized the need for Indonesia and PIC to strengthen solidarity and

foster cooperation in relevant areas (Ibid.).

In an interview by Mooy (2022) with an Indonesian AID official, it is gathered that aid from Indonesia to the PIC is also being presented to the public as adhering to the principles of mutual benefit and mutual respect. Highlighting that the funds for aid to PIC are taken from Indonesia's state budget, the Indonesian AID official shared that there is an expectation that the aid will pave the way for stronger economic relations with PIC (Ibid.). The provision of aid procured from Indonesia's local companies could help introduce Indonesian products to Pacific Island people and markets. Further, the informant also shared that Indonesia wishes to increase its international profile by providing aid to other developing countries (Mooy, 2022). In his speech during the inauguration of Indonesian AID in 2019, the Vice President of Indonesia, Jusuf Kalla, mentioned that Indonesia's aid to other developing countries is part of Indonesia's "hands-on diplomacy", through which Indonesia hope to increase its image in international stage by providing the much-needed assistance to countries in the global South (Hutabarat, 2022).

Possible Key Drivers of Indonesia's Aid to PIC

Indonesia's Foreign Policy Principles and the Perception of Public Toward West Papua Issue. Indonesia's foreign policy is guided by the principles of "free and active", which implies that Indonesia will uphold its independence and play an active role in the international arena (Sukma, 1995). In 1955, Indo-

nesia initiated the Asia-Africa Conference, which gave birth to the Bandung Principle[3] (Ibid.). According to Indonesian AID (2023), the provision of aid from Indonesia to other PICs is part of Indonesia's commitment, as the pioneer of the Asia-Africa Conference, to strengthen South-South solidarity and to set an excellent example on the global stage of its active role in supporting development in the global South. At the outset, the motive behind Indonesia's aid to PIC corresponds to Engel's (2017) and Prabowo's (2020) argument that the spirit of Southern solidarity could drive aid from a Southern donor.

Indonesia's aid to the PIC is also closely related to the government and the public's perception of the issue of West Papua's independence. Over the past decade, during the tenure of President Joko Widodo, the development of West Papua province become a crucial priority (Fauzi et al., 2019). Over 4,300 kilometres of roads connecting the province with other provinces on the island were built, and dozens of new airports and seaports were constructed surrounding West Papua (Ibid.). The government also repeatedly mentioned in the media that improving the welfare of the people of West Papua is one of Indonesia's main development policy objectives. Besides the government, the public of Indonesia also sees boosting economic and social development in West Papua as an essential matter. Research by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (2017) showed that at least 63 per cent of non-native Papuans in Indonesia support progress made by the In-

donesian government in enhancing connectivity in West Papua. The government's serious attention to improving development in West Papua and the public's support towards this effort might also be one factor supporting Indonesia's decision to give aid to PIC to bolster its broader national objectives of safeguarding sovereignty in West Papua.

Influence of the parliament, business communities, and Indonesian AID in Indonesia's aid to PIC. Besides ideas and values held by the people and government of a donor country, according to Lancaster (2007), a decision to give aid can also be influenced by political institution arrangements and the voices of interest groups and aid agencies. In the case of Indonesia's aid to the PIC, the parliament – which has the mandate to monitor Indonesia's policy-making process, generally supports Indonesia's more robust engagements with the PIC. In 2020, the Indonesian Parliament Working Committee on Pacific Cooperation reiterated its support for providing aid to PIC. It argued that intensified relations could provide an opportunity for Indonesia to share the development progress in West Papua with the people in the Pacific, who often held negative perceptions towards Indonesia (DPR RI, 2020).

Regarding voices from interest groups, civil societies and business communities generally have low interest in Indonesia's aid to PIC. This might be due to both sides' low trade and investment relations. In 2021, for example, the export from Indonesia to the Pacific was only around USD 342 mil-

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3 The Principle emphasizes the importance of recognizing sovereignty, territorial integrity, and equality among all nations worldwide.

lion (IIPC Sydney, 2021). This is far smaller than the value of Indonesia's exports to its small neighbouring countries, such as Singapore, Brunei, and Lao PDR, which reached USD 11,8 billion (Ibid). The considerable distance between Indonesia and countries in the Pacific and their geographical features (i.e. scattered over a vast area in the Pacific Ocean) make countries in the Pacific a rather unattractive market for Indonesian products and investors (IIPC Sydney, 2021). This, therefore, is partially contrary to Winanti and Alvian's (2019) argument that aid in SSC could be driven by material/economic interests. With the weak trade and investment potentials in Indonesia-PIC relations, material interests are not the main driver of the aid.

Besides the small influence from the interest groups, the Indonesian AID, which acts as the aid agency that manages funds for aid from Indonesia, also has a small say in the decision to give aid. The Indonesian AID gives an initial assessment of aid proposals from a developing country (Mooy, 2022). The proposals will then be passed on to a joint committee of high-level officials from the Indonesian MoFA, the Ministry of Finance, and the National Development Planning Agency to be scored. The scored proposals will then be sent to the Indonesian MoFA for final authorization (Ibid.). The Indonesian AID's authority is limited to the initial assessment and aid distribution to beneficiary countries. The Indonesian MoFA holds the strategic role of authorizing the aid proposal, thus making it likely that the decision to give aid has undergone careful consideration of its relation to Indonesia's foreign policy objectives.

Relations between Symbolic Claims and Real Motivations in Indonesia's Aid to PIC

According to Mawdsley (2012), symbolic claims are an essential performative tool to aid in SSC. The claims can enhance a sense of solidarity and shared identity among the donor and recipient. It also accentuates the sense of morality, often due to Southern donors' willingness to openly express their expectation for the aid to be mutually beneficial. This is different from aid in NSC, which is often branded as driven by the spirit of altruism but, in reality, comes with many conditionalities and an apparent power gap between the donor and recipient (Ibid.).

In the case of Indonesia's aid to the PIC, the Indonesian government promoted the aid as being driven by a sense of equality, inclusivity, and solidarity (Wardhani & Dugis, 2020). The implementation of the principles of equality and inclusivity are reflected in the Indonesian government regulation, which stipulates that aid distribution from Indonesia shall be "demand-driven". Indonesia seeks to first listen to the voices of prospective recipients and is open to aid proposals from all countries in the world (no countries are exempted). Regarding the claim of solidarity, Indonesia does possess vital racial and geographical proximity with countries in the Pacific (Fardah, 2016). Most people living in Indonesia's Eastern provinces, including West Papua, are Melanesian. Indonesia and PIC also share similar archipelagic features, which makes them prone to climate-related disasters.

Besides the claims of equality, inclusivity, and solidarity, the Indonesian government also promoted aid to PIC by adhering to mutual benefit and respect. The Indonesian government openly expressed hopes that the "investment" it has put in aiding PIC could yield tangible benefits to the Indonesian economy (Mooy, 2022). For example, the goods distributed as grants to PIC (e.g., medical supplies, agriculture, and construction materials) are mainly procured from local Indonesian companies. The aid, therefore, could pave the way for introducing Indonesian products to PIC and open the door for more robust business-to-business engagement (Ibid.). On the political aspect, the Indonesian government openly shared that the aid is part of Indonesia's broader diplomacy strategy to play a more active role in the international arena through its role as a donor. Indonesia seeks to gain a better image in the world by actively assisting development in global South countries (Indonesian MoFA, 2022).

In terms of the possible critical drivers of the aid, as elaborated in the previous section, the ideas and values held by the government and Indonesian people concerning the importance of Indonesia's active role in promoting solidarity among global South countries, as well as the need to support socio-economic development in West Papua, seemed to be one of the influential factors that drive Indonesia's aid to the PIC (Chairunnisa, 2017). This idea and value may result in domestic support for the decision to provide aid to PIC, hoping that this will promote Indonesia's positive image in the world and Indonesia's development achievements in West Papua. Whilst the parliament supports Indonesia's enhanced engagement with the PIC, including through aid, the influence of interest groups (especially business communities) and Indonesian AID in providing aid remain limited (Indonesian AID, 2023).

In the case of Indonesia-PIC relations, in line with Leheny (1999) and Faizullaev (2013), aid is used to support the Southern donor's geopolitical interests. The aid to PIC is part of Indonesia's more significant diplomacy objectives as a Southern country to uphold its position on the global stage and showcase its ability to perform the role of a "donor" instead of a mere Western country's aid recipient. The aid also emphasized positioning the recipient at a level playing field and highlighting the proximity in both sides' identity, thus allowing for a stronger sense of cooperation of mutual recognition, which is weak in NSC due to the power asymmetry. In line with Linklater's (2013, p.72) argument, Indonesia's aid to PIC under the framework of SSC underscores dialogue and Southern affinity, thus differing it to aid in NSC that often involves competition and depletion of the recipient country's agency of its own development agendas.

What Is Obscured Under the Symbolic Claims in Indonesia's Aid to PIC

Whilst Indonesia promoted its aid to PIC as being driven by a sense of equality and inclusivity, an interview by Mooy (2022) with a key official at the Indonesian AID revealed that Indonesia has a *List of Prioritised Aid Recipients*. While Indonesia is open to

receiving aid proposals from all countries in the world, and the provision of aid will adhere to the "demand-driven" principle, Indonesia will prioritize proposals from countries in this list. Countries in this list have been carefully selected, including by Indonesian MoFA, by considering Indonesia's current political-economic interest. Countries in the Pacific are included in the list (Ibid.).

Indonesia also used the symbolic claim of solidarity in its aid to PIC. While Indonesia and PIC share some racial and geographical proximity, West Papua has been among Indonesia's poorest and underdeveloped provinces (Pentury, 2023). While Indonesia promoted the aid as part of its effort to strengthen solidarity with the "Melanesian brothers" in the Pacific, the Melanesians in West Papua and other Eastern provinces in Indonesia have been dealing with the negative impacts of unequal development in Indonesia for many years (Ibid.). The narrative of aid to PIC as being driven by the spirit of brotherhood with Melanesian people in the Pacific becomes weak when one looks at the low socio-economic development in West Papua.

On several occasions, the Indonesian government also presented aid to PIC as adhering to the principle of mutual benefit. While it is true that grants to PIC can pave the way for the introduction of Indonesian products to the Pacific market, the trade and investment statistics over the past five years show a shallow potential for commercial transactions between both sides. Data from The Indonesian Investment Promotion Centre (IIPC) Sydney in 2021 reveal low Foreign

Direct Investments (FDI) flow from the Pacific countries to Indonesia, and vice versa. This is due to the high transaction cost for the movement of goods between both sides and the low population in the PIC, making it unattractive for Indonesian investors (Ibid.). Despite the low economic benefits it could gain, the decision to provide aid to PIC shows that there is more than just an economic motive behind Indonesia's aid to the Pacific.

When a closer assessment of the timeline of the aid provision from Indonesia to the PIC, it appears that the aid was often being distributed or intensified right after the PIC or ULMWP raised the issue of West Papua independence at international fora. The Indonesian AID was established in 2019, just a few months after ULMWP delivered a petition to the UN to demand more serious attention to the faith of the West Papuan people (Kabutaulaka, 2020). In 2016, Indonesia delivered 100 units of hand tractors and financial aid worth up to USD 3 million to PIC, just a few months after seven Pacific countries raised concern at the 71st UNGA over the alleged human rights abuse in West Papua (Wangge, 2021). Furthermore, the fact that the final authorization of an aid proposal lies at the hand of the Indonesian MoFA instead of the Indonesian AID (Mooy, 2022) shows that aid from Indonesia to the PIC holds a strategic value in supporting Indonesia's more significant diplomatic objective to influence the PIC.

When considering the findings above that i) the PIC are among countries in the pre-prepared *List of Prioritised Aid Recipients*, ii) weak evidence of the aid as being driven

by a mere desire to strengthen solidarity with the Melanesian race in the Pacific, and iii) low economic benefit that Indonesia could potentially yield from its strengthened ties with PIC, it is evident that Indonesia's aid to the PIC is part of Indonesia's more extensive foreign policy strategy to influence the standpoint or behaviour of PIC over the West Papua issue. This motivation, however, is obscured under the symbolic claims that Indonesia presents to the public, such as that the aid is driven by a strong sense of solidarity and equality with countries in the Pacific, as well as adhering to principles of inclusivity, mutual benefits and mutual respect. These narratives mask the real driver of the aid, which is closely related to Indonesia's intention to tone down PIC's support towards West Papua independence in international forums. While these symbolic claims indeed strengthen the sense of South-South affinity/identity among Indonesia and the PIC, as well as signal Indonesia's openness on the expectation for the aid to bring reciprocal benefits, it hides the critical political motivation behind the aid, which relate to Indonesia's interest to safeguard its sovereignty in West Papua.

Conclusion

The dynamics of aid in the global South are often filled with symbolic claims presented by the Southern donor to the public to create a positive image. However, there remains a debate on the extent to which these symbolic claims truly reflect the real motivations behind the aid.

In the case of Indonesia's aid to the PIC, this research found that Indonesia used symbolic claims, such as equality, inclusivity, solidarity, mutual benefit and mutual respect. These claims are used to strengthen the sense of Southern solidarity and identity among Indonesia and the PIC, which is in line with Indonesia's track record as a country that has long been championing equality among all nations and empowerment for countries in the global South. The symbolic claims also enhance the sense of openness in Indonesia's aid to PIC, in which Indonesia explicitly expressed its hope that the aid would pave the way for stronger bilateral and economic relations with PIC. To this extent, the use of symbolic claims in Indonesia's aid to PIC aligns with what IR scholars described as a Southern donor's effort to differentiate its aid from aid in NSC. Instead of basing the aid on superiority and competition, the decision to provide aid to PIC is consistent with Indonesia's long-standing effort to promote Southern emancipation and a stronger SSC.

However, when a closer assessment is made of these symbolic claims, especially when connecting it to the timeline of aid provision to PIC and the arrangement of responsibility for aid proposal authorization that lies in the hand of the Indonesian MoFA, it is apparent that the aid is a part of Indonesia's more significant foreign policy strategy to influence the behaviour and standpoint of PIC, especially at international forums, on the issue of West Papua. The objective of the aid is closely related to Indonesia's interest in safeguarding its sovereignty in West Papua. This political motivation, however, is ob-

scured by the symbolic claims that Indonesia presented to the public. The symbolic claims mask the critical driver behind the aid and allow Indonesia to maintain its positive image worldwide.

Indonesia's approach to foreign aid could be improved by considering a more equal distribution of aid to other developing countries in the surrounding region. The amount of aid distributed by Indonesian AID to Lao PDR and Timor-Leste from 2020 to 2022, for example, is far smaller than that distributed to PIC. By considering an equal distribution of aid to needy nations in Southeast Asia and the Pacific region, as well as expanding the aid delivery to new countries, such as Myanmar, currently going through political and human security crises, Indonesia could truly embody its claim as a country that champions South-South solidarity and Southern affinity. Expanding the scope of its aid and creating equal aid distribution in the region would allow Indonesia to balance its internal political-security motive behind the aid with its normative obligations to strengthen SSC and assist development in the global South.

Future research on a similar topic might consider exploring other patterns of relations between symbolic claims and genuine motivation to aid in the global South. The research can also explore other possible real motivations obscured under the symbolic claims (e.g. the donor's security or socio-cultural interests).

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Exploring the Role of Video Games in Shaping Global South Narratives: A Study of Far Cry 2, Far Cry 3, and Mobile Legends through the Popular Culture and World Politics (PCWP) Framework

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In the current digital era, video games, which have evolved from ancient times, have become immensely popular media with significant impacts on society. In this context, it is evident that video games are not merely entertainment but also powerful instruments for conveying stories and ideologies, playing a significant role in communicating political and social messages. Through in-depth analysis of various game genres, this study explores how video games can reflect, influence, and even shape our perceptions of power dynamics, government policies, and global conflicts. This aligns with the framework of popular culture and world politics (PCWP), which views popular culture, including video games, as capable of influencing and shaping our perceptions of the Global South. This research also investigates how video games like "Far Cry 2", "Far Cry 3", and "Mobile Legends: Bang bang" can be used as tools to promote specific ideologies, both explicitly and implicitly. Employing a qualitative method with a case study approach to analyze narrative content formed within video games, this study, utilizing the PCWP framework, will examine how the stories presented in video games can shape understanding and attitudes toward social, economic, and political dynamics in the Global South.

Keywords: video games; narratives; Global South; popular culture; world politics

Introduction

In the rapidly evolving digital era, the role of video games extends beyond mere entertainment. With their ability to create rich and complex liminal spaces, video games serve as effective instruments for delivering narratives distinct from other forms of media.

They hold tremendous potential in shaping narratives and representations of regions in the Global South. The term "Global South" refers to countries worldwide considered to be developing, characterized by conditions such as poverty, higher income inequality, and lower life expectancy (Heine, 2023).

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It's worth noting that developing countries in regions like Asia, Latin America, Africa, and others encompassed within the Global South are often overlooked in mainstream narratives such as popular media like films, books, and television. The emergence of video games presents an intriguing platform for introducing new narratives and expanding representations of Global South countries. With their distinctive delivery, video games enable player interactivity, allowing direct engagement in immersive and profound liminal experiences. Fresh perspectives on challenges, cultures, and lives experienced by Global South societies can be encapsulated in video games, serving as instruments for promoting cross-cultural understanding and facilitating intercultural dialogue in unique ways.

Narratives in video games are crucial due to their ability to provide players with motivation, engagement, and goals within the gaming world, enabling them to experience and empathize with different perspectives and viewpoints (University of Europe, 2023). The narratives crafted in video games can significantly influence perceptions of the Global South, such as empowerment or stereotypes, gaming community influences, cultural and geographical representations, as well as depictions of social and political issues. This is further supported by findings from research (Robertson, 2022), stating that strong narratives in video games with value frameworks and attributions can influence political views. It can be argued that video games can influence and alter players' political perceptions in complex and diverse ways, such as shaping global perceptions, fostering empathy, presenting alternatives, prompting reflection and discussion, influencing social and cultural norms, and encouraging creativity and innovation.

