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THE RISE OF PAPUA'S CUSTOMARY LAND CONFLICT ON SOCIAL MEDIA: DIGITAL ACTIVISM AND THE MEDIA REPRESENTATION ANALYSIS OF THE AWYU COMMUNITY

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List of Acronyms

AMAN	: *Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara* (Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago)
AMDAL	: *Analisis Mengenai Dampak Lingkungan* (Environmental Impact Assessment Analysis)
FCIP	: Future Cities Infrastructure Programme
MA	: *Mahkamah Agung* (Supreme Court)
PT ESK	: PT Energi Samudra Kencana
PT IAL	: PT Indo Asiana Lestari
RUU MHA	: *Rancangan Undang-Undang Masyarakat Hukum Adat* (Draft Law on Customary Law Communities)

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Deuteronomy 31:8: "The LORD Himself goes before you; He will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." I dedicate this work to Jesus Christ, *Hallelujah.*

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May this paper be a blessing to whoever reads it.

Abstract

For indigenous Papuan people of Indonesia, land and forest have been an inseparable part of their lives for so long, becoming a place to survive and preserve their ancestral values. The importance of land causes land rights as a crucial issue, especially with the expansion of large-scale extractive industries that repeatedly threaten the indigenous people' lives and environmental sustainability. This research focuses on the conflict between the Awyu people in Papua in defending their customary lands against the expansion of oil palm plantations and to what extent digital activism plays a role in that. Digital ethnography and discourse analysis are used to analyze the contents of the Awyu community's campaigns in the digital space, while Hall's politics of representation and Foucault's power and knowledge theories are used to examine how these contents represent and produce meaning of the community. In this context, digital activism has succeeded in becoming a new strategy for fighting for indigenous peoples' rights, attracting global attention, and encouraging accountability from the government and companies involved. The final result of this study is that digital activism plays a crucial role in strengthening representation and opening new spaces for advocacy for indigenous peoples' rights in Indonesia.

Relevance to Development Studies

In general, this research aims to examine the resistance of indigenous community on digital platforms against the injustices they face, in this case agrarian conflicts, capitalism, and unequal laws. Although the term digital activism is not new, this study aims to explore how the concept is used in striving indigenous peoples' rights, particularly through representation and the knowledge production. Furthermore, this research not only analyzes the use of photos, symbols, texts, and other forms of digital activism in the digital realm, but also seeks to provide further information on the impact of social media content on local struggles and public discourse. Going forward, this research is expected to contribute to development studies, especially in examining digital space as a tool for indigenous peoples' against injustice.

Keywords

Awyu Community, Customary Land Conflict, Digital Activism, Digital Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, Indonesia

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis is based on my personal racism experience after the news of the conflict between the Papuan people, the community I come from and was raised in, and the Indonesian National Armed Forces in 2021 spread. In this incident, Papuan students in Surabaya, East Java, were accused of vandalizing and insulting the Indonesian national flag in a picture shared online, leading to attacks by the military. The incident then spread online, and many other Papuan students living on the Java island, like myself, experienced online racism, such as being called as uncivilized people. Since then, I have come to realize how photos, texts, videos, and other forms of media significantly influence how people perceive others. Through this research, I am keen to explore more about how indigenous people are represented on social media and who we truly are. This chapter begins with the history and key issues of Papua's customary land conflict, from the colonial era to the present, followed by the main topic of this research: the conflict between the Awyu community and PT Indo Asiana Lestari (PT IAL).

1.1 Key Issues: Papua's Land Conflict - The Awyu Community and PT Indo Asiana Lestari

1.1.1 Land Conflict History in Papua since the 1960s

"We alone have the legal right to determine our future and manage our land, its deep green forests, its turquoise rivers, and the many-colored diversity of plants and animals that call it home." – Chair of the Knasaimos Indigenous Peoples Fellowship Council.

Papua, the island located in the easternmost part of Indonesia, is known as a region with abundant natural resources, including gold mining, with one-day production reaching 3.2 billion tons (CNBC, 2023), and is also a victim of the management of these resources by corporations. Since the colonial era, Papua has been an arena for power struggles and exploitation of nature that has forced its communities to live in poverty (Efendi, 2017). Colonialism has left a long trail in the relationship between indigenous people and their land, from the colonial era to what is often referred to as internal colonialism after Papua's integration into Indonesia (Moviesthatmatter.nl). This long history is also

evident in ongoing agrarian conflicts and seizures of customary land in Papua. The complicated relationship, along with the restricted internet access and living far from the capital city, makes this conflict rarely seen in the mainstream media, which shows how the patterns of domination and marginalization threaten the fundamental rights of indigenous Papuans.

