



Critical Netizen Perceptions of Polri in Instagram Discourse on the Affan Kurniawan Case: A CMDA-Appraisal Study

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ABSTRACT

Social media comment sections provide spaces where users evaluate public institutions and negotiate institutional legitimacy. This study examines how critical perceptions of the Indonesian National Police (Polri) were expressed in comments on an @narasinewsroom Instagram post concerning the death of Affan Kurniawan. Using qualitative descriptive content analysis, the study applied quota purposive sampling to select 100 comments from 4,581 available comments, with 20 comments drawn from each of five perception categories. The comments were coded according to their perception category, primary Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis-informed message form, and primary emotional-evaluative stance, and were subsequently interpreted through Appraisal Theory. Within the quota-balanced sample, questions and demands for transparency were the most frequently coded message form (27%), followed by figurative language, humor, and satire (25%), assertive and evaluative statements (22%), collective statements and calls for action (20%), and argumentative reasoning (6%). Cynicism was the most frequently coded emotional-evaluative stance (45%), followed by suspicion (25%), anger (18%), disappointment (10%), and empathy (2%). The Appraisal analysis showed that the comments combined Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation to evaluate police actors, institutional conduct, and the credibility of the investigation. The study demonstrates how critical institutional perceptions were linguistically and evaluatively constructed within a selected digital discourse corpus. Because the sample was deliberately balanced, the findings describe only the analyzed comments and should not be generalized to all comments on the post or to broader public opinion.

Keywords: Appraisal Theory; Netizen Perceptions; Instagram Comments; Indonesian National Police; Institutional Legitimacy.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of social media has transformed public communication from a predominantly one-way process into a participatory form of digital interaction. Users no longer function solely as recipients of information but also actively interpret events, evaluate institutional responses, and circulate opinions concerning public issues

(Ihsan et al., 2026). Through comment sections, users may express criticism, support, anger, suspicion, and demands for accountability. Social media can therefore function as a digital public sphere in which meanings concerning government policies, social events, and public institutions are produced and negotiated through user-generated discourse (Tarore & Mantiri, 2025).

Instagram is particularly relevant to this process because news organizations increasingly use the platform to distribute information and facilitate public responses to current events. Comments appearing below news posts provide access to spontaneous expressions through which users construct evaluations of the actors and institutions involved. However, these comments should not automatically be treated as representative of broader public opinion because participation is shaped by users' interests, platform characteristics, account audiences, and the framing of the original post. They are more appropriately understood as situated digital discourse reflecting the perspectives of users participating in a particular online discussion.

One event that generated substantial public attention was the death of Affan Kurniawan, an online motorcycle taxi driver who died after being struck by a tactical vehicle operated by members of the Mobile Brigade Corps during a public demonstration in August 2025 (BBC News Indonesia, 2025). The circulation of footage of the incident and subsequent reports concerning the investigation prompted extensive reactions on social media. These responses included demands for justice, questions concerning the identities of the responsible officers, criticism of the investigative process, and skepticism toward the transparency and accountability of the Indonesian National Police (Polri).

The case is relevant to the study of institutional legitimacy because public trust is influenced not only by institutional actions but also by how those actions are communicated, interpreted, and evaluated. In digital environments, official explanations coexist with user-generated narratives that may reinforce, challenge, or reinterpret institutional accounts. Repeated expressions, metaphors, questions, satire, and collective appeals can contribute to the formation of particular interpretations of an institution's credibility. Research on social media discourse has shown that shared meanings and institutional evaluations may emerge through the circulation of recurring linguistic and symbolic expressions (Khaeriyah & Natsir, 2024; Rachman et al., 2024).

Previous studies concerning Polri have largely examined internal organizational dimensions, including leadership, discipline, bureaucratic reform, employee satisfaction, personnel performance, and public-service implementation (Haribowo et al., 2012; Soemarmi et al., 2016; Wijayanty, 2018; Sabilla & Hariyanti, 2020). These studies provide valuable insights into institutional management and organizational performance. However, they offer more limited explanations of how users actively construct evaluations of the police through digital discourse. Studies of social media and public trust have also addressed public responses to government institutions and the circulation of distrust-related narratives (Tarore & Mantiri, 2025; Rachman et al., 2024), but further analysis is needed to explain the specific linguistic forms and evaluative meanings through which such perceptions are expressed.

Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) provides an appropriate framework for examining how meaning is constructed through digitally mediated language, including questions, assertions, figurative expressions, satire, collective

appeals, and argumentative statements (Herring, 2004). However, identifying message forms alone does not fully explain the emotional, moral, and institutional evaluations embedded within them. Appraisal Theory complements CMDA by distinguishing emotional responses through Affect, evaluations of social actors and conduct through Judgement, and evaluations of events or processes through Appreciation (Martin & White, 2005). Integrating these frameworks enables the study to examine both how critical perceptions are communicated and what types of evaluation they contain.

Research specifically examining how critical perceptions of Polri were articulated in Instagram comments concerning the Affan Kurniawan case remains limited. Little attention has been given to the relationship among perception categories, digitally mediated message forms, and emotional-evaluative stances within comments responding to this event. Addressing this gap is important for understanding how users question institutional credibility, demand procedural transparency, and evaluate law-enforcement responses within a specific digital discussion.

Accordingly, this study examines how critical perceptions of the Indonesian National Police were expressed in 100 quota-balanced comments selected from an @narasinewsroom Instagram post concerning the Affan Kurniawan case. It aims to: (1) describe five selected categories of critical perception, (2) analyze the primary message forms through which these perceptions were communicated using a CMDA-informed framework, and (3) interpret the emotional, moral, and institutional evaluations contained in the comments through Appraisal Theory.