Overall, video games hold great potential to influence perceptions of the Global South by presenting diverse and holistic representations related to the challenges, social issues, and cultures faced by Global South communities. This underscores the importance of video games as a popular culture medium capable of significantly contributing to shaping more inclusive and diverse narratives, reflecting various perspectives and experiences.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The literature reviewed in this discussion highlights various perspectives and research on topics relevant to the title from previous studies, providing a foundation or reference for conducting research. In the first study, based on the work of (Jenn, 2020), the exploration delves into how trauma and postcolonial identity in the Global South can be represented through new media like video games, with game narratives serving as instruments in uncovering trauma narratives, developing new analytical methods, critiquing existing understandings, and considering postcolonial and Global South narratives. This research offers fresh insights into how postcolonial identities and the Global South can be represented in video games, examining players' experiences within trauma narratives.

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Furthermore, findings from (Mukherjee & Hammar, 2018) elucidate how postcolonial areas are often overlooked in video games, with some popular games criticized for representation errors leading to a lack of proper understanding that can affect players' experiences of postcolonial regions. This study also explains how video games, as a disciplinary study, tend toward Western or Eurocentric perspectives, creating gaps in gaming studies between colonizing and colonized regions.

Moving forward,Crilley (2021) posits that the current popular culture and world politics (PCWP) should not neglect important issues outside the West and should ensure the direction of PCWP. The article emphasizes the importance of expanding PCWP research focus beyond the West to encompass the entire world, incorporating all aspects such as methodologies, theories, and philosophies from beyond the West to understand and analyze PCWP. This is crucial because PCWP research should not only focus on the non-Western "world" but also involve non-Western "thought," especially considering some forms of PCWP are better understood from non-Western traditions, providing a broader perspective on PCWP.

The PCWP framework, serving as the conceptual framework in this study, refers to an understanding of where popular culture such as films, literature, music, social media, and video games can be used to comprehend global politics. Popular culture can influence and reflect global political dynamics and vice versa. Notably, renowned video games like Call of Duty indirectly reflect and influence public perceptions of associated countries, carrying ideologies through their narratives and messages. Aligned with the research theme, the PCWP foundation is relevant because it can provide a broader understanding of video games. Moreover, video games generally fall under soft politics due to their indirect involvement in politics but are used to convey messages, influence viewpoints, and trigger social and political changes. With the use of PCWP in this study, it is hoped to provide broader and different insights from conventional "international relations."

With the theoretical framework of PCWP, the author can analyze the role of video games in shaping narratives in the Global South. Representations of the Global South in popular video games like Far Cry 2, Far Cry 3, and Mobile Legends: Bang Bang can evoke emotional reactions that can influence the identity of the Global South. It becomes interesting to study these three video games because they incorporate elements of the Global South. For instance, "Far Cry 2" and "Far Cry 3" feature narratives and visuals closely tied to conflicts often occurring in Global South countries. Moreover, Ubisoft, a major game studio from France (Ubisoft, 2024), has a significant influence on the video game industry due to its high-quality products and complex narratives that highlight the intricacies of post-colonial struggles. On the other hand, "Mobile Legends: Bang Bang" differs from the previous two games by showcasing the diversity and cultural richness of the Global South, providing a more positive alternative narrative. This video game is a major success for the Chinese game studio

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Moonton (Moonton, 2024), as it has created a mobile game product that is relevant and appealing to a broad audience, particularly in Southeast Asia.

Some researchers have found the importance of popular culture in understanding how power, ideology, and identity are formed, produced, and manifested (Grayson et al., 2009). Thus, it is essential to understand the role and connection between power, ideology, and identity to unravel the complexity of political dynamics in the Global South. Aspects related to popular culture such as actors, institutions, processes, texts, sites, and practices can be used to understand and analyze how popular culture operates (Caso & Hamilton, 2015). These elements can be translated into indicators in this research to measure, analyze, and understand to achieve the research objectives.

Methodology

In this study, the author employs a qualitative approach to obtain a deeper understanding in exploring this research from the perspective of Post-Colonial World Perspectives (PCWP). In collecting data related to this research, two approaches are utilized: in-depth content analysis and video game case studies. These two qualitative approaches are chosen for this research due to the complexity of narrative phenomena within video games in the Global South. Qualitative methods allow researchers to explore themes and unearth information more deeply, enabling a more subjective exploration from the perspectives of video game players and developers. This method also allows the au-

thor to examine the role of video games in shaping narratives in the Global South with a PCWP perspective, thus providing findings different from traditional perspectives in international relations.

Data obtained from in-depth content analysis will be used to comprehensively analyze research themes to yield relevant results. This approach is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the role of video games in shaping perceptions of the Global South from a PCWP perspective. Additionally, in the video game case study approach, the author will select several video games that directly or indirectly present narratives of the Global South. The focus will be on elements such as narrative, themes, and gameplay patterns within the chosen video games. This approach allows researchers to understand the formation of narratives within video games in the Global South based on the elements present in the games.

By utilizing data from these two approaches, the author aims to provide insights into the role of video games in shaping narratives in the Global South. Furthermore, by employing a PCWP perspective, this study seeks to contribute to the field of international relations by presenting alternative views that do not always align with hard politics.

Analysis

In the eyes of the international community, video games appear to be a double-edged sword. On one side, some studies find video games to be instruments of propaganda, while on the other side, there are also studies that suggest video games can serve as

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strategies to introduce diplomacy and international relations. It cannot be denied that the presence of video games in the international arena has indeed become one of the effective instruments of propaganda. However, it is important to emphasize that the existence of video games does not inherently make them "evil propaganda instruments," as propaganda itself is neutral, and video games likewise. It should be stressed that video games are commercial tools with advertising purposes, educational tools across various subjects, and even political instruments to support or criticize certain ideologies (Erad, 2018). However, the case study of the American-made video game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare, presents Russia as the villain, often engaging in inhumane acts against civilians without clear justification. What the author finds particularly problematic is the portrayal of Islamic values as terrorists in the game, which alludes to "imperialist propaganda." In this context, players are indirectly guided toward fictitious information that supports imperialistic policies under the guise of "liberation."

To understand video games as a medium within the framework of PCWP, three indicators can be used in analyzing video games: narratives, visuals, and gameplay. To comprehend video games, one must navigate through various options or alternative patterns within the game under study (Caso & Hamilton, 2015).

Figure 1. Three Indicators in Researching Video Games
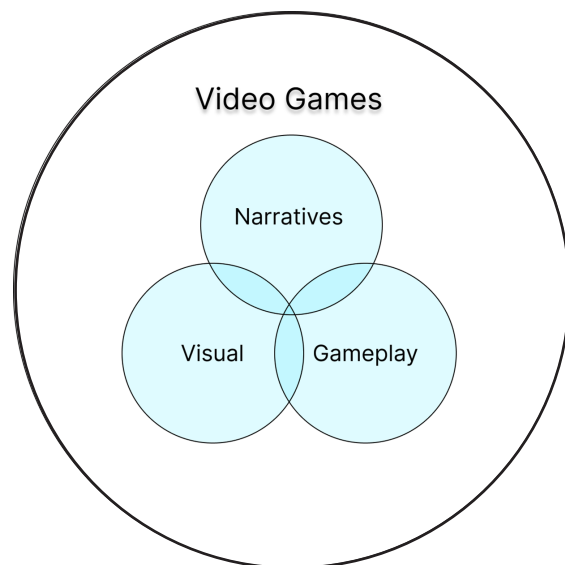
When researching video games through the PCWP framework, three indicators from the above image can be utilized in the study. First, the narrative or story in video games encompasses various aspects such as characters, themes, and plots conveyed through the game's story. The narrative in video games can reflect political ideologies, global conflicts, or relevant social issues within the PCWP context. Second, visuals encompass the visualization aspects in video games, including world background design, characters, and overall aesthetics. Visuals can represent the environment, conflicts, and political powers contained within the video game, allowing players to understand the conditions within it. Last, gameplay involves the interaction between players and video game mechanics, which can include decisions, strategies, or consequences of actions. The presence of gameplay can help players feel involved, making it easier for

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them to understand the messages conveyed in the video game. These three indicators are interconnected in helping to understand the contribution of video games in representing, responding to, or shaping society's perceptions of global political issues in the form of popular culture.

The Formation of Global South in Video Games

It is understood that media such as video games play a significant role in shaping and developing narratives in the Global South. In this context, the presence of video games in the Global South from their inception to the present cannot be underestimated. Video games in the Global South serve not only as entertainment but also as important instruments in conveying narratives about everyday life, politics, and culture in this region. The visualization of environments, cultures, and architectures in video games can provide players with immersive experiences. Similar to a film, video games encompass many aspects such as moving images, sound, music, and a running narrative. However, there is a specific point that can be derived from playing video games that is quite different from other media: the presence of complex interactions between players, the video games being played, developers, and other stakeholders, indirectly conveying messages from this media. Even the role of countries in the Global South that enjoy this media cannot be underestimated. According to data from (Dihni, 2022), Indonesia, as an example of a country in the Global South, is one of the largest markets for the video game in-

dustry globally, with 94.5% of internet users aged 16-64 playing video games.

Video games are important to consider due to the massive narrative empowerment in the Global South. It is known that several video games draw inspiration from backgrounds in Global South regions, providing views and experiences related to the culture, politics, and social issues in these areas. Thus, players gain broader perspectives and understanding of the realities in the Global South. The narrative is one of the crucial aspects to ensure that the message in video games is effectively conveyed, and to obtain narrative content, it must be structured well. To obtain narrative content, three methods must be employed, such as semantic formation of content arrangement, organizing strengths such as grouping actors, and forming temporal syntagmatic consisting of sequences of actions. These methods will be implemented in seven phases: the initial situation, event trigger, change, and decision, search for solutions, obstacles and complications, resolution, and final situation (Arsenault, 2006).

Figure 2. Narrative structure
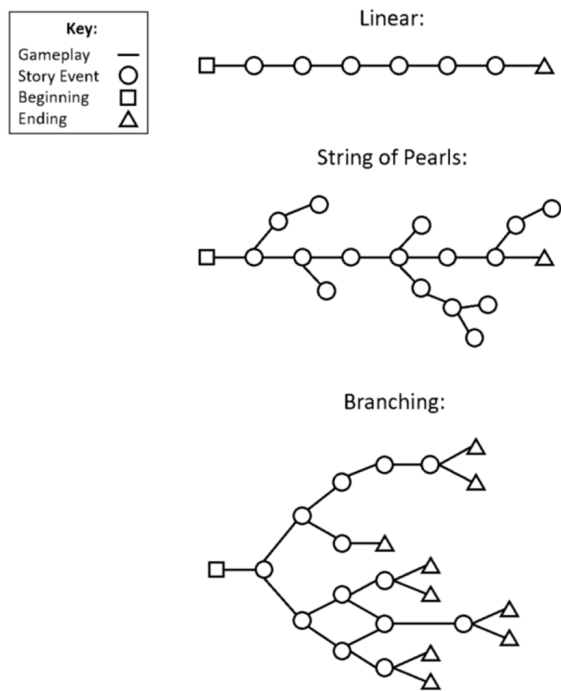
Source: Stone (2019)

In analyzing the formation of Global South narratives in video games, the author seeks to deepen understanding by exploring narrative structures based on the image above. Understanding the types of narrative structures can be applied to the formation of the Global South narratives. In linear narrative structures, video games set in the Global South can effectively convey stories sequentially and clearly, where the narrative progresses directionally from the beginning to the end. For example, this structure is suitable for video games depicting historical events such as the struggle for independence. Next, the strand of Pearl's narrative structure allows players to explore the video game world based on player choices. For instance, players can interact with local characters, engage in local cultural activities, and explore immersive locations, enhancing the game-

play experience. Lastly, the branching narrative structure enables players to make choices that can influence the story's outcome, presenting players with diverse perspectives on the liminal space reality.

These narrative structures guide how storytelling techniques are applied. Text, environments, and cutscenes in video games can deliver narratives more effectively, particularly in the context of the Global South. This may include the use of local languages, character dialogues, and visual designs of the video game environment. For example, the video game "Uncharted: The Lost Legacy" utilizes various storytelling techniques with a strand of pearls narrative structure, creating a deep and engaging experience for players to understand the perspectives of characters. In this game, the main character embarks on a quest for legendary treasures in India, featuring sites, monuments, music, and art unique to India.

Representation of the Global South in Far Cry 2, Far Cry 3, and Mobile Legends: Bang Bang

Based on the discussion above, there are three main indicators used in analyzing video games for this research: narrative, visual, and gameplay. These aspects are closely intertwined in providing the gaming experience. When applied to the analysis of the video game "Far Cry 2," it is evident that this first-person shooter offers a rich narrative experience, highly realistic visuals, and challenging gameplay with a high degree of freedom. From a narrative standpoint, the game is set in a fictional African country and tells

the story of a player who assumes the role of a mercenary tasked with killing an arms dealer known as "The Jackal," while also becoming involved in the country's civil war. In terms of visuals, the game features detailed and authentic environments with dynamic weather effects and a day-night cycle, allowing players to experience a beautiful yet chaotic country due to ongoing conflict. Regarding gameplay, the game emphasizes an open-world mechanism that enables players to freely explore, complete missions, and employ various strategies and weapons, which can realistically degrade over time. The game employs a branching narrative structure, allowing player decisions to impact the storyline and relationships with other characters, thereby creating a unique experience with each playthrough.

Figure 3. The environmental visuals from "Far Cry 2"

Source: Ubisoft (2008)

Building upon the analysis of 'Far Cry 2,' which exemplifies the integration of narrative, visual, and gameplay elements, this discussion extends to how the game series situates itself within the broader context of the Global South. Specifically, this game presents players with a challenging and engaging journey set in locations and times that roughly reflect various regions in Africa, focusing on complex social and political conflicts. The game also portrays diverse and complex African cultures through unique symbolism, values, and traditions, allowing players to interact within this virtual world. This game not only offers detailed visual graphics and sound but also includes various references to African history, such as the armed conflicts in Darfur involving multiple factions. Players take on the role of the main character, who embodies the values of freedom and justice. Throughout the game, players make decisions that shape a complex narrative, making justice and conflict subjective depending on the player's choices. This game reflects how Africa, as a conflicted region, has complex social structures with gaps between the elite and ordinary citizens, where power and wealth can be used for personal or group interests. Thus, the game serves as a medium for players to understand concepts of conflict, freedom, and justice.

In the aforementioned game, elements of power, culture, and world politics are reflected in various aspects. The setting in Africa reflects a time when economic and political power could be used by individuals or groups to control military power and natural resources in the region. Power struggles are visualized through armed conflicts between factions vying for control, involving private corporations, militias, and governments attacking each other to pursue their interests and goals. Cultural aspects are depicted through characters, environments, and interactions between players and local inhabitants. The portrayal of music and lan-

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guage reflects cultural diversity in the region. Furthermore, politics are reflected in the game's narrative, with geopolitical interests influencing various actors and shaping political dynamics in conflict-prone regions. These elements in the game serve as a medium for players to understand the situation and conditions in conflict-ridden regions, which are also relevant in several Global South regions often plagued by political oppression, corruption, and colonialism.

In delving into the analysis of the second video game, "Far Cry 3," it continues the successful trajectory of its predecessor by offering a profound experiential journey through its narrative, visuals, and gameplay. The game initiates with the protagonist, "Jason Brody," depicted as a stranded tourist on a tropical island. Its narrative intricately explores moral conflicts and character metamorphosis, as the central figure endeavors to liberate his abducted comrades and confront a charismatic yet deranged antagonist, catalyzing a significant evolution from an ordinary youth to a seasoned warrior. The visuals showcased in this gaming installment are striking, portraying lush foliage, numerous concealed caverns, and picturesque shorelines emblematic of tropical landscapes. Retaining the open-world mechanics of its precursor, the gameplay permits players to undertake missions with diverse combat strategies or indulge in uninhibited island exploration, all contingent upon player choices. The branching narrative structure of the game affords players the liberty to shape the storyline and outcomes, thereby granting them comprehensive agency to profoundly

influence the gaming experience.

Figure 4. The environmental visuals from "Far Cry 3"

Source: Ubisoft (2012)

Continuing the exploration of the "Far Cry" series, "Far Cry 3" developed by the same creators but with a fresh narrative and setting, presents another captivating experience. The representation of the Global South in this game is reflected in the fictional setting adopted in the Pacific, referred to as the Rook Islands in the game. This fictional setting triggers discussions as its specific location is ambiguous, with some players suggesting it is based on the Fiji Islands while others argue it is based on Papua New Guinea. Regardless of the debate, the game's setting utilizes a mysterious and exotic tropical environment reminiscent of regions in the Global South. The game's story depicts players as the main characters struggling to survive amidst conflicts between foreign colonizers and local communities. The relationship between colonizers and indigenous populations in this game vividly portrays regions in the Global South where social and political situations are tense, exacerbated by internal and external conflicts between colo-

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nizers and the colonized. Elements such as traditional weapons, ceremonial rituals, and dances provide a glimpse into the culture and life in this fictional region, potentially reinforcing stereotypes among players.

The dynamics of power, culture, and politics in the third installment of the "Far Cry" series are similar to those in the second installment of the game. Players are involved in conflicts between various factions vying for control of the territory and monopolizing its natural resources. The game's portrayal of culture showcases cultural and environmental diversity in tropical areas. Some scenes in the game use Indonesian phrases like "berhenti," "senapan ke bawah," and "berikan saya herba."(Ubisoft, 2012). Moreover, politics in the game are evident, with the presence of state agents and international criminals seeking the island's resources. These aspects also mirror real-world scenarios in the Global South, where foreign intervention in local political dynamics and the allure of resources often attract attention from powerful nations seeking to obtain and advance their national interests.

The analysis of the final video game, "Mobile Legends: Bang Bang," presents a straightforward narrative where individual characters possess their own respective stories, albeit with minimal impact on gameplay dynamics. Offering unique visuals spanning diverse themes, the Land of Dawn serves as the arena where players showcase their skills in vanquishing opponents or securing objectives, primarily the destruction of enemy towers divided into three lanes. The game features appealing character designs and flu-

id animations, contributing to its immersive environment. Furthermore, its gameplay is characterized by rapid and addictive 5v5 battles across various game modes, each character fulfilling distinct roles with accompanying strengths and weaknesses. Overall, while narrative depth may not be the game's forte, its allure lies in its highly addictive gameplay, facilitating engaging player-versus-player encounters and fostering an enjoyable gaming experience.

Figure 5. The character visuals of Gatotkaca from "Mobile Legend: Bang Bang"

Source: Moonton (2016)

Emerging as particularly intriguing is the fact that each character, drawn from the rich cultural landscape of the Global South, presents a unique narrative that resonates with players worldwide. This seamless integration of cultural elements not only enhances the gaming experience but also cultivates a deeper appreciation for the traditions and legends of various nations (Widyaswara, 2023). For example, characters like *Lapu-Lapu*, *Gatotkaca*, and *Badang* are inspired by national heroes and mythological figures from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia, respectively. Additionally, characters like *Faramis* and *Minsitthar* have close ties to countries in the Global South (Widyaswara,

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2023). These characters convey the message that local stories and traditions can be introduced to international audiences, expanding understanding and appreciation for each country's cultural richness. Furthermore, these characters can be interpreted as efforts to strengthen national pride and identity amidst the dominance of Western culture, thus creating alternative narratives. Examining representations in popular video games like Mobile Legends directs research toward the rapid growth of the video game industry in the Global South.

Shift from PC Games to Mobile Games: From Exclusive to Inclusive

In recent years, the video game industry has experienced advancements in both technical and narrative aspects. Technology in video games has rapidly evolved, resulting in games with increasingly realistic visuals and complex stories. Today, we can enjoy high-quality video games in the palm of our hands, whereas previously, playing demanding video games was limited to computers. The shift from computer gaming to mobile gaming is palpable, especially in the Global South, where not everyone can afford or access computer-based video games. This transformation signifies a significant paradigm shift in the entertainment industry from exclusivity to inclusivity. It extends beyond gaming preferences and encompasses accessibility, participation, and representation in popular culture. Developers now consider the mobile gaming market to make games more accessible to a wider audience previously hindered by a lack of devices or inadequate infrastructure. This analysis is reinforced by data from the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information, indicating that the number of video game players in Indonesia exceeds 170 million, with 133.8 million mobile gamers and 53.4 million PC gamers (KOMINFO, 2022).

There is a notable difference in how people play video games between Western countries and the Global South. In Western countries, the majority play video games on their personal computers, whereas in the Global South, not everyone can afford personal computers for gaming. Internet cafes are the primary choice for gaming in many Global South countries due to their affordability. Despite the popularity of personal computers, internet cafes are still prevalent in some developing countries where personal computers are considered expensive. With the current technological advancements, affordable and widespread mobile devices, particularly in the Global South, enable more people to enjoy video games and create business opportunities that empower more individuals. People in the Global South, whether in cities or villages, can now participate in gaming, which was previously exclusive to those who could afford personal computers. This shift fosters inclusion in various aspects, particularly as mobile games can better represent the Global South's cultures and values.

As an example of this shift in the Global South, we can look at the video game "Loka Pala," a mobile Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) game developed by Anantarupa Studios in Indonesia (Anantarupa Studios, 2024). This video game

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serves as a significant representation of the Indonesian video game industry, reflecting local narratives and culture. It incorporates various elements of Indonesian culture and history, expressed through characters and stories inspired by the tales of Wayang and the Mahabharata (Kemenparekraf, 2021). "Loka Pala" plays a crucial role in shaping and defining Indonesia's narrative and identity, allowing the country to share its local stories with the world. This presents an excellent opportunity for Indonesia; players have the chance to recognize and appreciate their cultural heritage while also introducing Indonesian culture to a global audience. The gameplay also requires players to achieve independence through struggle, set against backdrops like temples and kingdoms that vividly reflect the Indonesian atmosphere (Kemenparekraf, 2021). "Loka Pala" also highlights the significant potential of local video games and the capability of developers from developing countries to compete on a global scale, showcasing the rise of the creative industry in the Global South. The presence of a local video game industry in the Global South emphasizes that video games are not merely a form of entertainment but can also serve as a medium for cultural promotion for the new generation.

Government support can also aid a country's digital economy. For instance, Indonesia's total revenue from the video game industry reached USD 1.1 billion in 2021, indicating significant potential for further development (KOMINFO, 2022). The shift in the video game landscape opens up new avenues for representing narratives in the Global South. Unexpectedly valuable opportunities arise, such as Esports in the mobile gaming world, which has a vast and remarkable market. Esports in the Global South are gaining momentum and indirectly create influential communities that foster competitiveness and lead to competition. For example, in Asia, mobile gaming competitions like PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG) and Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) are garnering global attention as they compete with Western audiences.

Discussion

Before delving into the realm of video game instruments, it is essential to understand the concepts of soft power and hard power in international politics. These terms denote a nation's ability to influence others, with soft power emphasizing attraction through cultural values and hard power through military might and economic pressure (Master Class, 2023). Video games can be categorized under cultural soft power due to their ability to captivate global audiences through various aspects such as music, culture, language, and more, thereby influencing countries with the variables conveyed through video games. In the current era of digital transformation, soft power has become an effective solution, capable of exerting influence on other nations without significant costs or casualties (HIMAHI UMM, 2023). It's worth noting that 41% of the world's population, or 3.26 billion people, have played or are currently playing video games, indicating a significant influence (Dimitrievski, 2023).

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Indirectly, video games themselves have significant potential to serve as diplomatic instruments through various means. In the current era of video games, they can promote dialogue, values, cultural exchange, and international cooperation (Mujiono & Alexandra, 2019). Many video games played from childhood to adulthood often convey cultural values such as music, clothing, language, art, and stories, allowing players to understand and appreciate other countries' cultures. Additionally, video games create communities that foster relationships among players, providing forums for discussions, in-game events, and real-world meetings that transcend national boundaries. Furthermore, some games simulate real-world conflicts, prompting players to make difficult decisions akin to diplomatic simulations. In the current digital transformation era, online video games have become commonplace, even evolving into international competitive tournaments. From an International Relations perspective, Esports serves as an international competitive video game tournament platform promoting cooperation and friendship by forming teams from various countries to compete for victory. Additionally, Esports tournaments sometimes serve as venues for countries to reflect their national identities (Syahrin, 2023).

The emergence of new public diplomacy waves through video games is one-way nations share their culture with the international community. I have directly observed the educational impact of video games. Specifically, I have improved my English language skills through engaging with in-game dialogues. Moreover, while playing Age of Empires 3, I encountered the economic theory of mercantilism, which has provided valuable insights and references for my thesis (Rianto, 2022). In practice, video games also serve as political instruments, as seen in the United States with the release of Animal Crossing: New Horizons in 2020, featuring virtual Black Lives Matter protests and political campaign posters for Democrat candidate Joe Biden and his running mate Kamala Harris, along with Barack Obama's virtual billboard advertisements in various video games (Reymann, 2020). This case study illustrates the potential of video games as political instruments, enabling actors to convey non-traditional messages and target subjects as desired. While political ads in video games may initially seem intrusive, when executed subtly, they can have significant impacts without players realizing they're being targeted.

Video games offer substantial strategic potential and benefits. They can be used for educational purposes (Rhett, 2017), exploring and teaching subjects through game mechanics (Loban Rhett, 2017), especially in international settings, where major tournaments serve as diplomatic reflections and platforms for understanding international relations (Syahrin, 2023). However, it's also a dilemma, as not all video game genres are effective educational tools; for instance, games like Grand Theft Auto or Call of Duty are often criticized for their negative influence on children. Thus, parental supervision is crucial. Nevertheless, UNESCO-MGIEP is committed to exploring video games' poten-

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tial in promoting peace education and conflict resolution (Ore, 2017).

Recently, competitive video gaming, known as Esports, has gained significant traction, with events like Defense of the Ancients (DOTA) 2 The International (TI) illustrating how Esports is viewed globally (Alfi Syahrin, 2023). TI tournaments have helped change negative perceptions of video games, now seen as a form of competitive sports equivalent to traditional ones. This transformation is supported by substantial investments and industry support, making TI one of the most prestigious tournaments worldwide, evident in its large prize pools, high-quality broadcasting, and extensive fan base.

From the analysis results, the video games "Far Cry 2," "Far Cry 3," and "Mobile Legends: Bang Bang" present complex representations of the Global South. Both "Far Cry" series depicts how power dynamics and political conflicts can occur in those regions, while "Mobile Legends: Bang Bang" explores cultural diversity in Global South countries. For the "Far Cry" series, through highly reflective fictional settings in Africa and the South Pacific, the complex reality of political conflicts and cultural differences between players and characters in the games is apparent. The complexity of the Global South regions is effectively portrayed in both games, often overlooked in mainstream media's portrayal of the Global South. This highlights the potential of video games to serve as instruments for deeper understanding and critical thinking among players regarding global issues such as cultural heritage, colonialism, exploitation, and the frequent conflicts in the Global South.

The shift from PC gaming to mobile gaming has significantly increased accessibility and inclusivity in the Global South, leading to wider access to video games at relatively low costs. This shift indirectly opens doors for various stakeholders, including individuals, investors, game developers, and governments in the mobile gaming industry. The shift also affects cultural representations in video games on a broader scale, as they can target players globally.

This shift has led to the development of mobile video games, such as the two mobile games analyzed, "Mobile Legends: Bang Bang" and "Lokapala," both featuring Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) systems and elements of Global South cultures, as discussed in the analysis. Both mobile games offer rich visual designs, but "Lokapala" offers designs and narratives based more heavily on Indonesian mythology and folklore. "Lokapala" indirectly invites players, whether from Indonesia or elsewhere, to explore Indonesia's cultural richness in an environment inspired by local mythology and history. The cultural representations in both games can broaden players' understanding and appreciation of the cultures they depict, especially considering the success of "Mobile Legends: Bang Bang" in Southeast Asia, which can serve as a significant platform for introducing Global South cultures to a larger audience of players, communities, and competitive events.

It's not unlikely for each Global South country to develop its national gaming industry, as "Lokapala" proves that Indonesia

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can not only be a consumer of foreign video games but also advance its own gaming industry's growth and development.

In addition, such as video games in the discussion above often incorporate cultural values, influenced by social media, which spreads gaming content globally. Southeast Asia, in particular, has become a significant market for mobile gaming, with games like Mobile Legends: Bang Bang incorporating cultural values and identities into their characters and settings, indirectly introducing Indonesian culture to a global audience. Additionally, games like Pokémon, born from animated series, have become immensely profitable video game franchises.

This form of soft diplomacy is relevant to the concept of multi-track diplomacy, where various channels such as government, international organizations, business, civil society, research and education, organizational activism, religion, funding, and media communication are utilized (HIMAHI UMM, 2023). Indonesia, for example, employs diplomatic efforts to promote environmental conservation through video games like Coral Island, incorporating Indonesian elements and values into gameplay to address current environmental issues. This demonstrates how diplomacy can be channeled through digital media, particularly video games, effectively influencing other countries subtly, making video games a potent instrument of soft power diplomacy in today's digital transformation era.

In conclusion, the impact of video games in shaping perceptions of the Global South is significant. Analyzing narratives, vi-

suals, and gameplay reveals how video games influence views of Global South regions.

Reflection section

To foster a deeper understanding of the role of video games in shaping narratives about the Global South, comprehensive research policies are needed. These policies should encourage multidisciplinary collaboration by facilitating cooperation among experts in fields such as popular culture studies, politics, and computer science. Additionally, a strong ethical approach should be considered in representing cultures in video games to avoid causing harm or reinforcing negative stereotypes about Global South countries, which should also be aligned with stricter content monitoring. Importantly, inclusivity from various stakeholders is essential to provide broader insights and promote a deeper understanding of cultural and political dynamics in Global South countries.

It's crucial to acknowledge that large-scale video game industries are primarily profit-based, targeting commercial gains. However, smaller-scale game developers may prioritize conveying messages through game mechanics, objectives, and variables rather than solely focusing on profits. Governments can play a role in the video game industry by actively participating in production and distribution, and implementing policies regulating video game ratings and censorship. These governmental interventions aim to provide a stable regulatory environment and foster video game development (Zhadan, 2023).

As for inclusive case studies, initiatives like the Samsung Galaxy Gaming Acad-

emy organized by PT Samsung Electronics Indonesia provide insights, training, and networking opportunities in the video game industry (PT Samsung Electronics Indonesia, n.d.). Private sector involvement, as demonstrated above, can enhance the talent pool of video game players in the Global South, enabling them to participate in international competitions and receive relevant education for generational sustainability. Private sector involvement can also influence the representation of the Global South globally, allowing players from these regions to grow and develop within the esports community.

As a policy recommendation, government involvement in the video game industry is essential. One case study worth considering is India's full support for the video game industry to drive its growth. India's conducive environment for investment, consumer rights, technological capabilities, and welfare are efforts by the Indian government to support the development of the gaming industry. In 2021, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology of India issued regulations related to information technology, banning all forms of gambling and providing guidelines to prevent addiction and mental health damage, ensuring parental controls for young players (Dewangi Sharma, 2023). India also allows foreign investors to invest 100% in the Indian gaming industry without restrictions as long as they comply with outlined regulations, such as a 28% tax on online games. These measures are taken because of the global recognition of esports reaching unprecedented levels, with India ranking second after China in terms of the

largest global player base. Furthermore, the Indian government supports innovation in the gaming sector, such as Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) integration, Cloud gaming, and Blockchain technology integration (Sharma, 2023).

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The Growth of Digital Payments in Indonesia:

Harnessing Its Influence for SMEs and Indonesia's Competitiveness

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Digital Payment System (DPS) growth plays a crucial role in supporting the country's digital economic growth. As a country representing the global south, Indonesia has an important responsibility to manage the dynamics of DPS growth, which is influenced significantly by actors from the government and private sectors. Initially, DPS was designed to provide more efficient and accessible payment services, but over time, the scope of such digital services has expanded. Nevertheless, challenges must be addressed in distributing DPS evenly, especially among MSMEs. Through the approach promoted by the Economic Asian Committee (EAC), this study aims to assess the impact of DPS growth on the digital services ecosystem in Indonesia and the dynamics of interaction between related stakeholders. Qualitative methods are used to summarize information from various sources, including journal literature and data from websites, which provide an in-depth understanding of the complexity of this phenomenon and Indonesia's efforts to improve its overall digital competitiveness. The findings in this study indicate that the Digital Payment System (DPS) offers numerous benefits for the financial system, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness for industrial growth. However, challenges in ensuring equitable usage across all regions of Indonesia remain significant across various sectors.

Keywords: *digital payment system; Global South actor; MSMEs; digital competitiveness of Indonesia*

Introduction

Digital economic growth in Indonesia continues to increase, along with the digital payment system (DPS), which is also increasingly used for daily needs. According to DataBox, the growth of the DPS experienced a rapid increase of approximately 158% from April 2018 to April 2023 (Ahdiat, 2023). Although the development of the digital economy and DPS in Indonesia continues to increase hand in hand, these two things take work to analyze and observe. In this study, it is essential to consider the influence exerted on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in implementing the digital economy in Indonesia. The Indonesian government has been vigorously promoting the digitalization of payment systems since promoting its ambition to be at the forefront of the digital economy in Southeast Asia. However, the adoption of DPS by MSMEs faces a significant obstacle due to a lack of knowledge and resources. In addition, consumer habits that have become fixated on conven-

tional DPS also complicate the transition for MSMEs, which requires rapid adoption efforts to reduce potential economic disparities that may occur. This is also supported by Najib and Fahma (2020), who state that consumers feel the efficiency, effectiveness, benefits, and confidence in using DPS.

According to research conducted by Najib and Fahma (2020), MSMEs are essential pillars of the economy, both locally and nationally. Their role can create jobs, reduce poverty, and encourage growth in various regions. It can be noted that more than 75% of domestic products in many countries are driven by MSMEs (Najib & Fahma, 2020). However, currently, MSMEs face significant challenges, especially increasingly fierce competition that can hamper their economic impact. This is especially true in developing countries such as Indonesia, where MSMEs often need help to keep up with technological developments amid the onslaught of competitive MSMEs. Of Indonesia's approximately 63 million MSMEs, many have shown a slow response in adopting new technologies such as DPS compared to large companies. In addition, although about 60% of MSMEs are located in Java, the utilization of technology, including DPS, is still relatively low, with only about 30% -40% integrating technology into their business operations.

The use of DPS in QR codes, commonly known as Quick Response Code Indonesian Standard (QRIS), has become a significant phenomenon in Indonesia. DPS has transformed how we make payments, shifting from traditional to digital methods, each with distinct features. The most popular DPS

in Indonesia includes E-Wallets, which store money on mobile devices; Mobile Banking, which allows various transactions via mobile devices; Credit Cards, which are used for payments but not via mobile devices; Internet Banking, which enables payments over the internet similar to Mobile Banking; and Virtual Accounts, which are more convenient as they do not require registering the recipient's account number (Wahyudi, 2023). The adoption of QRIS by MSMEs significantly impacted financial performance, including increased number and value of transactions, growth in sales turnover, improved business cash flow, and more efficient sales recording. Factors that affect the increase in the use of QRIS are changes in consumer spending behaviour that increasingly tend towards digital, significant growth in internet users to reach 76.70% in 2022, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that accelerated the adoption of digital technology in various sectors, including business transactions. The success of QRIS as a payment technology innovation is also the result of cooperation between Bank Indonesia and the Indonesian Payment System Association (ASPI) to improve transaction efficiency in Indonesia. Based on Bank Indonesia, the use of QRIS at the end of the year reached 14.78 million users. By the end of 2022, it reached 23.9 million users, including MSMEs, and by the end of 2023, it reached 26.6 million MSMEs using QRIS, whereas Bank Indonesia targets 45 million MSMEs in 2023 (Marissa Herlina, 2023). Although the growth of QRIS usage is increasing, there are still some challenges faced by MSMEs, primarily related to lim-

ited information, socialization, literacy, and networking, as well as financial constraints that may reduce their interest in adopting QRIS (Wardhani et al., 2023). MSMEs will slowly lose the broader market effectiveness and efficiency in the transparency of fast and automatic recording of buying and selling operations if MSMEs do not take advantage of and follow the development of technology that continues to develop (Marizsa Herlina, 2023).