The study contributes to digital communication research by explaining how criticism of a public institution is linguistically and evaluatively constructed within a selected social media corpus. Its purpose is not to estimate the prevalence of perceptions among all 4,581 comments or the broader Indonesian public. Rather, it provides a contextual qualitative account of how distrust, procedural skepticism, satire, collective positioning, and demands for transparency were articulated in a deliberately balanced sample of Instagram comments.

METHOD

This study was conducted within the digital public sphere of Instagram, focusing on a post published by the @narasinewsroom account concerning the death of Affan Kurniawan. The account was selected because it is one of Indonesia's prominent digital journalism platforms that actively reports on social and legal issues while generating a high level of user engagement. The study specifically examined a post regarding the investigation of a Mobile Brigade Corps (Brimob) officer allegedly involved in Affan Kurniawan's death, which was published on August 29, 2025.

The research materials consisted of textual data derived from users' comments on the selected Instagram post. Comments were chosen as the unit of analysis because they represent public opinions, evaluations, and emotional expressions that emerged spontaneously in response to the news coverage. The analyzed dataset included comments relevant to the research focus, namely those containing perceptions, criticism, support, demands for justice, or evaluations of the Indonesian National Police (Polri).

Research Design and Data Source

This study employed qualitative descriptive content analysis to examine how critical perceptions of the Indonesian National Police (Polri) were expressed through digital discourse. The data were obtained from the publicly accessible comment section of an Instagram post published by the digital journalism account @narasinewsroom on August 29, 2025. The post concerned the investigation of seven members of the Mobile Brigade Corps (Brimob) in connection with the death of Affan Kurniawan.

At the time of data collection, the post contained 4,581 comments. An individual textual comment was treated as the unit of analysis. The post was selected because it addressed a widely discussed legal and social issue and generated substantial user responses concerning police accountability, investigative transparency, and institutional credibility.

Sampling and Comment Selection

A total of 100 comments were selected using quota purposive sampling. During the preliminary review of the comment pool, five analytically relevant perception categories were established based on recurring meanings and their relevance to the research objectives. These categories comprised: (1) distrust regarding the authenticity of the alleged perpetrators, (2) suspicion regarding the transparency of the legal process, (3) satire and sarcastic criticism, (4) collective expressions of distrust, and (5) critical questions concerning investigative procedures.

To facilitate balanced qualitative comparison across the five categories, 20 representative comments were purposively selected from each category. Comments were selected based on the clarity of their evaluative meaning, relevance to the research focus, and representativeness of the category in which they were classified. The equal allocation of 20 comments to each category was intentionally determined as part of the sampling design. Therefore, the composition of the sample does not represent the natural frequency or prevalence of the five categories among all 4,581 comments.

Comments were included when they contained an explicit opinion, judgement, question, criticism, demand, or emotional-evaluative stance concerning Polri or the investigation into Affan Kurniawan's death. Comments were excluded when they consisted of spam, promotional content, unrelated user tags, duplicate messages, emoji-only responses without an interpretable textual message, or expressions of condolence that did not contain an evaluative position relevant to the study. Repeated or substantially identical comments from the same user were counted once. Reply comments were included only when they provided an independent evaluation, question, or argument rather than merely affirming a previous comment.

Data Preparation and Anonymization

The 100 selected comments were transcribed verbatim into a coding sheet and assigned unique identifiers ranging from C001 to C100. The original wording of each comment was retained to preserve its linguistic, contextual, and evaluative meaning.

Username, profile photographs, hyperlinks, and other personally identifiable information were removed before analysis. The same comment codes were used consistently in the coding sheet, result tables, and illustrative quotations so that every reported example could be traced to the analyzed corpus.

Coding Framework

The coding framework consisted of three analytical components: perception category, primary Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis-informed message form, and primary emotional-evaluative stance.

The communicative form of each comment was analyzed using a framework informed by Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA), which examines how linguistic choices and digitally mediated message forms contribute to meaning construction in online environments (Herring, 2004). Five primary message forms were identified: questions and demands for transparency, figurative language, humor, and satire, assertive and evaluative statements, collective statements and calls for action, and argumentative reasoning.

Each comment was also assigned one primary emotional-evaluative stance according to its most salient orientation: cynicism, suspicion, anger, disappointment, or empathy. These descriptive stances were subsequently interpreted through the three main dimensions of Appraisal Theory: Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation (Martin & White, 2005). Affect was used to interpret emotional responses, Judgement to examine evaluations of institutional actors and conduct, and Appreciation to analyze evaluations of the investigation and legal process.

Each comment received one primary code within each analytical component according to its dominant communicative or evaluative function. Although a comment could contain several linguistic or evaluative meanings, only the most salient category was included in the frequency calculation. Secondary meanings were considered qualitatively during interpretation but were not counted as separate occurrences.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in five stages. First, the available comments were screened using the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Second, eligible comments were grouped into the five perception categories. Third, 20 representative comments were purposively selected from each category, resulting in a quota-balanced qualitative corpus of 100 comments.

Fourth, the selected comments were anonymized, assigned codes from C001 to C100, and entered the coding sheet. Each comment was then coded according to its perception category, primary CMDA-informed message form, and primary emotional-evaluative stance.

Fifth, frequencies and percentages were calculated for the CMDA-informed message forms and emotional-evaluative stances within the selected corpus. Because the sample was deliberately balanced across five perception categories, the numerical results describe only the characteristics of the 100 selected comments and were not used to estimate the natural distribution of perceptions among all 4,581 comments.

The frequency summaries were complemented by qualitative interpretation and anonymized verbatim quotations. Appraisal Theory was applied as an interpretive framework rather than as a separate mutually exclusive frequency classification because Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation could overlap within a single comment.