The significant growth of DPS in Indonesia has become one of the crucial factors affecting the MSME sector, as well as directly providing a boost to the competitiveness of Indonesia's digital economy, especially in the context of the banking sector, then known as the fintech sector. Regulatory bodies, especially Bank Indonesia, are vital in creating a conducive environment for digital financial services. The aim is not only to encourage economic growth but also to improve operational efficiency and expand the scope of banking services to previously underserved population segments. Banking institutions also show significant resilience and flexibility in responding to the digital era's changing economic dynamics and consumer needs. The emergence of online banking services, mobile banking, and digital payment systems is becoming increasingly common, fundamentally changing traditional banking operations and customer interactions. The modern banking era influenced by digital technology provides greater convenience, accessibility, and efficiency in conducting financial transactions, thus positively impacting Indonesia's digital economy ecosystem

(Hermiyetti, 2024).

Drastic changes in Indonesia's banking sector have become a major focus in efforts to improve accessibility to financial services and contribute to economic empowerment and social development in Indonesia. QRIS service providers must comply with QRIS standards set by Bank Indonesia, whether they are banks or non-bank entities. If they fail to comply, they will not be allowed to operate in Indonesia, and their users will not be able to conduct transactions (PRIMA, 2020). In this context, the role of technological growth has undeniable significance. Currently, the banking sector in Indonesia is ready to adopt digital technology as the main driver of growth and competitiveness for the country's banking sector. With the massive adoption of digital technology, it is hoped that banks can improve their customer services and further contribute to the country's competitiveness. In addition, the main impetus for the Indonesian banking sector to adopt digital technology is also driven by changes in the behaviour and expectations of consumers, who want smoother access and personalized experiences in banking transactions. Under this pressure, banks in Indonesia are constantly striving to innovate, deliver more personalized experiences, and offer multi-channel services to meet the demands of increasingly diverse and growing customers (Hermiyetti, 2024).

In 2022, digital transactions in Indonesia reached an impressive amount of USD 51.9 billion, placing Indonesia as Southeast Asia's most prominent and most developed economic leader. The impact of this growth

is the emergence of various fintech companies in Indonesia, including those that provide DPS services. The main actors are startup companies such as OVO, GoPay, and DANA, which dominate the market. However, not only startup companies but many state-owned banks now provide DPS services. Bank Indonesia and the Financial Services Authority (OJK) regulate the fintech industry in Indonesia, with their respective roles clearly defined. Bank Indonesia is responsible for monetary policy and payment ecosystem regulation. At the same time, OJK focuses on peer-to-peer lending supervision, crowdfunding, digital banking, financial data security, insurance technology, and Financial Consumer Protection. Both institutions have technology divisions that play an essential role in interacting with fintech industry players through long-term strategies, aiming to encourage the advancement of the financial technology sector in Indonesia (International Trade Administration, 2024).

This study focuses on evaluating Indonesia's competitiveness, especially in the context of the role of the banking sector within the fintech sector, often referred to as the fintech sector. The strong relationship between the fintech sector and MSMEs is the main focus of this study, considering that MSMEs frequently use fintech services to support their business processes. Although there has been some literature addressing this topic, such as research conducted by (Aspan et al., 2022) and (Fitri Kumala Sari et al., 2022), the two literature have not explicitly focused on the growth of DPS in Indonesia, which has a significant impact on the devel-

opment of the banking sector in Indonesia. This is mainly because almost all actors in the banking sector now provide DPS services, which ultimately helps encourage the provision of other services to meet users' needs, including MSMEs in the current digital era. So, this study aims to analyze the correlation between the growth of DPS for MSMEs and the unequal distribution of DPS benefits across different regions in Indonesia. This issue is urgent because the lack of widespread adoption and utilization of DPS hinders the potential for economic growth and inclusivity competitiveness in Indonesia, considering the various actors involved, the technological innovation model used, and the relationship between factors and the surrounding functional environment. This consists of analyzing the interactions between different stakeholders, the technological innovation models used, and the relationship between these factors and the surrounding functional environment. By understanding these dynamics, we can identify barriers to DPS adoption and develop strategies to overcome them, ensuring that the advantages of digital payment systems are accessible to all, enhancing Indonesia's overall competitiveness.

This research marks an essential pillar given Indonesia's role as a leader in the Southeast Asian region in the realm of the digital economy, which is expected to attract increased attention from international actors. In this context, the utilization of DPS growth by competent companies is considered a crucial step to maintain the competitiveness of Indonesia's digital economy at the global level, especially in the fintech sector. Although

initially only providing DPS services, these fintech companies are developing into other digital service providers. However, not only to compete in the international market, it is also essential to utilize DPS to support the sustainability of MSMEs, which are critical actors in the growth of Indonesia's digital economy. The ecosystem approach in this study has an important value in providing a comprehensive analysis of the observed phenomena.

Methodology and Material

In the context of this study, the method chosen is a qualitative approach that combines literature and information sources from the website and applies the analysis using the Ecosystem Approach Concept (EAC). This study aims to deepen the understanding of DPS growth in Indonesia, assess its impact on MSME business performance, and evaluate the competitiveness of Indonesia's digital economy. The EAC was chosen because it allows for a holistic examination of the interconnected elements within the fintech ecosystem, such as regulatory frameworks, technological advancements, and market dynamics. This approach enables researchers to collect specific and detailed data while still obtaining a comprehensive picture that might not be achievable with a more limited quantitative approach. Thus, the chosen methods are relevant and can produce meaningful insights for future research.

Research Findings
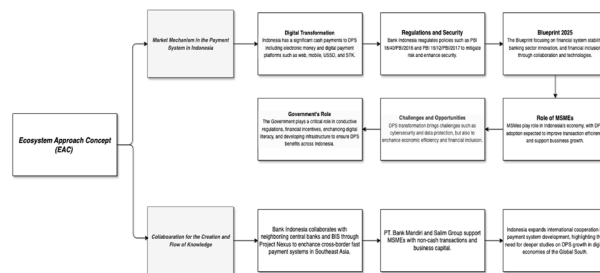
1. Ecosystem Approach Concept

Ecosystem Approach Concept (EAC) presents a point of view that examines innovative systems at various levels, ranging from national, regional, and cluster to other social organizational units. Within this framework, the EAC emphasizes several economic principles, the first of which is a market mechanism that develops independently within the ecosystem. Second, emphasis is placed on the nature and dynamics of interactions among potential participants, with collaboration as a driver of knowledge dissemination, transformation of that knowledge flow into innovation, and dissemination of that innovation across the economy. The EAC argues that decisions taken at the universal, regional, and national levels jointly affect the entire ecosystem. The importance of collaboration is highlighted to bring together communities interested in the development of the digital industry, fostering public-private partnerships, creating a competitive environment to accelerate the growth of digital services, and improving their quality (Rozentsvaig & Kovalenko, 2018). Thus, the emergence of the Digital Payment System (DPS) in Indonesia's digital economy is a new impetus for transforming the country's society.

The EAC began through the evolution of the digital economy from a digital transformation process that took more than 30 years. The OECD, an international organization that plays an important role in developing standards for protecting information and regulating data flow across borders, has been active since 1982. In this context, EAC emerges as a crucial solution, similar to software, that looks at the system holistically as an ecosystem and prioritizes sustainable development considerations quality (Rozentsvaig & Kovalenko, 2018). This narrative confirms the importance of the EAC in analyzing the phenomenon of DPS growth in Indonesia, which impacts MSME businesses and the competitiveness of the digital economy.

The EAC essentially adopts the concept of Ecology, which shows the natural evolution of the interaction between economic agents, models of innovative activity, and relations of the national, regional, cluster level, and so on as a subject of a constantly changing social organism under the influence of new dynamics of participants and new situations. This approach suggests that the EAC looks at not only the combination of organizations and institutions but also the multidimensional aspects of internal connections that include economic agents, interactions, and innovative environments consisting of ideas, technologies, regulations, social interactions, and cultural elements, quality (Rozentsvaig & Kovalenko, 2018). Further, in the context of this study, EAC is considered a practical framework for managing the complexity of digital components, including

DPS. This requires flexible management to anticipate and adapt to changes and events that may occur, taking into account the regulations provided by the government of Indonesia.

The EAC brings arguments that combine legal and economic principles in the context of ecosystems. First, the EAC affirms that ecosystems have internal market mechanisms capable of developing independently without governments' excessive intervention, which helps maintain the continuity of innovation processes and avoid too dominant interference from the authorities. Second, the EAC highlights the ecosystem approach's focus on collaboration between system participants, which it believes can facilitate knowledge exchange and innovative transformations that contribute to economic growth. In addition, the EAC also formulated the concept of Innovative Ecosystem (IES) as an evolution of the approach, which emphasizes the importance of conditions that support the improvement of national competitiveness through international regulation from a legal and economic perspective. In the context of research, the role of EAC is crucial to analyzing the influence of DPS growth on MSMEs and Indonesia's competitiveness. At the same time, IES emphasizes the international dimension of the competitiveness of countries that have their regulations applied to their country's economy according to the quality of their condition (Rozentsvaig & Kovalenko, 2018). The research follows a positivist approach using various secondary empirical data, utilizing data from online sources to provide and ex-

plain the correlation between phenomena. This study aims to uncover new findings by adopting the EAC for analysis and empirical data.

Consequently, this research maintains flexibility in its analysis and offers new insights. To ensure clarity, the data analysis process involves detailed coding and theme identification to capture the intricate relationships between actors and phenomena. Furthermore, methods such as triangulation and peer debriefing are employed to validate the findings and ensure reliability. This comprehensive approach enhances the study's credibility, providing a robust framework for understanding the impact of DPS growth on MSMEs and overall competitiveness in Indonesia.

A. Market Mechanisms in The Payment System in Indonesia

This section refers to the concept that ecosystems have internal market mechanisms that manage themselves, creating the necessary conditions for the continuity of technological innovation and avoiding excessive interference from the state of an excessive nature. The relevance of this concept to the development of the payment system in Indonesia over time affects the business strategy of economic actors, including MSMEs, in designing their business processes (Bank Indonesia, 2020; OCBC, 2023). The payment system in Indonesia has undergone a rapid transformation from a cash payment system to a non-cash payment system, also known as DPS. Over the past decade, there has been a massive wave of digital transformation

that has significantly changed consumer behaviour substantially. In addition, the diversity of payment systems is increasing with the introduction of chip-based and server-based electronic money, as well as consumer demand for easier, faster, and safer payments through various platforms, including web, mobile, Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD), and Sim Toolkit (STK). Furthermore, the emergence of virtual currencies or digital currencies that are formed and created by non-monetary authorities poses security risks such as the absence of a clear administrator, financial stability that is vulnerable to financial swelling, a means of money laundering, and even terrorism financing affect Bank Indonesia's policy in regulating financial markets. From the existing risks, Bank Indonesia regulations, such as PBI 18/40/PBI/2016 on the implementation of Payment Transaction Processing and PBI 19/12/PBI / 2017 on the implementation of financial technology, are important in regulating the use of virtual currencies and minimizing risks associated with payment systems (Bank Indonesia, 2020).

Significant digital transformation has transformed the payment system landscape in Indonesia, prompting the government to formulate the Indonesia payment system blueprint 2025 as a guide to navigating this digital era. The transformation brings several opportunities and threats that need to be carefully addressed. On the one hand, more sophisticated payment systems promise convenience, speed, and efficiency that can drive economic growth. However, these developments also pose risks, such as cybersecurity,

compliance with anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism Regulations, and personal data protection. In addition, these changes could result in market dominance by some entities and potential misuse of data that could destabilize the financial system. Other threats include a decline in the role of conventional financial institutions and the growth of shadow banking, which may reduce the effectiveness of monetary policy. With this blueprint, appropriate directions can be given to effectively manage this digital transformation while ensuring Bank Indonesia's role in maintaining the stability and integrity of the financial system (Bank Indonesia, 2020).

The Blueprint outlines five critical visions that become focal points in strategic planning. The First vision focuses on integrating the digital economy and National Finance, which aims to ensure that central banks can regulate money circulation and monetary policy and maintain financial system stability while supporting financial inclusion. Second, the vision seeks to support digital transformation within the banking sector as an intermediary between the digital economy and the financial sector by leveraging technology and data to drive growth and innovation. Third, the blueprint affirms the importance of maintaining a healthy relationship between fintech and the banking sector to avoid shadow banking risks through collaboration and technologies such as Application Programming Interfaces (APIs). Fourth, the blueprint highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between innovative consumer protection and financial system stability by implementing strict regu-

lations such as Know Your Customer (KYC) and Anti-Money Laundering or Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT), as well as utilizing technology for surveillance and reporting. Fifth, the blueprint aims to ensure national interests in the digital economy and Interstate finance through regulations that encourage domestic transaction processing within the country and fair cooperation between foreign and domestic operators (Bank Indonesia, 2020).

The Blueprint details five essential steps that will be taken to realize the visions that have been set. First, through open API standardization, this step will secure access to the financial information of banks and fintechs to third parties, facilitating interconnection between banks and fintechs to enhance innovation. Second, the focus is on developing a more efficient and secure retail payment system by introducing 24/7 real-time payments through fast payment, optimizing the National Payment Gateway (GPN), and developing a unified payment interface. Third, financial market infrastructure and wholesale payments, such as Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS), will be developed. Fourth, steps will be taken to develop and utilize national data collaboratively and integratively to support better decision-making. Finally, there will be regulation, supervision, licensing, and reporting to ensure a conducive environment for the growth of the digital economy and an inclusive and secure financial sector (Bank Indonesia, 2020).

The development and regulation of the payment system in Indonesia is a very relevant and detailed topic, especially

considering its crucial role in Indonesia's e-commerce, transportation, online media, and online travel industries. In these four frameworks, MSMEs play a significant role. The projected value of these industries, which are expected to reach $82.56 billion by 2023 with continued growth of 12.26% through 2027, highlights the importance of the digital payments ecosystem. The various services provided by DPS have responded to the diverse needs of the Indonesian people. The concept of digital wallets, divided into three categories: closed-digital wallets, open-digital wallets, and prepaid cards, offers significant flexibility and convenience. Closed-digital wallets are intended for specific applications. Merchants such as GoPay, ShopeePay, LinkAja, DANA, OVO, and Prepaid cards can use open-digital wallets, which offer alternative payment solutions. All these aspects are governed by Bank Indonesia Regulation Number 20/6/PBI/2018 on electronic money, which affirms the importance of compliance and eligibility for each service provider. In addition, Payment Gateway, which facilitates online payments, and QRIS, which offers fast and efficient payment methods, help enrich the digital payment ecosystem by implementing ride-hailing, e-learning, and other services. Third, there is the QRIS innovation, where users can make payments through mobile banking or applications without taking more time and distance (Brankas, 2024); with the existence of various kinds of DPS services, various significant implications arise, including changes in cross-border transactions, credit allocation, and a more efficient and universal

financial system. They have increased financial data privacy, monetary policy direction, and the impact on MSMEs as a critical stakeholder in adopting the digital economy ecosystem (Topan Yuniarto, 2024).

The role played by MSMEs in driving the Indonesian economy has been the subject of significant attention. In this context, MSMEs are the largest absorber of Labor, reaching 97% of the total workforce in the business world, and also contribute substantially to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), reaching 61.1%. In comparison, large business actors only contribute around 38.9%. An interesting phenomenon observed in 2022 is the number of cellular connections in Indonesia that exceeds its population of 277.7 million, reaching 370.1 million connections, with a percentage ratio of 133.3% of users. This factor shows excellent potential for the growth of digital payment systems (DPS), with each individual having more than one SIM card and performing digital transactions many times. In developed countries, cash payments are still less common, such as South Korea, which only has 14% of payments in cash, and the United States only 32%; even some European countries have switched completely to non-cash payments (Pratama, 2024). DPS in Indonesia has bright prospects to improve transaction efficiency and support the growth of MSMEs and the country's GDP.

As researched by M. Mashabi and Wasiaturrahma (2021), DPS positively impacts economic growth, particularly in Indonesia (Mashabi & Wasiaturrahma, 2021). In addition to improving transaction securi-

ty, such as reducing theft, DPS also expands MSME access to the ecosystem, combines connections with new markets with employees and suppliers, and opens up wider economic opportunities that are proven to have implemented financial inclusion in the United States (Pratama, 2024). In this framework, the role of the government is essential to ensure that the benefits of DPS are distributed effectively to MSMEs and positively impact the country's economic growth. Four main aspects must be considered in the government's role in distributing DPS benefits to MSMEs:

1. Creating a conducive regulatory environment through the creation of transparent regulations and guidelines to encourage the adoption of digital payments among MSMEs by strengthening aspects of security, data protection, and consumer rights in digital transactions.

2. Provide financial incentives, such as tax exemptions or subsidies, to encourage MSMEs to adopt digital payments, which can help reduce cost barriers for small businesses.

3. Improve digital literacy by socializing and spreading education-related campaigns to MSMEs about the benefits of digital payments and how to use them effectively.

4. Encourage infrastructure development by investing in building digital payment infrastructure with internet connectivity and payment processing systems so that financial facilities for MSMEs become smoother. The government's role is very central in the distribution of DPS in Indonesia so that financial inclusion occurs and the country's GDP increases (Pratama, 2024).