The study did not analyze likes, engagement levels, complete reply chains, comment influence, or the development of interaction patterns because these forms of metadata were not included in the coding sheet.

Intra-Coder Consistency and Trustworthiness

To assess coding consistency, the same 100 comments were coded in two separate rounds conducted at different points in time. The results of the two coding rounds were compared to identify differences in category assignment. When discrepancies occurred, the original comment, its contextual meaning, and the relevant operational definition in the codebook were re-examined before the final category was determined.

This procedure was treated as an assessment of intra-coder consistency rather than inter-coder reliability. The trustworthiness of the analysis was further supported through predefined selection criteria, verbatim transcription, documented coding categories, consistent comment identifiers, and an audit trail linking the coding sheet, frequency calculations, result tables, and illustrative quotations. These procedures strengthened the transparency and traceability of the analytical process (Krippendorff, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

The study analyzed comments that were publicly accessible on Instagram using a non-intrusive research procedure. The researchers did not contact, interact with, or intervene in the activities of the users whose comments were analyzed.

All usernames, profile photographs, and personally identifiable information were removed, and only anonymized comment codes were presented in the manuscript. The data were used exclusively for academic purposes and stored securely to reduce the risk of user identification.

Although the comments were publicly accessible, anonymization was applied because users may not have anticipated that their comments would be reproduced in an academic publication. This procedure is consistent with ethical considerations in online and netnographic research (Kozinets, 2010).

RESULTS

Overview of the Analyzed Data

This study analyzed 100 comments selected from 4,581 comments posted in response to an @narasineewsroom Instagram post concerning the investigation into the death of Affan Kurniawan. The comments were selected using quota purposive sampling, with 20 comments purposively drawn from each of five perception categories. Each comment was anonymized, assigned a unique code ranging from C001 to C100, and analyzed according to three components: perception category, primary CMDA-informed message form, and primary emotional-evaluative stance.

The three-layer coding procedure enabled the comments to be examined in terms of the perceptions they expressed, the linguistic forms through which those perceptions were communicated, and the evaluative positions accompanying them. Each comment was assigned one primary message form and one primary emotional-evaluative stance based on its most salient communicative function.

The numerical results presented in this section describe only the composition and characteristics of the deliberately balanced qualitative sample. They should not be interpreted as estimates of the prevalence of particular perceptions among all 4,581 comments or among the broader population of Instagram users.

Composition of the Quota-Balanced Qualitative Corpus

The qualitative corpus was organized into five perception categories: distrust regarding the authenticity of the alleged perpetrators, suspicion regarding the transparency of the legal process, satire and sarcastic criticism, collective expressions of distrust, and critical questions concerning investigative procedures. To facilitate balanced qualitative comparison, 20 representative comments were purposively selected from each category, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Composition of the Quota-Balanced Qualitative Corpus

Perception category	n	Percentage
Distrust regarding the authenticity of the alleged perpetrators	20	20%
Suspicion regarding the transparency of the legal process	20	20%
Satire and sarcastic criticism	20	20%
Collective expressions of distrust	20	20%
Critical questions concerning investigative procedures	20	20%
Total	100	100%

Note. The equal allocation of 20 comments to each category reflects the quota purposive sampling design and should not be interpreted as the natural prevalence of these perceptions among all 4,581 comments.

The equal distribution enabled comparable qualitative attention to be given to each perception category. Consequently, the analytical significance of a category was determined by the linguistic and evaluative patterns identified within it rather than by its numerical dominance over the other categories.

1. Distrust Regarding the Authenticity of the Alleged Perpetrators

The 20 comments assigned to this category questioned whether the individuals presented during the investigation were the actual persons responsible for the incident. One commenter stated:

“Pemain pengganti lagi nih. Yang asli mana?”
[“Another substitute actor. Where is the real one?”] (C002)

Comment C002 expresses doubt regarding the identity of the individual presented during the investigation. The phrase *pemain pengganti* (“substitute actor”) frames the individual as someone allegedly replacing the actual perpetrator, while the question *Yang asli mana?* (“Where is the real one?”) functions as a direct demand for clarification. The comment therefore combines suspicion with an explicit challenge to the credibility of the public presentation of the investigation.

Across the 20 comments coded in this category, similar doubts were expressed through references to substitute actors and perceived differences between the individuals shown during the investigation and those visible in the circulated footage. For example:

“Badan kekar di video, yang ini kurus. Tukar orang nih.”
[“The person in the video had a muscular build, while this one is thin. They have substituted the person.”] (C010)

Comment C010 uses a comparison between two perceived physical characteristics as the basis for its conclusion. The contrast between *badan kekar* ("muscular build") and *kurus* ("thin") is presented as evidence supporting the commenter's suspicion that the individual shown during the investigation was different from the person visible in the incident footage.

Within this category, distrust was directed not only toward the identity of the alleged perpetrators but also toward the institution's ability to provide a credible and verifiable account of who was responsible for the incident. The comments do not independently establish that substitution occurred; rather, they reveal how perceived visual discrepancies were used to construct narratives of institutional concealment.

2. Suspicion Regarding the Transparency of the Legal Process

The 20 comments in the second category expressed doubts about the openness, objectivity, and credibility of the legal process. Several comments portrayed the investigation as symbolic, performative, or intended primarily to manage public reaction. One comment stated:

"Proses hukum cuma sandiwara buat nenangin massa!"

["The legal process is merely a performance intended to calm the public!"]

(C022)

Comment C022 evaluates the legal process as performative rather than substantive. The term *sandiwara* ("performance") characterizes the investigation as staged, while the phrase *buat nenangin massa* ("intended to calm the public") attributes a strategic public-management motive to the institution. The comment therefore constructs the investigation as an attempt to reduce public pressure rather than establish accountability.