The adoption rate of DPS by MSMEs still shows that it has yet to reach the optimal level. One of the main determining factors is that many MSMEs still have not fully switched to digital business models, such as participating in e-commerce platforms, and the number of MSMEs utilizing DPS is not yet optimal (Herlina, 2023). As MSMEs step towards digital transformation, DPS will become a crucial and interrelated element. E-commerce and DPS have great potential in facilitating transaction processes, increasing revenue, increasing transparency, and improving the efficiency of MSME business operations. Although the awareness of MSMEs about the importance of digital technology adoption has increased, the distribution and utilization of DPS is still uneven. This may be affected by the need for internet access, especially in rural areas. In this regard, the role of the Indonesian government is crucial in addressing this issue to ensure that the benefits of DPS can be enjoyed evenly throughout the region, not just in big cities (Fathan, 2023).

In the context of this study, the main focus lies on market mechanisms involving Bank Indonesia, DPS, FinTech, and MSMEs in Indonesia. These three variables are interrelated and influence each other, making it an essential subject for research. The role of Bank Indonesia in encouraging the develop-

ment of DPS by fintech, whether non-bank or private sector, as well as banks, confirms the role of regulators in regulating digital financial markets. DPS is fueling innovation in digital services, primarily through mobile devices, which were initially only used for online transactions. This initiative has strengthened Indonesia's competitiveness in the fintech market, with an increasing number of digital service providers yearly. This is reflected in the ever-increasing transaction growth in Indonesia with the emergence of many new actors in the industry. The financial sector has become evident with the penetration of technology and the emergence of digital payment services dominated by financial institutions such as banks, both private and government-owned. However, a paradigm shift occurred with the influx of non-bank players offering digital payment services. This is encouraging traditional banks to adjust their business strategies in the face of this increasingly digital market.

Nonetheless, this dynamic has a positive impact by encouraging technological innovation and reducing excessive government interference in the sector. However, it should be recognized that the distribution of digital payment services, especially to MSMEs, is not entirely the government's responsibility alone. Fintech industry players also have a significant role in promoting, maintaining security, and ensuring that MSMEs can make optimal use of it, just as Grab through OVO continues to push for the adoption of DPS among MSMEs (Antara, 2021). The challenge arises when the internet infrastructure in some regions is still inadequate, thus hindering the adoption of digital payment services. The government has become very important in ensuring equal internet access across the country or providing incentives to industry players to invest in areas still lagging in internet connectivity.

B. Collaboration for the creation and flow of knowledge

This section discusses a collaborative approach to improving cross-border payment systems in the Southeast Asian region, focusing on developing fast payment-based DPS by building partnerships that disseminate knowledge and transform flows that can shape innovation across all aspects of the economy. Bank Indonesia is working with central banks from neighbouring countries, including Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM), Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), and Bank of Thailand (BOT), to explore the potential of fast payment-based DPS, particularly in Southeast Asia, and to engage the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) through Project Nexus. This cooperation continues the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on regional payment connectivity approved by the five banks on November 14, 2022. The project known as Project Nexus is divided into three stages. The first phase aims to establish a multilateral scheme to connect fast payment systems in different countries. The second phase focuses on cross-border fast payment research and trials, while the third phase explores organizational, business model, technology and operational aspects implemented from April 2023 to March

2024. The goal of the project is to build a retail payment infrastructure that can be accessed at any time, with the hope of increasing ease, security, and inclusion in cross-border transactions, which will benefit various stakeholders, including MSMEs, tourists, and Indonesian migrant workers (Haryono, 2023).

Companies such as PT. Bank Mandiri and Salim Group and Bank Syariah Indonesia (BSI) have taken several initiatives to support MSMEs—cooperation between PT. Bank Mandiri and Salim Group cover a wide range of services, such as the provision of wholesale goods and the sale of digital products, with a focus on accepting non-cash payments, recording digital transactions, and providing business development capital for MSMEs. In addition, BSI also launched the MSME Center program in collaboration with Bank Indonesia to improve the quality and competitiveness of MSME products in the Go Halal Go Digital and Go Global MSME schemes. This Program assists MSMEs in adopting digital technology for product marketing, facilitating financial transactions through DPS, improving market access, and providing training related to business processes. The initiative also expands opportunities for BSI to penetrate international markets, especially in the Middle East through partnerships with conglomerates and startups in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (Hayana, 2023).

The cooperation implemented by Indonesia in developing the payment system is not limited to the national level but also includes the international level, which allows more comprehensive market access and increases the country's competitiveness. Although the cooperation benefits not only fintech actors but also MSMEs, international regulations governing competition between countries in the payment system still do not exist, encouraging countries to develop their own regulations and cooperate with other countries and non-state parties. Although Indonesia has been active in such cooperation, it is essential to consider how countries in the rest of the Global South Region are developing their payment systems. So, according to the author, future studies that focus on the growth of DPS in countries with digital economies that have not developed significantly become a need that needs to be considered more deeply (Hayana, 2023).

Conclusions and research results

In the context of the digital age, DPS has emerged as an essential component in the financial system, providing efficiency and effectiveness in the flow of funds, especially with the growth of industries that increasingly rely on digital transactions. Although DPS offers significant potential benefits for MSMEs and other business people, its deployment and utilization have yet to be evenly distributed across sectors. In this study, the Asian Economic Committee (EAC) highlighted several challenges and recommendations to improve the distribution and utilization of DPS, namely:

1. DPS distribution and other digital services to reach all MSMEs in Indonesia by prioritizing safety and comfort for users.
2. Promoting and supervising technolo-

gy, including DPS by the private sector and the Indonesian government, is also emphasized to ensure balanced adoption of technology throughout the region.

3. The creation of organizations and communities that accommodate all stakeholders in the Indonesian payment system is also a focus, with the goal of supporting broader and effective cooperation and encouraging innovation in this sector.

The international regulations governing DPS are seen as important to creating a healthy and equitable environment for all countries. This emphasizes the need for a comprehensive review because, until now, most regulations have focused more on the national level and have not been able to embrace all countries equally.

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The Political Economy of Crypto Assets:

World Dependency on Digital Financialization

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The massive development of technology, the use of data, and information systems have brought the popularity of crypto assets—also known as cryptocurrency—as part of the digital economy in the globalized political economy order. This study aims to capture structuralist criticisms by Karl Marx of crypto assets as a global political economy project and see its massive entanglement in the current global political order. Using the concepts of base and superstructure, this study will dismantle the discourse on the mode of production of commodities that have been questioned based on their digital and intangible commodity. It reveals the reproduction of the surplus labor process as a part of an initial understanding of how the crypto assets work from the social relations network's perspective. In further analysis, this study uses Dependency Theory to view crypto assets as a global system phenomenon that cannot escape the role of multi-sectors that perpetuate the presence of global structuralism in the current global economy. The research utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate the intertwining relationships between crypto assets and world dependency in the international political economy order.

Keywords: *blockchain; cryptocurrency; dependency theory; digitalization; Global South*

Introduction

This study aims to dissect Karl Marx's notion of crypto assets as part of the digital economy instruments in a super-modern society, seeing its massive shift in the current global economic order that derives from the advancement of the usage of data, technology, and globalization. In recent years, the notion of crypto assets—which is also known as cryptocurrency—has changed the relations between stakeholders and actors in the global economic order, where its presence is expected to transform not only banking and financial capabilities but also the people's power relations in the era of neoliberalism (De Filipi & Loveluck, 2016). The crypto assets concept was initially offered as a neoliberal economy project that radicalized Frederik Hayek and Milton Friedman's ambition to end central state control over the production of redistribution of capital flow. Crypto assets system require technological and information systems sophistication as part of the capitalist mode of production, initiating a long historical and dialectical journey in the era of disruption. According to Ethan

Fridmanski (2021), the political economy of crypto assets is a relationship between a capitalist system integrated with advanced computational technology and information systems to create social power relations and political ideology.

The conceptions of the political economy of crypto assets later meet the definition of digital financialization from Le Thanh Ha (2022). Economic transformation in a digital sector should fulfill criteria such as internet connection, digital connectivity, e-business, e-commerce, and e-government. The reality illustrates changes in the scheme of relations and trusts between countries and markets in managing digital finance projects by by-passing government financial institutions. For this reason, a country does not have sufficient legitimacy to regulate the circulation of crypto assets, assessing the impact of cryptographic technology beyond the central bank's power (Filipi & Loveluck, 2016).

I shall underline its initial designation of crypto assets in the global economy as an essential component of the digital economy framework as an alternative digital financial direct payment system to respond to the global financial crisis of 2008 (Bachaev & Abdulazizova, 2020). However, various academia, experts, and researchers have made several critical assumptions on the resilience of the crypto assets system, stating that several drawbacks of volatility market movement are predominant issues. Drawing upon Filipi & Loveluck (2016), Bachaev & Abdulazizova (2020), and Le Thanh Ha (2022), this research synthesizes based on the significance of crypto asset operationalization,

blockchain technology as the financial 'hardware,' and the volatility market as a structure of the global financial system. In juxtaposing with structural political economy, the crypto asset discourse fills the emergence of dependency relations from the Global South with the capital flow of finance. Thus, this study's contribution is mainly on understanding the political struggle of the capitalistic financial system from the lens of the Global South.

The intertwining relationship between the crypto assets system and the global economic order is inseparable from the behavior of the global community, which uses the crypto assets as a payment gateway and capital accumulation with the support of the capitalist neoliberal regime in every economic practice. Here, I address two questions: (1) How does Karl Marx's notion dissect the crypto assets mode of production as part of the phenomenon of global capitalism? (2) How does the structural dependency created in the crypto assets system affect the global economic order? Two theoretical frameworks were used to answer those two questions. First, Karl Marx used the notion of Base and Superstructure, which underlines the essential anatomies of capitalism as an input for commodity production analysis within the system, including the labor and individual. In understanding the capitalist mode of production, Marx emphasizes that economic activity in material production within society is used to reproduce surplus value for a capitalist lifestyle, as in investment, later known as the Economic Base (Marx, 1976).

In addition, the Social Superstructure of Capitalism is defined by a supplementary aspect of the Economic Base, which consists of the economic system, commodity production, labor class, and power relations with the Economic Base (Preston, 1999). The social Superstructure of Capitalism can be formed in many ways, including state contribution, political organization, society's culture, ideology, and other non-economic base variables (Zotov, 1985). The relation between the basis and the creation of the superstructure of society is reciprocal so that they determine the nature of each other, and the role of the social class that runs the base can influence how the social superstructure of society can be formed (Preston, 1999).

To explain the implication of the crypto assets system to a global power structure, I strongly utilize Dependency Theory on a global scale, combining the historical materialism and critical thinking paradigm as a development of Dependency Theory in a contemporary political economy. The main aim of this theory is to actively describe the inequality of economic development in the non-European world, which makes it increasingly less visible than it should be. The inequality of economic development created by a long historical process also creates economic development, on the other hand, as a side effect of capitalist development (Peet & Hartwick, 2015).

Crypto assets are a digital commodity that alienates digital labor work and perpetuates capitalists' victory in accumulating capital in the market. In a global economy context, crypto asset systems produce discrepancies in technological domination, capital, and cheap infrastructure utilization in the Global South in the era of contemporary international political economy and global development.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach as its leading research umbrella to answer existing problems. The research design used is critical research that seeks to investigate further social and economic phenomena that arise in the global community. This critical research method seeks to emancipate mindsets, thoughts, and understandings of how current socio-political conditions can alienate in the context of discursive practices (McNabb, 2015). In addition, this method is believed to answer the discourse within the development order of the political economy of cryptocurrency, which also aims to raise the awareness of the public as part of the process of understanding the current social and political conditions as part of the process of understanding previous practices (McNabb, 2015). The increasing public unawareness of the potential alienation of crypto asset practices that have been prevalent over the past five years shows the need for emancipating understanding from other perspectives and their adverse implications for the sustainability of society in the era of capitalism. Society in the era of capitalism.

Data was collected through research based on hermeneutics methods where the hermeneutic analysis includes secondary data such as formal and non-formal written materials such as journals, books, articles,

etc. such as journals, books, articles, newspapers, magazines, and others (McNabb, 2015). In other words, data collection is done with a desk study analysis that utilizes secondary data with an analysis that leans towards interpretivism. The analysis will look at an author's interpretation and place it in the theorization used in this research, which discusses the development of the crypto economy and its social relations with users. Not only that, but the unit of analysis also used in this context is the global economic system, where the overall system of the world's economic order is seen holistically and thoroughly. Through these processes, the data is available from International Finance Institutions (IFIs) reports such as the OECD, the World Bank, and Marathon Digital Holdings and juxtaposed with previous research. Thus, synthesizing various empirical evidence and descriptive statistics reinforces the arguments built into the crypto financial system.

Crypto Assets as an Economic Base

Crypto assets are not new terminology in digital and political economic discussions. However, many must understand how the technology works and what differentiates it from other digital financial tools. To begin with, crypto assets are part of digital commodities from a pragmatic and philosophical understanding. Mariana Makarova (2018), in her work *The Influence of Bitcoin Ecosystem on Digital Economy*, says crypto assets or cryptocurrency is a form of digital asset that is not legally regulated under the law, is a decentralized and closed system (anonymous) and consists of the series of numbers or cryp-

tographic code.

The central concept promoted by crypto-economics is the lack of human supervision, so the monitoring system is carried out via computers with help from software. This can replace the central bank's money supply monitoring system. Therefore, all the transactions in the system are based on cryptographic technology, which combines unique characters and codes, later known as Blockchain technology (Makarova, 2018). In addition, Bachaev & Abdulazizova (2020) explain the comprehensiveness of this study by making old users rich through the sacrifice of new users with all market capitalization activities and rationality. In other words, the pattern formed by the crypto assets is that capital accumulation is based on the period and amount of existing market capitalization.

However, some studies of crypto assets need to explain holistically how the position of labor and capital can be juxtaposed and affected by the global dependence country between the core and the periphery. By expanding our understanding of that, we must first agree that there has been a significant shift in civil society's understanding of capital in the digital economy. For this reason, the non-digital economic transition underway so far has experienced a shift when digitalization and information systems are present in society. Hence, the forms of commodities and their production modes also change along with technological developments.

Table 1. Comparison of The Transition from Non-Digital Economy to Digital Economy

	Non-Digital Economy	Digital Economy
Commodity	• Tangible Assets • Physical Form	• Tangible Assets • Current Assets • Digital Assets
Accessibility	• Trade Infrastructure • Providers of Goods and Services	• Internet of Things • Big Data • ICT • Network Infrastructure
Labour	• Traditional Labour	• Digital Labour
Surveillance	• State • Central Bank	• Central Bank • Blockchain Technology (for Decentralized Finance) • *Laissez-faire* • *Efficient* • *Transparent*
Market	• *Laissez-faire* (Market) • State-intervention	• Organic (Complex)
Civil Society	• Mechanic (Conventional)	• Digital Governance
Governance	• New Public Management	

Source: processed by author from various sources

Furthermore, *Table 1* explains the indicators that help to understand changes in the digital economic system, which are reworked from OECD 2020. The digital economy has various forms of commodities but has one distinctive characteristic, namely Tangible Assets, including Fixed Assets, Current Assets, and Digital Assets (Nuraliat & Azwari, 2018). These assets are the main exchange commodity in digital economic circulation, whether for investment purposes or other financial-monetary-related activities. This also applies to crypto assets, which qualify as a digital economy that has invisible commod-

ities, meaning there is no actual value for a commodity. The commodities in question can be seen from two aspects, namely intangible fixed assets and current assets. This is because crypto-assets do not have physical material value and only take the form of a collection of information and data, which is then valuable in society. Moreover, crypto assets qualify as current assets because of their investment function in extracting profits.

Commodity Modes of Production on Bitcoin

One of the most popular and well-known commodities in crypto assets is Bitcoin (BTC), which has become the world's number one asset in crypto and decentralized finance circulation. In juxtaposing Bitcoin and The Value Theory of Karl Marx, several significant relevances in the capitalistic market dominate the global economic order and form a new commodity within systems. One of the most universal ways to understand this is by first understanding the *use value* and its *exchange value*. *Use value* is the actual value of one commodity, which explains the proper function of its goods. In contrast, *exchange value* is the exchange equivalent of a commodity compared to objects in the market (Villarreal Robledo, 2016).

When there is a polarization on Bitcoin's use value and asymmetrical perception of exchange value, Bitcoin's commodity flow that can be observed in general is that its identity does not qualify as fiat money but rather as a commodity and a medium of exchange only, and why is that? *First*, the value of bitcoin is obtained exclusively so that it

does not go through a commodity mediation process that provides use value into exchange value because the commodity produced is fictitious (not physical material) and inside the network (Villarreal Robledo, 2016).

The value given to coins is an exchange value based directly on the market's laws of supply and demand, not on the use value or intrinsic value of the material from which they are made. According to Marx, it does not have a real form that can be categorized as a function of money. However, its use value is represented by the improbability of crypto puzzle calculations and the sophistication of computing.

Second, Bitcoin (BTC) and other crypto coins are optimal means for exchanging value where prices cannot be determined through commodity use value but rather the law of supply and demand; consumers and crypto speculators are potential winners in accumulating wealth in the system (Villarreal Robledo, 2016). The framework introduced by Karl Marx with the notation C-M-C (Commodity-Money-Commodity) and M-C-M (Money-Commodity-Money) is very relevant for implementation. The exchange of low Bitcoin prices for buying and selling on the secondary market and replacing them with higher Bitcoin prices uses a complex economic strategy that works in two directions: to gain profits in the crypto economic circulation. Of course, this activity can alienate and objectify the workforce in crypto mining.

The workforce, later known as Labour, has an ontological position in the reality of crypto assets activities and mode of production. The commodification of labor is a physical commodity with non-material value, so it does not only talk about the transfer of capital flows between parties but also the transaction activities of goods or services within it (Kleijnen, 2020).