Across the comments coded in this category, suspicion was also expressed through questions about the speed of the proceedings, the possibility of lenient sanctions, and perceived inconsistencies between official statements and the reported investigative process. One commenter asked:

"Proses hukumnya cepet, tapi keadilannya mana?"

["The legal process is fast, but where is the justice?"] (C029)

Comment C029 contrasts procedural speed with the perceived absence of substantive justice. The conjunction *tapi* ("but") marks a discrepancy between the rapid conduct of formal proceedings and the outcome expected by the commenter. The question implies that procedural efficiency alone was insufficient to establish the credibility of the investigation.

Across this category, transparency was evaluated through the accessibility of evidence, consistency of official explanations, visibility of institutional responsibility, and proportionality of possible sanctions. The coded comments indicate that the existence of a formal investigation did not automatically generate confidence when the process was perceived as lacking verifiable evidence and substantive accountability.

3. Satire and Sarcastic Criticism

The 20 comments in the third category used humor, irony, metaphor, and popular cultural references to criticize the investigation and the police institution. References to

actors, scripts, films, awards, and staged performances appeared repeatedly. One commenter stated:

“Wah, pemeran pengganti dapat piala Oscar nih.”
[“Wow, the substitute actor deserves an Oscar.”] (C041)

In Comment C041, the reference to an Oscar functions as sarcastic praise rather than genuine admiration. The expression portrays the investigation as an acting performance and implies that the individual presented to the public was playing a predetermined role. The phrase *pemeran pengganti* (“substitute actor”) also connects this sarcastic evaluation to doubts about the authenticity of the alleged perpetrator.

Another comment stated:

“Aktingnya dapet 10, keadilannya dapet 0.”
[“The acting deserves a score of 10, while justice deserves 0.”] (C047)

Comment C047 creates a contrast between public performance and substantive justice. The numerical opposition between “10” and “0” portrays the institutional presentation as highly polished while evaluating the delivery of justice as entirely inadequate. This concise comparison intensifies the criticism by framing the investigation as successful in appearance but unsuccessful in producing accountability.

Across the 20 comments assigned to this category, commenters repeatedly drew on metaphors of actors, scripts, films, casting, performances, and awards. These cultural references condensed complex accusations into recognizable images and communicated skepticism indirectly through humor and irony.

Within the selected category, satire functioned as more than entertainment. It delegitimized institutional explanations by presenting them as artificial, predetermined, and unworthy of serious trust. Instead of directly debating procedural details, the comments reduced the investigation to an object of ridicule.

4. Collective Expressions of Distrust

The fourth category comprised 20 comments that used collective pronouns and expressions such as *kita* (“we”), *rakyat* (“the people”), and *publik* (“the public”). These linguistic choices constructed shared positions toward the case and encouraged continued public attention. One user wrote:

“Yuk, kita awasi terus sandiwara ini.”
[“Let us continue monitoring this performance.”] (C063)

Comment C063 combines an inclusive pronoun with an imperative call for continued monitoring. The word *kita* (“we”) positions the commenter and other users as members of a shared public, while *awasi terus* (“continue monitoring”) transforms distrust into a proposed collective action. The word *sandiwara* (“performance”) reinforces the perception that the investigation required sustained scrutiny.

Another commenter stated:

“Suara kita satu: keadilan buat Affan!”
[“Our voice is united: justice for Affan!”] (C077)

Comment C077 constructs unity through the phrase *suara kita satu* (“our voice is united”) and directs that collective identity toward a demand for justice. The comment

simultaneously communicates dissatisfaction with the unresolved case and attempts to mobilize other users around a shared moral position.

Across the 20 comments coded in this category, collective language shifted the comments from individual reactions to shared public positioning. Inclusive pronouns and calls for action were used to encourage monitoring, remembrance, solidarity, and demands for accountability.

These comments demonstrate collective positioning within the deliberately selected category. They should not be interpreted as evidence of consensus among all users participating in the Instagram discussion. Nevertheless, they show how some commenters attempted to frame continued public scrutiny as a shared civic responsibility.

5. Critical Questions Concerning Investigative Procedures

The fifth category consisted of 20 comments requesting information about evidence, legal provisions, command responsibility, independent examinations, and institutional procedures. One user asked:

“Mana rekaman CCTV asli? Kok cuma ini yang dikasih lihat?”
[“Where is the original CCTV footage? Why is this the only footage being shown?”] (C082)

Comment C082 focuses on the availability and completeness of primary evidence. The repeated interrogative form challenges the selective disclosure of visual material and implies that relevant evidence may have been withheld. The reference to the “original CCTV footage” also indicates that the commenter distinguished between primary documentation and the limited information publicly presented.

Another commenter asked:

“Mana hasil uji balistik dan forensik rantisnya?”
[“Where are the ballistic and forensic examination results of the tactical vehicle?”] (C090)

Comment C090 presents a technically specific demand for evidence. By referring to ballistic and forensic examination results, the commenter identifies concrete forms of verification expected from the investigation. The question positions transparency as dependent on the disclosure of documented and testable evidence rather than on general institutional assurances.

Across the 20 comments coded in this category, users requested CCTV recordings, forensic findings, legal provisions, independent examinations, and clarification of the chain of command. These procedural questions show that distrust was not expressed solely as an emotional reaction. It was also articulated through scrutiny of whether the investigation met publicly expected standards of evidence, disclosure, independence, and accountability.

Distribution of CMDA-Informed Message Forms within the Quota-Balanced Sample

The CMDA-informed coding identified five principal message forms through which the sampled comments communicated their evaluations: questions and demands for transparency, figurative language and satire, assertive and evaluative statements, collective statements and calls for action, and argumentative reasoning. Each comment

was assigned one primary message form according to its most salient communicative function. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of CMDA-Informed Message Forms within the Quota-Balanced Sample

Primary message form	n	Percentage
Questions and demands for transparency	27	27%
Figurative language, humor, and satire	25	25%
Assertive and evaluative statements	22	22%
Collective statements and calls for action	20	20%
Argumentative reasoning	6	6%
Total	100	100%

Note. Percentages describe the 100 quota-balanced comments and should not be generalized to all comments on the Instagram post.

1. Questions and Demands for Transparency

Questions and demands for transparency constituted the most frequently coded message form, appearing in 27 of the 100 selected comments. These comments requested evidence, clarification of legal procedures, identification of responsible actors, and disclosure of the investigative process.

“Mana hasil uji balistik dan forensik rantisnya?”

[“Where are the ballistic and forensic examination results of the tactical vehicle?”] (C090)

Comment C090 illustrates a technically specific demand for evidence. By identifying ballistic and forensic examination results, the commenter specified the type of documentation expected from the investigation. The comment therefore linked institutional credibility to the disclosure of verifiable evidence.

Across the 27 comments assigned to this message form, criticism was frequently organized around requests for verification. The comments did not merely reject institutional explanations; they asked what evidence existed, who was responsible, and whether appropriate investigative procedures had been followed.

2. Figurative Language, Humor, and Satire

Figurative language, humor, and satire appeared in 25 comments. These comments commonly employed metaphors related to actors, films, scripts, stages, and awards.

“Aktingnya dapet 10, keadilannya dapet 0.”

[“The acting deserves a score of 10, while justice deserves 0.”] (C047)

Comment C047 uses a numerical contrast to compare institutional performance with substantive justice. The comment evaluates the public presentation as convincing while portraying the delivery of justice as absent. The contrast transforms a complex institutional criticism into a concise and recognizable sarcastic expression.

Across the 25 comments coded in this form, satire functioned as a central communicative resource through which commenters expressed skepticism and questioned institutional credibility. The repeated performance metaphors framed the investigation as artificial and oriented toward appearance rather than accountability.

3. Assertive and Evaluative Statements

Assertive and evaluative statements accounted for 22 comments. These messages communicated criticism directly and presented their evaluations as conclusions rather than questions.

“Transparansi bohong. Pelaku asli nggak ada di layar.”

[“The claim of transparency is false. The actual perpetrator is not on the screen.”] (C020)

Comment C020 directly rejects the credibility of the institutional process. The phrase *transparansi bohong* (“the claim of transparency is false”) presents the evaluation as definite, while the second sentence states the commenter’s basis for rejecting the official presentation.

Across the 22 comments assigned to this form, direct assertions reduced ambiguity and communicated a high degree of certainty. The commenters did not merely request clarification; they presented institutional explanations as already discredited within their interpretation.

4. Collective Statements and Calls for Action

Collective statements and calls for action represented 20 comments. These comments used inclusive expressions and encouraged continued public attention, solidarity, or demands for justice.

“Suara kita satu: keadilan buat Affan!”

[“Our voice is united: justice for Affan!”] (C077)

Comment C077 uses the phrase *suara kita satu* (“our voice is united”) to construct a collective identity and connect that identity to a specific demand. The message expresses an evaluation of the unresolved case while attempting to mobilize other users around justice for the victim.

Across the 20 comments coded in this form, collective language was used not only to state opinions but also to coordinate attention, remembrance, and public demands. These comments transformed individual reactions into appeals framed as shared public concerns.

5. Argumentative Reasoning

Argumentative reasoning was identified in six comments. Although this was the least frequent message form, the comments assigned to it provided physical, logical, or narrative reasons to support their evaluations.

“Badan kekar di video, yang ini kurus. Tukar orang nih.”

[“The person in the video had a muscular build, while this one is thin. They have substituted the person.”] (C010)

Comment C010 follows a simple argumentative structure. It presents an observable contrast between two perceived physical characteristics and then draws a conclusion about possible substitution. Although the conclusion cannot be verified from the comment alone, the structure demonstrates an attempt to justify distrust through evidence-based reasoning rather than through unsupported assertion.

Across the six comments coded in this form, users relied on comparisons, causal explanations, or references to available evidence. The limited frequency of this form does not reduce its analytical importance, because it shows how some users attempted to legitimize their evaluations through explicit reasoning.

Overall, the five CMDA-informed message forms reveal different ways in which criticism was communicated. Questions sought disclosure, satire undermined institutional narratives, assertive statements expressed firm rejection, collective appeals encouraged public participation, and argumentative comments attempted to justify suspicion.

Emotional-Evaluative Stances within the Quota-Balanced Sample

Each selected comment was classified according to its primary emotional-evaluative stance. Five categories were identified: cynicism, suspicion, anger, disappointment, and empathy. Their distribution is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Emotional-Evaluative Stances within the Quota-Balanced Sample

Primary emotional-evaluative stance	n	Percentage
Cynicism	45	45%
Suspicion	25	25%
Anger	18	18%
Disappointment	10	10%
Empathy	2	2%
Total	100	100%

Note. Percentages describe emotional-evaluative stances within the 100 quota-balanced comments and do not indicate their prevalence among all comments on the post.

1. Cynicism

Cynicism was the most frequently coded emotional-evaluative stance, appearing in 45 comments. It was commonly expressed through irony, mockery, and references to performances or predetermined scenarios.

“Sandiwaranya kepanjangan, penonton udah tau endingnya.”
[“The performance has gone on too long; the audience already knows the ending.”] (C054)

Comment C054 presents the investigation as a predictable performance whose outcome was assumed to have been determined in advance. The words *sandiwara* (“performance”), *penonton* (“audience”), and *ending* create an extended theatrical metaphor that communicates disbelief and resignation toward the anticipated institutional outcome.