According to Marx (1976), Labour has the most valuable non-material value in the production process scheme, which mediates the transfer of the value of a raw commodity into a finished commodity and is, of course, more valuable. Moreover, he said that the value of a commodity first appears as a unity that cannot be separated from the labor power that produces the commodity. The extraction carried out by capital owners towards digital workers continues to be carried out to achieve maximum profits and prominent figures. In crypto mining, digital workers solve puzzles in validating Bitcoin transactions, which require high computational power and electrical energy, so a surplus of labor value can be obtained based on these activities.

Capital owners take advantage of the minimal production costs required to mine Bitcoin, including sophisticated computer infrastructure and the electrical energy needed to support this activity (Fridmanski, 2021). Capital owners then calculate low production costs to control a large portion of world energy and electricity based on low prices and cheap labor. Bitcoin mining centers then extract surplus labor by paying wages at no more than production costs to achieve profits on fictional capital or Bitcoin itself (Fridmanski, 2021).

Digital Financial Market and System as a Superstructure

The growth-oriented economic development of a country is one of the classic characteristics of the political project of capitalist society to achieve sustainable development. The disruption of information and communication technology in the current era is also an essential determinant of the orientation of a country's economic development and even global development towards the Industrial Revolution 4.0. The crypto assets system is believed to be an instrument of money exchange that maximizes technological sophistication by reducing the role of the government and its intervention in the flow of capital circulation, whether between individuals, corporations, or countries (OECD, 2020). Various financial problems considered inefficient, not fast, and impractical are being addressed by crypto-economics in cross-border transactions requiring a third-party mechanism.

The main principle of crypto-economic development relies on the *Laissez-Faire* principle, which maximizes decision-making for political units, investment, production, and distribution of decentralized economic circulation. The market is the main arena for information transactions, resource allocation, and coordination related to decision-making, so it can provide sufficient intensity in stimulating individual and business capital (Mas'oed, M., 2002). The natural characteristic of the market is competition and is full of international competition. This concept is the foundation of the crypto economic production mode which promotes *Decentralized*

Finance (DeFi) transactions without the legitimate authority of third parties including the government in carrying out economic circulation flows (Tokocrypto, 2021). The *Laissez-Faire* development principle is very well manifested in the growth and transformation-oriented crypto assets system.

As a growth-oriented economic development instrument better known as an economic-led development project, crypto relies on the law of supply and demand to ensure transactions run smoothly so that government intervention in supervision, implementation, and legal regulations is relatively minimal (Mas'oed, M., 2002). More than that, the circulation of the crypto economy is a political-economic project driven by the private sector, so the public sector's legitimacy towards this industry is still considered skeptical. It is not interested in this industry (Feyen et al., 2022). One private sector that supports crypto is the financial institutions JPMorgan and Morgan Stanley, saying that many financial institutions want to invest their funds in Bitcoin (Feyen et al., 2022). The busy private sector investing in Bitcoin and the circulation of the crypto economy can also be seen from several corporations such as Tesla, PayPal, Ark Invest, and others, which have begun channeling investment funds into the Bitcoin system (Feyen et al., 2022).

Class Formation on Crypto Assets System

According to Marx (1976), the social ability to transform materials can be seen from the degree of development of produc-

tive forces and guided by exploitative social relations to transform collective consciousness into an ideological format where elites can monopolize collective violence, rationalize inequality, and guarantee the continued reproduction of profits in forms of inequality (Peet & Hartwick, 2015). This can be classified through the organizational pattern of the economic society that forms it so that the class formation between capital owners and the working class is structurally understood in the notation of core and periphery. The core and periphery structure in social and financial relations is usually formed based on interdependence in a society where lower production levels depend on higher levels. Actors in core social relations usually have transactional relationships in their direction, so they have complex relationships between the core and the periphery (Villarreal Robledo, 2016).

The core-periphery structure in the crypto assets system can be seen as a hierarchical order in power distribution in socio-economic relations. Hypothetically, investors, landlords, and financial capitalists occupy the highest hierarchical position or core of all social relations by extracting surplus capital from industrial capitalists such as credit, site rentals, investments, and buildings (Villarreal Robledo, 2016). This shows the production of structural imbalances within the core itself, so there is an imbalance of power because the financial capitalist aspect has the power to regulate all other aspects. Meanwhile, the peripheral aspect of the system facilitates the exchange of labor from the total social capital of the crypto as-

sets system, where digital workers can also own, buy, and benefit from relationships with the core.

More specifically, the structure of the crypto assets community formed in the core-periphery scheme shows intense connections but weak connections at the periphery (Villarreal Robledo, 2016). This causes a more profound gap with fellow peripheries where the distribution of power between the mining center and crypto consumers has dense transactions to actualize its value. Exchanges also continue to take place with traders, consumers, and mining centers that require the disbursement of other assets. For this reason, social relations in the hierarchy of actors in the core become a complex accumulation of social relations because they connect many actors needed in the crypto-economic system (Villarreal Robledo, 2016).

Capital and Technology Domination in the Global North

Based on the IMF report (Feyen et al., 2022), the adoption of the crypto economy in various parts of the world, both in the Global North and Global South, is known as cryptoisation, which continues to be echoed as part of digital financialization. The cryptoisation phenomenon in Table 2 shows that countries with middle-income economies show crypto adoption that exceeds countries with advanced economies. This is caused by various factors that encourage massive crypto adoption in the Global South. The IMF said that inadequate macroeconomic policies and inefficient payment systems are the

main factors in developing the crypto economy in these countries. However, more than that, speculative retail investments are the main attraction for users in these countries (Feyen et al., 2022).

Table 2. List of Countries on Cryptoisation in the Year 2022

Cryptoisation Ranking	Countries	Peer-to-peer Exchange Volume Index
1	Vietnam	2
2	Philippines	66
3	Ukraine	39
4	India	82
5	United States of America	111
6	Pakistan	50
7	Brazil	113
8	Thailand	61
9	Russia	109
10	China	144

Source: Chainalysis (2022)

For this reason, the success of cryptoisation in Global countries cannot be separated from the role of the Global North as owners of capital in various aspects, be it technology, business land, research, human resources, and so on. Of course, the Global North has a role as an investor in carrying out the circulation of the crypto economy which is concentrated in countries with advanced economies with high capitalization (Hays, Elkov, Rosenberg et al., 2022). For example, in Table 3, a crypto company with a total capitalization of $482.5 billion held by Bakkt (a Bitcoin exchange company) is a clear illustration that the largest capital owner in the crypto and technology industry comes from the United States. More than that, the United States also dominates the world's largest capitalization and funding for the technology industry and the crypto economy, which owns many crypto resources with investors through venture capital companies.

Table 3. List of the World's Largest Venture Capital Companies Funding Crypto

Venture Capital Firms	Country
TRGC	United States of America
Coinbase Venture	United States of America
Dragonfly Capital	United States of America
Polychain Capital	United States of America
Digital Currency Group	United States of America
Alameda Research	Hongkong

Source: Cointelegraph Consulting (2020)

Based on this table, the Global South needs more capital to fund companies to ensure the circulation of crypto assets within the global economy systems. This creates differences in the division of labor between countries that contribute to the global political and economic order. Not only that, the relationships developed by capital owners and crypto with the existing technology companies also offer their services to crypto miners in the field. The consequences of technological domination of the Global North are proliferating the use of crypto in various parts of the world, particularly the Global South. In this context, market intrusion is carried out in the Global South countries that have the power to use crypto-economic transactions. Hence, if we want to differentiate between

the divisions of labor, the Global North countries are investors, capital owners, and economic activity regulators (powerhouses). At the same time, the Global South is the adopter player in trade, exchange, and has a high volume of transactions in a concentrated area.

The Global North Dependency on Labor, Production, and Capital

Corresponding with an economic order based on neoliberal capitalism, the crypto assets mode of production, with all the complexity of the intertwining actors and their relationships, gives rise to a quite significant process of dependency between the core and periphery structures in circulation. The two structuralist positions and the networks created are the valid world dependence structural framework in seeing dependency at the macro and global level as these countries need each other to meet the needs of capital owners and the economies of their countries, especially in perpetuating an economic system that is exploitative and supports inequality. The power distribution in mapping the relationship between the core and the periphery is also crucial because the degrees of the crypto assets hierarchy can be traced (Fridmanski, 2021).

The structural relationship between the Global North as the location of the core structure consisting of investors, both individuals with significant capital and venture capital companies, crypto and crypto technology companies, as well as crypto mining sites, has quite complicated social ties with the Global South as the location of periphery

structure in the crypto assets circulation. It is described as a user, consumer, and transaction implementer with a lower power relationship than a country with various capital types (Fridmanski, 2021). The increasingly complex accumulation of social ties between the Global North and the Global South provides a picture of increasingly complex structural consolidation in claiming a portion of the total social wealth obtained in a system (Fridmanski, 2021).

In general, the essence of the hierarchal relationship structure in the crypto assets system has the primary function of driving the wheels of the crypto economy, called core space. The complex relationships in the core structure reflect not only the complexity of the actors within the company but also the countries of origin of the company, which shape the distribution of power and its relationships. Without being said, the transfer of power and social relations in crypto cannot be studied with certainty due to the anonymity of users and the circulation used. Nevertheless, key player companies can be tracked through location, capital owners, and the companies or affiliates used to run their business (Fridmanski, 2021).

In the core space, the state is a facilitator that supports the flow of crypto assets so that accessibility for companies that provide funding or investment can be achieved efficiently. Then, it also gives a high power in determining which companies and consumer targets they want to reach, including market intrusion into the Global South countries and jurisdictions. After that, venture capital firms, individual investors, and crypto ex-

change companies have the highest structure of power that regulates all activities created, and every transaction between the three has an important role in extracting wealth with the help of crypto mining industries. Miners also have strategic power in determining where the capital or coins being split during market consolidation go (Fridmanski, 2021).

All relationships that create power relations in the core structure are carried out to support and maintain the flow of transactions that must occur to accumulate, obtain, and exploit the resources owned by the capitalists. The relationship being put forward is also oriented towards consolidating capitalists to strengthen their bargaining power position in the global economic order so that more ideological and fundamental economic ideas can last longer for the benefits they obtain (Fridmanski, 2021). The Global North clearly illustrates the structure of inequality, differences, and division of labor that can occur among the Global North and the need for interdependence with other sectors.

One example is the Marathon Digital Holdings Company, which operates in the crypto and Bitcoin mining sector in Las Vegas, United States. In implementing the structuralism framework in the Global North as the leading provider of reproductive resources for the crypto economy. Marathon Digital Holdings is a crypto company and the largest bitcoin mining center in the United States. It has been involved in the crypto industry for a long time. Of course, a provider of production equipment requires sufficient funding from venture capital companies consisting of The Vanguard Group, Blackrock Fund Advisors, and Morgan Stanley & Co (Marathon Digital Holdings, 2022). Both have a reciprocal relationship regarding the needs of industries and businesses that run to fulfill profits and have substantial power over ownership of resources.

Moreover, two important sectors that have high power in regulating the running of the crypto economy in various companies require mining activities to perpetuate existing businesses to achieve profits or benefits. Marathon Digital Holdings further has mining centers in several areas in the United States, which are affiliated with other companies specifically providing mining services and infrastructure, including Computenorth, blockchain applications, and others such as Mccamey, Grandbury, Ellendale, Garden City, Plano, and Coshocton areas., United States (Marathon Digital Holdings, 2022). Of course, these companies employ digital workers or digital labor to carry out mining activities and make profits for service-providing companies.

Electricity as a New Land Resource

The cryptoisation phenomenon in the Global South is a form of extension of market consolidation in continuing economic development brought about by the Global North countries. The world's use of the crypto economy can be seen as the percentage of intensive usage, including peer-to-peer transactions (P2P), dominated by the Global South, including Vietnam, the Philippines, Ukraine, India, and so on (Adrian et al., 2021). Even though using a digital economy based on crypto technology is prohibited in

various regions, the massive cryptoisation phenomenon still dominates in the Global South.

Crypto mining activities also occur in Asia, more precisely in China, which holds the highest numbers in the crypto assets mining industry, especially Bitcoin mining. This can be seen from the seventy percent computational power of crypto mining that dominates the world, which manifests as the world's most significant mining activity (Matthews, 2018). Even though China has banned the use of all crypto-economic activities considered detrimental to its national financial stability, there are still many capitalists based in China to extract profits from these activities (Matthews, 2018). The cycle being faced also has a strong dependency cycle between sectors where crypto users, exchangers, and consumers, mainly in the Global South, have a high dependency on it.

Comprehensively, the power relations formed by the dependence between the Global South and the Global North are also caused by deep and institutional social and political extraction, so they have strong control over the exploitation used during the crypto economic business processes. This also shows the difficulty of inclusive economic development because access to the crypto economy is, again, limited to those who have capital, even within the Global South countries. However, in a global context, the Global South remains an economic actor in the peripheral structure because it is still the provider of the cheapest mode of production, including materials, resources, labor, infrastructure, and taxes.

Dependency in the peripheral space or the Global South can be seen by the presence of key players with a core role in this circulation. Of course, the adoption of the structuralist economic model, which led to the capitalist mode of production, was obtained from the intrusion of the Global North countries, which consolidated their market share in the Global South countries. The core inside Periphery provides a more affordable mining center with other countries and is affiliated with another institution that provides crypto-economic exchange services for local currencies. Of course, its success requires increasingly alienated digital workers and the public to catch up to the demands of capitalism in countries.

One of the most critical aspects of Global South market consolidation required by Global North capitalists is cheap resources. According to the Earth and Space Science Open Archive (ESSOAr) report, the involvement of the Global South in mining mechanisms in the crypto-economic industry has increased massively as measured by concrete environmental impacts that can be seen. The substantial increase in activity in the crypto economy also indicates an increase in mining carried out to extract profits. Of course, the ease with which the Global North can purchase and extract it also has severe environmental impacts. This is because the infrastructure needed to produce profits has a very high material value and supports electricity, carbon emissions, etc.

Some companies have subsidiary companies located not only in the Global North but also in the Global South. This is

shown through the high rate of electricity consumption, carbon footprint, water footprint, and land footprint used for crypto mining. ESSOAr classifies based on Bitcoin (BTC) mining. The Global South, in the top ten most extensive BTC mining activities, such as China, Kazakhstan, Iran, and Venezuela, has relatively cheap electricity prices compared to northern countries and is subsidized by the local government so that crypto economic mining can be profitable sustainably. More than that, these countries also produce electricity from varied energy resources such as water, carbon, and land.

Conclusion

This research systematically explains digital financialization as a contemporary phenomenon in the current global political economy, especially the use of crypto assets in an economic order that is closely related to technology and information systems. As part of the digitalization transformation, the crypto assets system continues to gain high popularity amidst the onslaught of globalization and its challenges. This shows a shift in production modes at the community, state, and global levels of analysis in carrying out transactions that are increasingly invisible and based on cloud technology. Of course, understanding the crypto assets system must be fundamental and philosophical, reflected in analyzing its base, superstructure, and impact on the global political-economic order.

At least two main points must be observed in the commodity production process in the crypto-economic system: the economic base of society, which is shifting towards digital, and the social superstructure, which contains inequality in key institutions. The mode of production in the economic base of today's digital society has similarities in various aspects with non-digital economic modes of production, such as commodities, labor, and market systems.

However, what is different is the type of classification of the crypto asset or commodity itself, which is still a matter of debate because it does not meet the definition of a fiat currency but rather as a means of exchange and investment for wealth accumulation in the Global North. Moreover, it also has forms of alienation, exploitation, and labor extraction that exclusively happened in the Global South. Thus, accumulation by dispossession is a central theme in the dependency of the Global South and North relations as a network rather than a dyadic concept, which explains the need for new capital formation, such as electricity.

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The Impact of Boys' Love Television Series as a Way of

Shaping Thailand's LGBT Rights Acceptance

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The journey of Thailand's cinematic queer existence can be traced back to the 1960s with a portrayal of a same-sex couple's tragic story. However, the re-emergence of Thailand's cinematic queer in the form of the Boys Live series in 2020 has succeeded in enticing audiences' attention and soon created the narrative of the exact sex couple series portrayal to be the icon of Thailand's entertainment industry. The increased demand for Boys Love series production later shifted into giving a proper platform for the LGBT community to represent themselves in the media. The expansion in exposure led to reshaping the discourse in society and creating a way for familiarising the community with the public, all while providing the chance to address the topic matters, including long-standing discrimination.

Keywords: *LGBT; human rights; discourse school; media representation; gender equality*

Introduction

While the appearance of the LGBT community in the media, especially in Thailand, has existed for some time, in the past, it has yet to utilize the platform as a means of advocating. It only recently started to shift as the same-sex couple given the screen time as the main lead and whose story is being told to the media. The shift was assumed to begin back in 2016 with the appearance of a remarkable series called SOTUS that caught the audiences' attention (Yukari, 2020)

SOTUS offered a lighthearted story and created positive feedback that led people to see more about what a same-sex couple could be. Coincidently, the despair of the pandemic, which led to the extended quarantine, has allowed people to spend more time exploring cinematic entertainment, giving momentum to the Boys' Love series made by Thailand. For example, in 2020, the 80 series was broadcast alone (Mitchell, 2020). Poowin Bunyavejchewin, a Thai political scientist, argued that the trend, which is booming not only locally but also gaining global notice following its widespread, has helped in normalizing male-male romance in Thai pop culture that seems to be unthinkable a few years back, and in the process has become a platform to educate the people about the representation it showed (Watson & Jirik, 2018).

Thus, it gives a glimpse of the definition of the Boys' Love genre, which often refers to the portrayal of romantic interest between male-male protagonists. It is mainly consumed by audiences who seek redemption, which they often fail to find in real life (Welker, 2022).

This article argues that the wake-calling of same-sex couples' portrayal in the media, especially in Thailand, is creating an awareness of the livelihood of the LGBT community, which often still experiences discrimination and is scorned. A question of *How Does Boys Love Genre in the TV Series Campaign Shaped Thailand's LGBT Right Acceptance* will be used as the main anchor in this article.

As this research is trying to bring a new perspective in looking upon the issue of the same-sex series as support towards the LGBT community agenda, two highlights on the previous research will elucidate the justification. Most previous research has contributed significantly to shining a light on this matter. However, it has yet to specifically cover the shift of mindset and how the ongoing discourse in Thai society is facing the growing number of LGBT portrayals. It did, however, highlight the power of the series, which undoubtedly captured many audiences' attention by depicting a soft erotica show with good-looking male characters who ended up being together (Ünaldi, 2011).

Baudinette (2019) claimed that the series *wai*, which now refers to the *Boys Love* genre, generates a narrative that challenges the typical heteronormative narrative conventions of a series as it neglects the homo-

erotic storyline. As such, the extension of the research explores the changing representation of sexual minorities in the current Thai pop culture. Although, to be fair, Baudinette has yet to extend the research to the result of the challenge and the exploration of the changing representation. Nevertheless, despite the limitation, it is still showing a significant change in looking at how the narrative usually leads to more ambiguity as to the commonly used queer representation in order to blur the line and to avoid challenging the societal primacy of familial (Farmer, 2011).

Another point of the previous research is the anticipation formed by looking upon several recognitions and homonegativity often dominated by the older generation for their disagreement towards emerging mass media trends. Alas, the older generation's viewpoint can be justified by bringing up the Marxist view, which brings upon "privileges" to shun or even ignore the issues of oppression (Wolf, 2009). Berry (2000) argued that as the use of media increases among youth, so does the exposure to media messages as the transmission of cultural experiences depicted by characterology by creating and reinforcing cultural appropriateness. However, Berry's research has limited the focus on the youth's role in the use of media, which arguably hinders the older generation from coming to terms with the new occurrence. The anticipation mentioned refers to the research on the observation progress to see further changes created by the emerging mass media trends. In Thailand, as the LGBT community served protection by law, the social norm

is still being questioned; this means that the public is still in an unstable condition to be considered accepting the perspective. Now, with the acknowledgement of the existing occurrence of both challenge and changing representation, supplemented with the increasing use of media by youth, the implications and the result of the previous research are left to be explored within this writing.

Methodology

This paper will adopt two frameworks: Cedric Clark's Four Stages of Representation and Marie-Bènèdicte Dembour's 4 Schools of Thought. Clark categorized representation stages into Non-Representation, indicated by outright exclusion; Ridicule, which indicates the small number of inclusion towards a particular group to create a mockery; regulation, which indicates the showcase of socially representable representation but within a limited number; and lastly, Respect which indicates the inclusion of portrayal similar to everyday lifestyle. Clark's theory will highlight the last two stages as a framework to support the development of Boys' Love genre affinity in the media.

Furthermore, Dembour's 4 Schools of Thought in discussing human rights are categorized into Natural, Deliberative, Protest, and Discourse. Following down the list, Natural school is designed to see human rights as something universally accepted by everyone without any limit, Deliberative school to see human rights as something agreed upon by a collective of people and Protest school to see human rights as something to fight for and a group of people bound to question the

rights they are given to by social standard, and lastly, Discourse school which designed to see that human rights will be socially acceptable when people familiarized with the law of the rights. It required the collective of people to justify the rights imposed on a particular group. In this case, Dembour's framework supports the argument that the popularization of the Boys Love genre campaign creates a platform for people to be aware of the LGBT movement and helps neutralise the mindset of the collective people of the image they have upon the LGBT group.

The technical methodology will use in-depth interviews to gather information about experiences and points of view concerning specific research of interest (Lambert & Loiselle, 2007). A set of prepared questions will be available to navigate and provide limitations in the data collection process. The interview will help to understand the discourse by triangulating the different perspectives compiled.

Long Road to Recognition

Before the Boys' Love series boom in Thailand, it was doubtful for LGBT topics to be discussed mainly in public. Despite the acknowledgement towards the numbers of LGBT-identified individuals, Thailand's path still goes a long way, especially with the discrimination that is still prevalent. Although many advocates have fought for it, legal matters have yet to give a certain degree of protection.

[The Matter of LGBT in Thailand] Thailand has long been in the melting pot regarding

perceiving the LGBT community. Despite no persecution by law or blatant discrimination, it still does not automatically make the living conditions different from theirs. It is infused with profound moral and patriarchal culture. Cases of gender inequality remain.

Before further divulging into the matter of human rights, this article will present the discourse in Thailand regarding sexual identity to create an aligned understanding as it is severely different from what is commonly found in Western countries. In looking into Thailand's society, an idea about the discourse of what we would call *phet* (เพศ) worked as the umbrella term for both the gendered system and sexual preference. *Phet* as a term is the closest thing that could be related to the Western idea in indulging upon the topic of queer studies as it could be used to refer to both gendered systems as well as sexuality that is interlinked within each other (Morris, 1994). Furthermore, the Thai identities that separated gender and sexuality led to the rethink of the categorical separation between queer studies and feminism in the establishment (Jackson, 2000). Thailand in the former period recognized three sexes under *phet,* which are normatively masculine men (*phuchai,* ผู้ชาย), normatively feminine women (*phuying,* ผู้หญิง), and an intermediate or a hermaphrodite despite men and women called *kathoey* (กะเทย) (Jackson, 2000). The term often used to refer has slowly been considered derogatory throughout the period.

[The Discrimination against the Community] Despite the tolerance society claimed to be implemented, it does not mean

discrimination has been eradicated. Many factors could play a role in the existence of discrimination, such as the predominantly heterosexist societal norms that pressed the society to think in a heterogeneity mindset, thus leading people to believe that people are inherently heterosexual and that having a sort of attraction other than the opposite sex would categorize them as abnormal in an instant (Gregory, 1990; Herek, Chopp, & Strohl, 2007). The contradiction that remains gives a slight depiction of the unequal treatment which the LGBT people still experience in their daily lives. While the government does not arrange severe sanctions, it does not mean the sanction is not there (ILO, 2014). Over time, discrimination comes in a variety of forms. In the past, direct abuse was more likely to be seen as they targeted the members of LGBT. The forms can go beyond jokes and harmful stereotypes that manifest into hate crimes such as murder and rape. The brutality is so horrifying that the victim of the hate crime can be found stabbed, strangled, suffocated and burned alive (Liljas, 2014). The example can be seen in several cases, as mentioned, the action of burning alive a bisexual woman back in 2006 and the rape, murder, and burning of a lesbian back in 2008 (Likhitpreechakul, 2009).

In the present time, where LGBT activities are more likely to be seen, especially in 2019, which can be considered as the peak visibility (Pawa, 2021), discrimination in the form of direct abuse is less likely to happen due to the morality standard set by the public. This statement, supported by Assistant Professor Ronnapoom Samakkeekarom

from Thammasat University, gave a point of view from the cultural sector which described the consideration embedded in most Thai individuals that created a cultural buffer preventing the people from conducting confrontation and helps the society to coexist with the LGBT group. However, coexistence itself does not imply understanding (Promchertchoo, 2020). Generally, LGBT rights are being affected in specific areas; however, they are more prominent within these areas: the work field sector, education sector, and medical sector (UNDP & USAID, 2014).

Discrimination in the work field sector exists as a disadvantage regarding access to the refusal of employment and dismissals, and there is increasing evidence of a pay gap (ILO, 2014). Because of the lack of jobs offered for LGBT individuals, they usually resort to a low-paying jobs such as opening a hairdressing shop or a market seller, and most of the time, it comes to the extent of being a sex worker as a last resort. An example of a case happened to Phakjira Visavakorn-skow, who was hired for a sales administrative officer position on June 5 2007. However, on July 5 2007, Phakjira received a cancellation of the employment contract after the company disapproved of cross-dressing as a woman (ILO, 2014).

In the education sector, several bullying cases towards LGBT Youth, which led to the suffering of mental illness, have been reported (Zaza et al., 2016). Moreover, the lack of understanding creates a condition to usher out what is considered abnormal – in which generality cannot be met. A study in 2014 determined the fact that more than half

of the LGBT-identified students had been bullied, one-third experienced physical abuse in school, and almost a quarter experienced sexual harassment (Mahidol University, Plan International Thailand, & UNESCO Bangkok Office, 2014).

Lastly, from the medical sector, the issues are represented in health services itself. In terms of legislation, transgender are not allowed to change their identity in legal documents despite undergoing surgery. In terms of organizational capacity, the lack of funding becomes the main obstacle for research on addressing health issues faced by LGBT individuals to be conducted outside the realm of HIV. Not to mention, a report on the rejection of treatment after the patient is identified as LGBT is found in the field (UNDP & USAID, 2014).

[Legal Review Concerning the LGBT Community] The LGBT community in Thailand has long been fighting to create a draft of the same-sex union. Not only at the national level but Thailand has also been known to quite actively participate at the international level, as can be seen through the number of ratified human rights resolutions and conventions that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI).

Recalling on the road to institutionalizing the human rights of LGBTQ people by ratifying Independent Expert on Protection against Violence and Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (IESOGI) back in 2016, the delegation of Thailand was the only ASEAN mem-

ber-state to be given the chance to voice out during plenary meeting which they wisely explained that in hoping for a more fruitful engagement, it could give more support on the exercise of human rights issues (ASEAN SOGIES Caucus, 2017)

Thailand is known for its vocal action. It adopted the Gender Equality Act of 2015, which includes the definition of unfair gender discrimination. This policy has since become the pillar of the aftermath policies on gender equality in Thailand (ASEAN SOGIES Causcus, 2017).

The aftermath of 2016 also came along with the focus of the movement on the passing of the Civil Partnership bill, which draft was constructed in early 2014 and just around a half year into 2020, the bill was approved by the Thai Cabinet after being proposed by the Ministry of Justice (English, 2020). Despite the contradiction of the advantages of this bill, it has still become the main focus as it allows a union between two people regardless of gender. The union will enable rights that previously only been given to the hetero couple, some of the rights including the right of the civil partners to adopt children, to decide on behalf of their injured/dead partners, the right to own shared property after entering the union, etc. moreover, apart from pushing for same-sex marriage, another sector has been putting more efforts in widening the opportunity in other sectors. The Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development unofficially introduced the Gender Identity Bill to the public in 2017 (Nishrat, 2021); however, the drawback on the eligibility criteria has drawn

criticism and become quite a hindrance. This bill, however, was renamed the Gender Recognition Bill, which was tabled by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security for consideration by parliament in October 2020. The proposed bill will establish the rights of a transgender who has been denied access due to the mismatch between current gender identities and one written on the birth certificates (Boonlert, 2020).

As for the pertaining laws and constitution that existed, Thailand has also ratified and legalized several international laws that are also being adopted as national laws for the protection of LGBT individuals in order to limit discrimination and expand the access given towards the community, some as mentioned; The Criminal Code Amendment Act (No. 19) BE 2550. This was a huge change considering the act worked to change the definition of a rape case, which previously only referred to a vaginal rape by a man on a woman (ILO, 2014). The series involved a loose LGBT ad hoc campaign group that included the now-disbanded Anjaree, Nada Chiyajit, and other independent activists collaborating with the women's movement. Later on, the definition was changed by the parliament to include marital rape and other forms of rape between two people (ILO, 2014). This has also worked in covering transgender rights (Sanders, 2011). There is an opportunity to increase the use of laws to gain advantages. The struggle within politics could also come from lawmakers who tend to be conservative (UNDP & USAID, 2014).

Boys Love Series as a Tool of Change

The phenomenon of the Boys' Love genre in reshaping Thai society and pushing recognition towards Thai LGBT rights acceptance will be further analyzed within the time framework from 2016 to 2021 through Clark's stages of media representation that will determine the progress of representation in the media. It will see how far the cinematic queer has been portrayed in society and if it is well enough to stand as a platform for representation. In addition, another framework from Dembour's discourse school will examine the impacts of the shifted discourse, which allows LGBT individuals to gain their voices and push their rights agenda.

[The Role of TV Series in Determining the Stage of Representation] LGBT individuals have been increasingly portrayed in various types of media and have gained attention as a category of social and cultural identity (Gray, 2009). Clark (1969) argued that the aim of a certain thing being communicated through mass media is to gain recognition, and due to its ability to offer a source of information, it can increase the value of social groups through the recognition and respect it presently. Nowadays, it is shown how Thai entertainment has broadened its way of broadcasting a representation in comparison to the past, where the LGBT community would be depicted in a deviant way, physically, sexually and mentally (Burapha University, 2017). Brett Farmer (2000), a scholar with familiarization in Thai queer study, describes the cinematic queer era as a boost to famil-

iarize the new identity within sexual and gender identity. Moreover, a queer cinema that is accompanied by the potential erotic queerness has humanized LGBT individuals, breaking the stigmas and lifting them from a mere comedy skit (Farmer, 2000). The focus will be narrowed to the *Boys Love* (BL) genre, which refers to a specific genre that depicts the arc of a male-to-male relationship. This connection further attracts people to the storyline, which depicts the semi-realist LGBT community's experience in society. For example, the drama *Dark Blue Kiss* raised the issue of discrimination and coming out-to-parents scenes, which appealed to the audience and naturally led them to support the main couple (Kimie, 2020).

Thailand's entertainment industries then began to produce Boys' Love in numbers when the market began to enlarge due to the enthusiasm of audiences from local to international scale and potential customers said to constitute economic and business opportunities.

If looking at the chronological progress of LGBT representation in the media, following Clark's theory, it can be illustrated as such in the following passage: Prior to the popularity of the Boys Love genre series back in 2016, the progress of cinematic queer believed to pass the second stage which is the **ridicule** stage. As the stage referred to the representation being portrayed in a skit, it is proven to be shown around the 1960s to the 2000s, whereas the representation was portrayed as 'the clown of the show'. This period has further led to the stigma that all LGBT individuals have fun and a come-

dic personality (Jackson, 2011). Truthfully, looking at how the progress has been going so far, there is a blurred line to how far the stages have been reached. Seeing the development started in 2016, with the regular airing of the Boys Love genre series, proves the third stage, **regulation.** In this stage, the continuous representation being shown to the wider audience may create a new image that replaces the stigmas that were previously around. Poowin Bunyavejchewin stated how the Boys Love genre series created a new normal in Thai pop culture with the portrayal of male homoerotic relations, and it is certainly a development that was very unlikely to be agreed upon years ago (Watson & Jirik, 2018). In addition to this, Maneerin, BL viewers and LGBT-identified individuals shared how a few years ago, the talk of the topic of LGBT was not really open and that Boys Love series that existed prior to 2016 mostly only consumed by *wai fans* – referred to the person who watches Boys Love genre series in Thailand – but after it received a huge exposure and LGBT people start to be in the mainstream, it just keeps growing and getting bigger, assuming the growing as the representation being represented thus widening the audience who acknowledge LGBT people.

Progressing from there is where the line between the third stage, **regulation,** and the fourth stage, **respect,** which refers to the character being represented in both positive and negative notions, is blurred. This is due to the subtle changes within the plotline, which are drawn more realistically than the fantasy ones. Around 2019 and until the cur-

rent year 2021, several Boys Love genre series hits have been acknowledged due to the interesting and progressive plotline within. 2gether, the series, as the biggest hit series in 2020, inserted a relatable theme of love and a genuine portrayal of what LGBT youth experience, while the show is still accompanied by a good proportion of romance series attributes (Wang, 2020). One of the highlights is coming from the display of the bisexual community, a group circle that previously often being overlooked. In addition, Gontorn, BL viewer, when asked how Boys Love has progressed, shared how the progress happened at some point. He further hit the point by saying, "With the changing of progressing like Tharntype the Series, Manner of Death, and I Told the Sunset About You. It is not only a love scene anymore; it is also how the story progress, on how you have a good plotline. In addition, it also raising the standard and moving forward" The interpretation is that progress is still continuously increasing, yet with how it is going now, there is also still a small number of BL series categorized with the uncommon arc that focuses more into the normalization of LGBT portrayal instead of only giving a glimpse.

[The Impacts of Boys Love Series from 2016 – 2020] Following the success of several BL genre-based series released from 2016 to the current year, namely SOTUS, Love Sick, Tharntype, and so on, the Thai Boys Love entertainment industry carved a path towards wider exposure within the country and globally. This new genre is considered to be interesting due to the representation

of a watershed moment in the depiction of queer sexualities within Thai popular media (McLelland & Welker, 2015). As for now, the fact that the Boys Love series can easily be accessed both on national TV channels and online platforms creates the opportunity for audiences to keep up with the latest releases. Although the initial production of the Boys Love series may not entirely aim to showcase representation of the LGBT community, with how it is going right now, it also opens the opportunity to spread awareness and informative messages towards the audiences. In the process, the series tends to be a huge hit when the plotline sympathizes with the realistic situation, and nowadays, many BL productions are shifting their way of screenwriting to keep up with the market demands (Koaysomboon, 2020). The progress could again be related to Clark's last stage of representation, Respect.

While it is partially a business matter, the fact remains that the improvement was made within the plotline. Gontorn, the BL viewer, expressed his view by reasoning both the good and bad sides of the current BL series, "I'd say that on the good side, it spread the normality of the same-sex relationship, especially guy and guy relationship (…) if the government sees the potential, they can make it a selling point." As for the bad sides, he argued that since the BL genre is packed into a series with a targeted audience, there is still much romanticization in portraying gay relationships. Another respondent, Lalin, a BL viewer, shared that BL projected the LGBT theme, giving a positive glimpse of society that enabled the viewer to understand

more. Overall, the Boys' Love genre series can be considered a promising platform that spreads the normality of the LGBT community by the progressing plotline it offers.