Across the 45 comments coded as cynical, institutional explanations were frequently portrayed as artificial, predictable, or undeserving of serious trust. Cynicism therefore communicated more than immediate dissatisfaction; it reflected an expectation that the process would fail to produce meaningful accountability.

2. Suspicion

Suspicion appeared in 25 comments and was reflected in questions about concealed evidence, the identity of the alleged perpetrators, command responsibility, and institutional transparency.

"Apakah ada perintah langsung dari komandan lapangan?"
["Was there a direct order from the field commander?"] (C091)

Comment C091 expands the possible scope of responsibility beyond the individuals directly involved in the incident. By questioning whether an order came from a field commander, the commenter raises the possibility of hierarchical responsibility and requests clarification concerning the chain of command.

Across the 25 comments coded as suspicious, uncertainty was associated with perceived gaps in the official account. The comments questioned unidentified decision-makers, inconsistencies in reported identities, undisclosed evidence, and the possibility that responsibility extended beyond the personnel publicly examined.

3. Anger

Anger was identified in 18 comments, particularly through direct accusations and forceful demands for accountability.

"Jangan tipu publik! Tampilkan pelaku aslinya!"
["Do not deceive the public! Show the actual perpetrator!"] (C006)

Comment C006 realizes anger through imperative constructions and intensified punctuation. The commands *jangan tipu* ("do not deceive") and *tampilkan* ("show") communicate urgency and position the institution as actively withholding or misrepresenting information.

Across the 18 comments coded as angry, commenters moved beyond questioning the investigation and directly accused the institution of deception, incompetence, or unwillingness to provide accountability. Anger was therefore associated with explicit confrontation and demands for immediate corrective action.

4. Disappointment

Disappointment appeared in 10 comments and reflected declining expectations regarding justice and institutional accountability.

"Proses hukumnya cepet, tapi keadilannya mana?"
["The legal process is fast, but where is the justice?"] (C029)

Comment C029 contrasts procedural speed with the perceived absence of justice. The question suggests that rapid formal proceedings were not considered meaningful when the outcome was not regarded as fair or credible.

Across the 10 comments coded as disappointment, users expressed reduced confidence in the institution's ability or willingness to meet expected standards of fairness, openness, and accountability. Unlike anger, disappointment was communicated through declining expectations rather than direct confrontation.

5. Empathy

Empathy appeared in two comments and was directed primarily toward Affan Kurniawan and efforts to prevent the case from being forgotten.

"Solidaritas buat Affan, kita nggak akan lupa ini."
["Solidarity for Affan; we will not forget this."] (C068)

Comment C068 foregrounds the victim through an explicit expression of solidarity. The inclusive pronoun *kita* (“we”) transforms remembrance into a collective commitment and connects empathy with continued public attention to the case.

The two comments coded as empathy shifted the focus from institutional conduct to the victim and collective remembrance. Their limited number should not be interpreted as evidence that empathy was absent from the broader discussion. It reflects the evaluative focus of the quota-balanced corpus, in which most selected comments concerned institutional credibility, investigative transparency, and accountability.

Overall, the emotional-evaluative analysis indicates that the selected corpus was characterized primarily by cynicism and suspicion. These stances reflected entrenched disbelief and uncertainty regarding the institutional account, while anger and disappointment represented more explicit reactions to perceived failures of accountability.

Qualitative Mapping of Appraisal Dimensions

The descriptive emotional-evaluative stances were subsequently interpreted using the three principal dimensions of Appraisal Theory: Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation. Because these dimensions could overlap within a single comment, they were analyzed qualitatively rather than treated as mutually exclusive frequency categories.

Table 4. Qualitative Mapping of Appraisal Dimensions in the Selected Comments

Appraisal dimension	Evaluative focus	Findings represented in the comments
Affect	Users’ emotional responses	Anger, disappointment, frustration, and empathy
Judgement	Evaluation of institutional actors and conduct	Police personnel and the institution were evaluated as deceptive, unprofessional, unaccountable, or lacking integrity
Appreciation	Evaluation of the investigation and legal process	The investigation was evaluated as symbolic, staged, procedurally questionable, or lacking credibility

Cynicism and suspicion functioned as broader evaluative orientations that frequently intensified affective meanings and overlapped with Judgement and Appreciation. They were therefore not treated as straightforward emotional subcategories of Affect.

1. Affect

Affect was most directly realized through expressions of anger, disappointment, frustration, and empathy. For example, imperative accusations communicated anger, whereas expressions of lost expectations communicated disappointment. Statements of solidarity with Affan represented empathy and concern for the victim.

2. Judgement

Judgement appeared when commenters evaluated the honesty, integrity, competence, professionalism, and accountability of police actors.

"Cocok jadi influencer, jadi aparat nggak becus."

["They would be better suited as influencers; they are incompetent as officers."] (C057)

Comment C057 negatively evaluates the competence and professional conduct of institutional actors. The comparison between an "influencer" and an "officer" functions sarcastically to question professional suitability, while *nggak becus* ("incompetent") explicitly evaluates the officers as failing to meet the standards associated with their institutional roles.

Across comments representing Judgement, institutional actors were evaluated in relation to expected standards of honesty, capacity, professionalism, and accountability.

3. Appreciation

Appreciation was represented when commenters evaluated the quality, credibility, and substantive value of the investigation or institutional response.

"Bikin konferensi pers doang, substansi nol."