Looking at the inside of the industry, there are still several debates concerning the production of the BL genre series. Aam Anusorn, a director of several BL series, namely Present Perfect, Call It What You Want, and so on, shared his view from the director's point of view that has been working directly within the Thai entertainment industry. He confessed that within the BL genre series industry, there may still be slow progress in casting a real LGBT individual. While it does not enclose the opportunity, Aam predicted that around 30% of LGBT individuals would get cast for the roles. While it is unfortunate enough how slow the progress can be, without denying the excuse that the Thai industry shall do better, it is still an improvement if it is to compare prior to the event. In contrast, LGBT is poorly underrepresented in the media, let alone casting real LGBT people.

This creates a negative notion that there's an implication for the monetization of the advantage of the fantasy-selling Boys Love Series.

With his identification being related to the community, Aam himself is also trying to advocate in his own way; he claimed that his work will have no gender. By this, a similar initiative taken from the production crews is also growing. In another case, Backaof Nopharnach, usually known as Aof, the pioneer of GMMTV's LGBTQ production that has been highly involved in producing famous BL genre series, is eager to explore

new possibilities in the Boys Love landscape. As an LGBTQ advocate, he tried to deliver a message about gender acceptance in the BL series he produced (Koaysomboon, 2020). Aof has seen the possibility of further turning the media into a proper platform to widen media utilisation as a source of public discussion.

From 2016 to the present, the Boys Love genre series has spread its influence with its steady progress from the continuously improved plotline, which has sent messages to clear up some stigmas. Prior to its popularity, there was only a glimpse of discussion about the realities of one identification to attain. Is it because in Thailand, such a topic is considered to be a personal affair that must be kept, but this limitation is also what restrains the people from gaining any proper understanding (Ocha, 2013) but now that it is exposed and framed in a media accompanied by interesting traits, has turned the limitation into a prospect. Improving people's understanding has also widened the chance to raise voices from NGOs and activists and gain support from most groups of society, predominantly the younger generations with their high consuming media (Koaysomboon, 2020). Another visible impact of the additional support can be seen from the conduct of the first Bangkok Pride back in 2017. The parade, usually in Phuket, is being returned to the capital as a celebration to unify the local LGBTQ community. Not only was it the first time it was held within the capital, but the Bangkok Pride 2017 was also organized as a collaborative effort under many LGBTQ organizations instead of being managed by the business sector, which only focuses on capitalization (The Jakarta Post, 2017). Moreover, following the event, back in 2019, another first pride celebration of the Chiang Mai Pride Parade was held after it was cancelled on February 21 2009, due to the threat and forces to shut down the event (Prachatai, 2019). So, while there is a lack of numeric data regarding the increase of support from society, witnessing the turning of the drawback prior to the rise of the BL genre and seeing the change, such as the joint support in the events as well as the more positive view from the society determine the rise of influences as the direct impact of the media role in depicting the LGBT representation in the form of BL genre series.

[The Reshaped Discourse towards the LGBT Community] Dembour's (2010) theory regarding her Four Schools of Thought, in which she initiated the discourse school, referred to the argument that human rights exist only because people talk about them and that it is neither given nor they are an answer to the wrongdoings. Furthermore, discourse schools believe in the express political claims done by the language, which is assumed to be the acknowledgement of human rights from the collective group towards a certain thing, and the position does not blatantly regard human rights as a good thing only, rather it is balance based on its merits.

In line with the discourse school is the perspective of Thai society towards their LGBT community, which has been progressing for a few decades now. Believing that human rights exist only when people talk about

them and are not given led to the idea that the people in the surroundings determine rights. When imbued into a society where a particular trait's social structure exists, a group's rights need to reach a certain standard for it to be considered. Taking the LGBT community in Thai society as an example, even prior to the rise of the BL genre series, being part of the LGBT community was not illegal by law. However, the lack of understanding due to several factors, the biggest factor likely to be the poorly received information being shared in society, has resulted in people being wary of their identity and indirectly denouncing their rights. However, when the lack is mended, and the information is shared, it is possible to change the stigmas and receive acceptance. Now that Thai society has begun to open up and accept the display of sexual identities, there appears to be a high number of people who reveal themselves (Phoovatis, 2019). This is also related to other thoughts that human rights are not the answer to wrongdoings. Despite claiming to have a human right, the discrimination that might prevail for the community does not stop altogether. Freedom S, BL viewer and LGBT-identified individual shared how some people will open their hearts and accept, but there are also still unaccepting people. This statement is similar to almost all other respondents, too, confirming that the progress of acceptance is still ongoing and that people should put efforts into changing.

Much development can be traced back to a couple of past years in line with the discourse school regarding the express political claim. Before the growing support, society

generally tolerated the existence of the third gender. However, due to the stigmas and the social punishment, many LGBT people are pressured to hide their identity. However, with the growing community and the development within the society perspective, the opportunity for LGBT people to express and advocate for their rights has become bigger. The event marked with the growing movement such as Free Gender TH, which was created back in 2020, led to several impacts; in 2019, within the same period of election, Nook, LGBT Identified and BL viewer shared, "In the past election, prominent figures show the fully political position and they want to support for the LGBT rights, it seems we have the bigger chance right now" Nook statement assumed to be referring to the first time two transgender representatives was elected to parliament (Pawa, 2021) and with the more awareness on the current generations it opens the chance from the top as well as the bottom side.

In 2020, several chances led the LGBT community to be under the highlight. Following the outbreak of the pro-democracy protest in Bangkok, one led to another. In the entertainment industry, a particular BL genre series entitled *2Gether* rose as Thailand's biggest hit show, with it being aired on both primetime television and online channels (Wang, 2020). With the growing awareness, many young Thais launched a campaign on social media to gain a wider audience on the acceptance of the LGBT community. One of the campaigns was done by posting a certain rainbow colours theme. One person painted the rainbow flag on a forearm as an act

of expression (UCA, 2020). The peak is the marked historic milestone on July 8, on the approved draft of the Civil Partnership Bill by the Thai cabinet that would make same-sex marriage legal in Thailand. It is certainly one step closer to the approval by the parliament. If it passes, it will be a major step toward the liberation of the LGBT community in Thailand (Phoonphongphiphat, 2020). Certainly, it will be a huge reflection for the neighbouring Asian countries.

Conclusion

Catching its momentum back in 2016, the Boys Love genre, which once was carefully being aired, has now become one that the public has been eagerly waiting for its release. It has progressed since then and is considered a well-developed genre. This catches up with the plotline that has been produced to meet the demands of the audience. Assessing Clark's Four Stages of Media Representation, prior to the event, it is highly believed that the situation at that time has passed the first stage, non-representation, and the second stage, ridicule. This is marked by the existence of LGBT characters in the media aiming for mockery. However, before catching the momentum, the progress has slowly shifted into the third stage, becoming more noticeable after the BL genre series released in 2016 succeeded. Still, the progress shown within the years has proved there is an increasing representation in the mainstream that is highly beneficial both for the LGBT community, with their voices spreading thoroughly, and the society, to create a normalization and to contribute to the straightening

of the stereotypes and stigmas.

This opportunity related to the second framework gained from Dembour's Discourse School. The school identified the lack of esteem towards human rights. It regards human rights as part of people's beliefs and does not justify the answer to prejudice. Concerning the case of the LGBT community in Thailand, previously, due to the lack of understanding in society towards the LGBT community, resulting in various stereotypes and stigmas have been created that hinder them from achieving equal rights. Nevertheless, now that the positive images have been continuously normalised in the media in the form of the Boys Love genre series, it gradually pushes the growth mindset in society. Through it, the opportunity for LGBT people to attain their rights becomes reachable. The opportunity to widen the voices of the activist-led to stable advocating progress that displays a proper understanding will make people acknowledge the existence and rights of the people.

To conclude, based on the analysis of the two theoretical frameworks resulted in the turning of the discourse in the society on how they view LGBT rights acceptance. The limitation of the LGBT topics has been erased, and in return, an abundance of understandings framed as a TV series being aired continuously; the same can be said that the representation once shown as a skit has now progressed into a more respectable manner and meant to show a realistic portrayal. In addition, this thesis acknowledged the limitation of the research, as the study target was taken from Thailand. There is a limit

to gaining further data due to the language, as well as a limit to the people fulfilling the criteria to be the interviewees. For further development, it might be more objective to indulge with the locals directly to ensure accurate data.

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Authors Biography

Ellie Ophelia Delviolin is a seasoned professional with a strong academic foundation in Economics and Political Science from National Tsing Hua University, complemented by a Bachelor's in International Business Management from Chung Yuan Christian University, Taiwan. Currently, she is an OEM Sales professional at Medtecs Group, where she leverages her expertise in strategic partnerships and market analysis to drive growth within the medical and PPE sectors. Her research interests span a broad spectrum, encompassing regional economic policy, consumer behavior, and the evolving geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific. Her recent work includes a comprehensive analysis of the "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty" framework, examining its implications for shaping regional policies in Asia-Pacific nations. Additionally, she has conducted a rigorous regression analysis to investigate shifts in Taiwan's consumer behavior before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, providing valuable insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders. Beyond her professional and academic pursuits, Ellie is actively engaged in international student organizations, fostering cross-cultural understanding and supporting fellow Indonesian students in Taiwan. Her fluency in Indonesian and English, coupled with her conversational proficiency in Chinese, enables effective communication and collaboration across diverse cultural contexts.

George Morris William Tangka received the S.Kom. in computer science from Universitas Klabat, Manado, Indonesia in 2019; and M.B.A. degree in information management from Kunshan University, Tainan, Taiwan, in 2022. Currently working as a lecturer of Computer Science at Universitas Klabat. Current research interests include machine learning, decision-making problems, decision analysis, and IT government.

Jeniar Nelsus Mooy earned her undergraduate degree in International Relations from Universitas Padjadjaran in 2017 and a master's degree in Development Studies from the University of Sussex in 2022. She is currently working as an external relations officer at an international organisation in Jakarta. Prior to her current role, she was a programme support officer for the ASEAN Foundation and a human development report officer at the Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia (FPCI) in 2020 and 2018, respectively. She was a recipient of the Chevening Scholarship by the Government of the United Kingdom in 2021. Her interests are in the issues of foreign aid, South-South Cooperation, and Southeast Asian studies. She can be contacted via jeniarmooy6@gmail.com.

Fathanaditya Rianto is a master's student in International Relations at Universitas Gadjah Mada, with a focus on digital transformation and competitiveness in global contexts. His research centers on the transformative role of technology in shaping contemporary international relations, particularly examining how digital advancements influence diplomatic strategies, economic competitive-

ness, and global governance. Additionally, he is deeply interested in the interdisciplinary field of popular culture and world politics, exploring how popular media, such as films, video games, and social platforms, serves as a medium for shaping public perceptions and influencing geopolitical narratives. Through his studies, he aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how technological innovation and cultural forces intersect to redefine power structures and state interactions in the international arena. He is driven to bridge theoretical insights with practical applications, supporting a more interconnected and informed global community.

Hayuningrum Citra Maharsi is a researcher specializing in international relations with a focus on digital transformation and sustainability. She holds a Bachelor's degree in International Relations from Universitas Islam Indonesia, graduating with honors, and is currently pursuing a Master's degree at Universitas Gadjah Mada, where her studies center on Digital Transformation and Competitiveness. Her research contributions include The Growth of Digital Payments in Indonesia: Harnessing Its Influence for SMEs and Indonesia's Competitiveness, along with key works such as Canadian Government Compliance in the Paris Agreement: A Case Study from Justin Trudeau's Administration (2015-2020), Transforming MSMEs through TikTok Shop: Opportunities and Challenges in Indonesia's Digital Economy Era, and Traveloka's Role in Achieving Net Zero Emissions in Indonesia Through ESG. Hayuningrum's professional background includes internships in finance and foreign affairs, notably at Asuransi Askrida and Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where her work emphasized human rights and sustainable policy. She has been an active contributor to discourse on economic digitalization and environmental sustainability, with published works in Modern Diplomacy. Her academic pursuits reflect a commitment to advancing sustainable economic policies, particularly through the integration of digital solutions to enhance SME growth and competitiveness in Indonesia. She can be contacted via hayuningrumcitramaharsi@ugm.ac.id.

Muhd Rafli Ramadhan Warganegara is currently pursuing a master's degree in MSc Development Studies (Political Economy) at SOAS, University of London. His research interests revolve around the intricate connection between economic growth and sustainability, encompassing topics such as measurement, industrial policy, global commodity chains, and feminist political economy. Rafli is particularly focused on addressing the challenges of sustainability through green growth and green industrial policy. He has undertaken several works on the political economy of technology, green growth, and social reproduction, contributing to the broader understanding of how economic policies can align with "sustainable" development based on niche socio-political context.

Addine F. Hidayat has earned her bachelor's degree in International Relations from Universitas Gadjah Mada on 2021 and currently an Economic Staff at the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Yangon with nearly 1.5 years of experience. Addine is particularly interested on addressing

the social norms in which associated with the gender studies and the awareness of the inclusive community. She is also keen to pursue more understanding on human rights issue as she faced the on-going conflict in Myanmar.

Title
Must be brief and informative, between 15-20 words (16pt, bold, single pharagraph spacing, 0 before-after)

First Author; Next Author; Last Author – without academic title (12pt, bold)
First Author's Affiliation (Department, University, Country) (12pt);
Second Author's Affiliation;
Third Author's Affiliation;
email@writer.ac.id (only write email for the corresponding author)

Abstract (13pt, bold)

Abstract should be typed in italic, font size 10pt, single-spacing format and justified. The abstract should briefly summarize the aim, findings, or purposes of the article. Authors encouraged to write clear explanation on methodology or conceptual framework used in the article, followed by short summary of the research findings. The end part of the abstract should give conclusion that indicates how this paper contributes to fill the gap in previous studies, or any practical implication that might occurs. The abstract should be written in one concise paragraph of no more than 250 words.

Keywords*: contains; three to five; relevant keywords; separated by semicolon; written in lower case, italic 10pt*

Guidelines (13pt, Bold, Title Case)

The manuscript should be written in English on A4-sized papers (21x29.7 cm), with custom margins as follows: left 2.5 cm, right 2 cm, bottom 2 cm, and top 2 cm. The manuscript should use Callisto MT, 12pt font size, 1.5 line spacing. Manuscript should consist of 4,000—7,000 words (research article) and 3,000—4,000 words (book review). Referencing and citing technique used is APA 6th edition, with in-text citation format

Guidelines - Introduction

All sources quoted or paraphrased should be listed in the reference list. Cite source using APA in-text citation format, by writing author's last name followed by the publication

year, for example: (Hudson, 2014). Direct quotations, tables, or figures referred should include the page number, for example: (Hudson, 2010, p. 44).

The introduction part should explore these elements: (1) Explanation about the research background and the general theme or topic; (2) Provide clear and convincing answer to the question: Why is this article is important? (3) A concise literature review of available literature or research. Please cite the most imperative part, theories, or debates from existing studies; (4) Indicate how your article will contribute to fill the gap to the current studies. This is also important to show that your idea is original; (5) Offer explanation on specific problem or question[1] and hypothesis

that will be the main point(s) of the article.[2] We encourage authors to bring only one or two questions.

Author should also describe objectives of the research and offer the brief structure of the article.

Guidelines - Methodology

Author is encouraged to describe methodology clearly. Put it in a dedicated subchapter if necessary. This part should contain a brief justification for the research methods used.

This part should contain enough detail to enable the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of your methods and the reliability and validity of your findings.

How To Write Your Subchapters
[This is an example text]

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[1] Fewer question or hypothesis is better, we encourage author to bring only 1-2 questions

[2] Footnote may be used to provide additional description (terms, concept, specific event, etc.) that might be too excessive to be included in-text.

tempor odio, in porta orci. Phasellus scelerisque

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est ac elementum ullamcorper. Duis ut lectus non nibh dictum malesuada. Quisque convallis lectus non justo posuere venenatis. Nam bibendum sem et nibh eleifend placerat sit amet a nibh. Vestibulum quis varius purus.

If You Have 2nd Level Subchapters, Use 12pt, Underline, Title Case

[This is an example text] Proin non consequat justo. Praesent tempor aliquam nibh vitae venenatis. Praesent pulvinar nulla ut ligula ultricies, bibendum pretium mi hendrerit. Quisque luctus, purus in tincidunt consequat, nibh metus laoreet ex, at rutrum nisi metus ut lacus. Integer commodo purus orci, non pharetra nisi iaculis non. Aenean eget rutrum risus, eu egestas erat. Sed lobortis diam dolor, at porttitor dolor consequat tempus. Etiam erat felis, porttitor sed enim a, aliquam commodo elit. Cras ac posuere est, eu interdum mi. Maecenas posuere lacus vitae nisi efficitur, sed malesuada erat tincidunt. Nullam a dignissim massa. Fusce molestie finibus augue id lacinia. Integer tincidunt at metus ac pharetra. Vivamus hendrerit, mauris quis pharetra fringilla, orci ipsum interdum lacus, et imperdiet massa mauris quis lorem. Pellentesque placerat fermentum imperdiet. Fusce scelerisque purus eget suscipit semper.

If You Have 3rd Level Subchapters, Use 12pt, Italic, Title Case. Run the text on after a punctuation mark. **[This is an example text]** In hac habitasse platea dictumst. Nunc in euismod libero, vel interdum lacus. Proin ut dignissim risus. Nunc faucibus libero sed eleifend bibendum. Nam mattis, odio ac placerat euismod, mauris felis consequat nunc, ut porttitor ligula risus ac nisl. Nulla ullamcorper sapien non quam gravida, nec dignissim ligula

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- Sed sit amet massa felis. [This is an example te xt for 2nd level subchapter]

Guidelines - Conclusion

Conclusion is a brief summary of findings

and discussion. It is strongly recommended to avoid mere repetitive statements or phrase from the previous section. Author may also discuss implication of the findings and point out prospect for further research.

Conclusion should followed by reference list format. Reference list is based on American Psychological Association (APA) style. Reference list should appear at the end of the article and include <u>only literatures actually cited</u> in the manuscript. Citation should be sorted alphabetically and chronologically, written in single spacing and 0pt before-after spacing format.

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