["They only held a press conference; there was no substance."] (C035)

Comment C035 evaluates the quality of the institutional response rather than the personal behavior of a particular actor. The contrast between holding a press conference and *substansi nol* ("no substance") characterizes the response as superficial and lacking meaningful investigative content.

Across comments representing Appreciation, the investigation was evaluated as staged, symbolic, procedurally inadequate, or lacking credibility. The evaluative target was therefore the quality of the process rather than solely the conduct of individual police personnel.

The three Appraisal dimensions frequently overlapped. For example, a metaphor of acting could communicate cynical emotion, negatively evaluate the honesty of institutional actors, and portray the investigation as an artificial performance. The Appraisal analysis was therefore used to interpret the layered meanings of the comments rather than assign additional mutually exclusive categories.

DISCUSSION

Distrust and Procedural Skepticism in the Selected Comments

Across the deliberately quota-balanced sample, distrust and procedural skepticism were expressed through five categories: doubts about the authenticity of the alleged perpetrators, suspicion regarding the transparency of the legal process, satirical criticism, collective expressions of distrust, and critical questions concerning investigative procedures. These categories illustrate different ways in which critical perceptions of the Indonesian National Police and the investigation into Affan Kurniawan's death were articulated within the selected comments. Their equal representation reflects the sampling design and should not be interpreted as evidence of their natural prevalence among all 4,581 comments.

Expressions such as "substitute actor," "performance," and "scapegoat" indicate that some users did not interpret the investigation solely as a formal legal procedure. Instead, they represented it as a symbolic, staged, or insufficiently credible institutional

response. This finding is consistent with Rachman et al. (2024), who demonstrated that distrust toward the police may be reproduced through recurring narratives and symbolic expressions in social media discourse. In the present study, skepticism was communicated not only through explicit accusations but also through procedural questions concerning CCTV footage, forensic evidence, command responsibility, applicable legal provisions, and the independence of the investigation.

The findings suggest that distrust in digital discourse can involve both emotional reactions and demands for procedural accountability. The selected users expressed dissatisfaction with the institution while also questioning whether the investigation met expectations of transparency, fairness, and institutional responsibility. These comments therefore illustrate how perceptions of procedural credibility may be connected to broader evaluations of police legitimacy within a specific digital discussion.

Nevertheless, these interpretations are limited to the quota-balanced qualitative sample. Because the sample was intentionally constructed from five predominantly critical categories, the findings cannot be used to determine the prevalence of distrust, skepticism, or other perceptions among all users who commented on the post. They should therefore be understood as an explanation of how critical perceptions were discursively expressed rather than as a representation of Indonesian society or Instagram users generally.

Message Forms as Digital Strategies of Criticism

The CMDA findings show that netizens communicated their perceptions through five primary message forms: questions and demands for transparency, figurative language and satire, assertive evaluations, collective appeals, and argumentative reasoning. Questions and demands for transparency constituted the most frequent message form, accounting for 27% of the selected comments. This indicates that users frequently positioned themselves not merely as recipients of information but as participants demanding clarification from public institutions.

From the perspective of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis, digital messages must be understood not only according to their propositional content but also according to how users construct meaning through linguistic choices and platform-specific forms of communication (Herring, 2004). In this study, rhetorical questions, direct demands, metaphors, satire, and collective pronouns served different communicative functions. Procedural questions expressed suspicion and demanded institutional evidence, while assertive statements communicated criticism more directly.

Figurative language, humor, and satire appeared in 25% of the comments. References to actors, films, scripts, awards, and staged performances enabled users to criticize the investigation indirectly. Humor in these comments did not primarily function as entertainment. Instead, it operated as a rhetorical strategy through which skepticism and delegitimization were expressed in a socially recognizable and shareable form. This supports the view that social media language can facilitate the construction of shared meanings through symbolic and culturally familiar expressions (Khaeriyah & Natsir, 2024).

Collective statements and calls for action accounted for 20% of the comments. The use of expressions such as “we,” “the public,” and “the people” enabled users to present their evaluations as part of a broader social concern. However, these collective

expressions should not be interpreted as evidence of complete public consensus. They are more accurately understood as a dominant discursive convergence within the selected sample, in which similar criticisms and demands were repeatedly articulated.

Argumentative reasoning was less frequent, appearing in 6% of the comments. Although limited in number, these comments are analytically significant because they attempted to justify distrust through comparisons, perceived inconsistencies, or references to physical and procedural evidence. This finding shows that online criticism was not entirely based on emotional expression; some users also attempted to construct reasoned arguments to support their evaluations.

Emotional and Evaluative Meanings in the Comments

The emotional-evaluative coding identified cynicism as the most frequent stance, appearing in 45% of the comments, followed by suspicion at 25%, anger at 18%, disappointment at 10%, and empathy at 2%. This distribution indicates that the discourse was characterized primarily by cynical and suspicious evaluations rather than by neutral discussion or explicit expressions of sympathy.

Cynicism was commonly expressed through satire, mockery, and references to institutional performance. Such expressions imply that users had limited expectations that the investigation would produce a fair or credible outcome. Suspicion, meanwhile, was reflected in questions about evidence, the identity of the alleged perpetrators, institutional responsibility, and the transparency of legal procedures. Anger was communicated through direct accusations and demands, while disappointment reflected declining expectations regarding institutional accountability.

The relatively low proportion of explicit empathy does not necessarily indicate an absence of concern for the victim. Instead, it may suggest that the discussion focused more strongly on evaluating the institution and the investigation than on expressing personal sympathy. In several comments, concern for Affan Kurniawan was conveyed indirectly through demands for justice, accountability, and continued public attention.

Appraisal Theory provides a useful framework for interpreting these evaluative meanings. The Affect dimension was reflected in anger, disappointment, frustration, and empathy. The Judgement dimension appeared when users evaluated the integrity, professionalism, honesty, and accountability of police actors. Negative Appreciation was directed toward the quality and credibility of the investigation, particularly when users characterized the legal process as symbolic, staged, or lacking substance (Martin & White, 2005).

The three dimensions were frequently interconnected. For example, a sarcastic comment might simultaneously express cynicism as Affect, criticize institutional competence through Judgement, and negatively evaluate the investigation through Appreciation. Therefore, Appraisal Theory helps demonstrate that netizen perceptions were not limited to simple positive or negative sentiment but involved emotional, moral, and institutional evaluations.

Integration of CMDA and Appraisal Theory

The integration of CMDA and Appraisal Theory provides a more comprehensive interpretation of the selected comments. CMDA explains how evaluations were communicated through questions, assertions, metaphors, satire, collective appeals, and

arguments. Appraisal Theory explains the emotional and evaluative orientation embedded in those message forms.

The combination of the two frameworks moves the analysis beyond conventional sentiment classification. A classification of a comment as merely “negative,” for example, would not explain whether the negativity was expressed as anger, cynicism, procedural suspicion, moral judgement, or criticism of the quality of the investigation. By combining CMDA and Appraisal Theory, the study demonstrates how linguistic form and evaluative meaning operate together in digital discourse.

This integration also clarifies how institutional distrust is discursively produced. Distrust did not emerge solely from explicit statements that the police were unreliable. It was constructed through repeated metaphors of performance, procedural questions, direct accusations, collective appeals, and evaluations of institutional integrity. The contribution of this study therefore lies in showing how perceptions of a public institution are expressed through multiple layers of digitally mediated discourse.

Comparison with Previous Research

Previous studies concerning the Indonesian National Police have frequently focused on internal organizational matters, including leadership, discipline, bureaucratic reform, employee performance, and personnel management (Haribowo et al., 2012; Wijayanty, 2018; Sabilla & Hariyanti, 2020). These studies are valuable for understanding institutional performance from an administrative perspective, but they provide limited insight into how citizens actively construct evaluations of the institution in digital spaces.

The present study complements this literature by shifting attention from internal organizational processes to outward-facing public discourse. Its findings indicate that institutional reputation is not formed solely through official performance indicators or organizational reforms. It is also negotiated through user-generated interpretations of specific events, particularly when institutional actions are publicly questioned.

The findings are also consistent with studies showing that social media facilitates the formation and circulation of collective interpretations (Khaeriyah & Natsir, 2024; Rachman et al., 2024). However, the current study extends this understanding by identifying the specific message forms and appraisal meanings through which distrust and demands for transparency were articulated. Rather than treating online opinion as an aggregation of isolated responses, the analysis shows how linguistic strategies and evaluative positions contribute to dominant narratives within a particular digital discussion.

Implications for Institutional Communication

The findings have practical implications for public institutions, particularly law-enforcement agencies responding to high-profile incidents. The prominence of procedural questions suggests that public distrust may intensify when institutional communication does not sufficiently address demands for evidence, investigative transparency, command responsibility, and accountability.

Public communication should therefore move beyond general assurances and provide clear, timely, and verifiable information regarding investigative procedures.

Responsive communication may not automatically restore trust, but it can reduce informational uncertainty and demonstrate institutional commitment to transparency.

Public institutions should also treat digital comments as a source of public feedback rather than merely as negative sentiment. Questions repeatedly raised by users may indicate areas where official communication remains unclear or incomplete. However, any monitoring of digital discourse should be conducted ethically and should not involve intrusive surveillance or the identification of individual users.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The findings are limited to 100 purposively selected comments from one Instagram post. The results therefore describe patterns within the analyzed dataset and cannot be generalized to all comments on the post, all followers of @narasinewsroom, or the broader Indonesian public.

The study also does not examine how Instagram's algorithm, the framing of the original post, comment visibility, user demographics, or prior experiences with the police may have influenced the discourse. Furthermore, because interaction metadata and complete reply chains were not analyzed, the study cannot determine how particular comments influenced subsequent responses or how opinions developed over time.

Future research should examine multiple posts, media accounts, and platforms over a longer period. Comparative studies could assess whether similar evaluative patterns appear across Instagram, X, TikTok, Facebook, or online news platforms. Research may also combine qualitative discourse analysis with larger-scale computational analysis to identify broader patterns while retaining contextual interpretation. Including complete interaction chains would further allow researchers to examine how agreement, disagreement, and narrative reinforcement develop within online conversations.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that public perceptions of the Indonesian National Police (Polri) regarding the Affan Kurniawan case were collectively constructed within the analyzed Instagram comment sections. By integrating Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) and Appraisal Theory, the findings reveal how these specific user comments expressed distrust toward the police institution through distinct message structures, meaning constructions, interaction patterns, and evaluative expressions. Within this examined sample, recurrent narratives, symbolic markers, and user interactions fostered shared interpretations, while appraisal analysis underscored predominantly negative emotional, moral, and institutional evaluations. Consequently, these specific comment sections functioned not merely as venues for individual opinion, but as localized digital public spheres where institutional legitimacy was actively negotiated through participatory discourse.

However, these findings must be interpreted in light of several limitations. Because the study relies on a purposive sample drawn from a single Instagram post, the conclusions are specific to the analyzed dataset and cannot be generalized to broader public sentiment or all social media users. To address these constraints, future research

should expand the scope by examining multiple posts, diverse social media platforms, a broader range of accounts, extended timeframes, and larger datasets. Practically, these insights suggest that public institutions, particularly law enforcement, should actively monitor digital communication spaces to better understand public grievances, foster transparent dialog, and strategically rebuild public trust through clear, responsive communication during high-profile legal and social events.

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