Map 1.1
Map of Papua, Indonesia

Source: Freepik

Looking back, control over Papuan land has been happening for a long time, starting with the Dutch colonial history from 1898 until 1962, especially with the fact that Indonesia had become independent before Papua was handed over by the Netherlands to it and there was an independence agreement for Papua by the Netherlands. Webster (2001, p. 512) explains that the Dutch decision to retain Papua after Indonesian independence was driven by plans to build a model state for colonial modernization in Southeast Asia. In this narrative, indigenous peoples were viewed not as political sovereigns but merely as primitive communities in need of modernization. In an effort to strengthen their claims, the Dutch also propagated racial discourse, emphasizing the ethnic differences between Papuans (Melanesians) and Indonesians (Asians).

However, after World War II, the Dutch planned to make Papua a separate region with the option of self-determination, but the geopolitical pressure from the United States, which opposed communism and feared that Indonesia would fall under the influence of the Soviet Union, led to Indonesia's transfer of power over Papua under the New York Agreement of 1962, agreed to by the Netherlands (Saltford, 2003). Behind the geopolitical pressures, there was also a strong economic interest: controlling Papua's natural resources. Since the early 1960s, the United States government and the Freeport mining company have known the great potential of the Erstberg and Grasberg

mountains in the Papuan mountainous region. This triggered American support for the integration of Papua, not only for regional stability, but also to open up opportunities for mining investment.

Proven in 1967, before the official referendum decision to determine the people's opinion, as requested by the Papuan people, the Indonesian government had already signed the first work contract with an American company, PT Freeport-McMoran, making it the first foreign company allowed to exploit Papua's natural resources (Suharyono, 2017, p. 372). The signing of the contract and the discovery of Mount Ertsberg then became the starting point for the interest of large world corporations in Papua's copper and gold. Moreover, during the President Soeharto administration (1968-1998), the Indonesian government held only 9% of shares in PT Indocopper Investama (9.36%), while the remaining 80% was controlled by PT Freeport (*Ibid*, 2017, p. 373). This then lasted for decades, during which the huge profits from this mining were enjoyed only by a handful of elites and Indonesian military personnel. At the same time, the Papuan people bore the environmental and social damage.

From the perspective of the indigenous Papuan community, the presence of Freeport confirms a new colonization, especially with several other national and foreign companies that came and exploited the forests in Papua. For example, the Merauke Integrated Food and Security (MIFEE) project in 2010 cleared up to 1.2 million hectares of land for agribusiness investment by dozens of international and national companies. It is also noted that 2.5 million hectares of land were allocated to cooperatives to make the Merauke region a national and global food hub (Mongabay, 2021). However, eventually, the implementation of this program caused suffering for the indigenous people who had inhabited the area for generations. Their customary land was transferred to the company's business without meaningful consultation, forests that were a source of food and cultural identity were cut down, and local communities were marginalized from projects on their land (Walhi Papua, 2021).

Examining various cases of deprivation of indigenous peoples' rights, the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN), a coalition of indigenous peoples' groups in Indonesia, submitted the Draft Law on Customary Law Communities (RUU MHA) to the Indonesian House of Representatives in 2010. The RUU MHA aims to provide recognition, protection, and empowerment to indigenous peoples amid rapid global developments, and to preserve their cultures, identities, and traditional ways of life. For example, articles 20-28 of the RUU MHA outline regulations regarding rights to customary territories, natural resources, development, spirituality, culture, and the

environment (Charliesta, 2023). This bill was then considered three times in the 2014 National Progress. However, to date, the RUU MHA has not been ratified, despite being recognized by the constitution, such as Law Number 5 of 1960 concerning Basic Agrarian Principles and Constitutional Court Decision Number 35/PUU-X/2012. Unfortunately, these are still not enough to protect the rights of indigenous peoples as long as the RUU MHA has not been ratified (*ibid,* 2023) and the indigenous community continues to fight for its ratification.

1.1.2 Awyu Community and PT IAL's Conflict Chronology

These land-grabbing cases have continued to this day. It is reported that between 2001 and 2020, a total of 6,414 thousand hectares of land were deforested in Papua, leaving only around 34 million hectares. The remaining total is still threatened by deforestation, as it is part of the concession area, which includes mining, plantations, and industrial tree plantations (Greenpeace, 2022), currently occurring in the Awyu community in Boven Digoel, Merauke, Papua. The Awyu tribe itself is one of the indigenous people living in southern Papua, specifically in Mappi and Boven Digoel Regency (South Papua Province). Its population is estimated at around 27-30 thousand people. Traditionally, the Awyu tribe resides around large rivers, such as the Digul River and its tributaries, with their primary livelihoods centered on hunting and collecting sago as a staple food (Kompas, 2024).

For the Awyu people, customary forest is a source of life passed down through generations, communally owned by the clans within their tribal group. Each clan has a customary territory with clear natural boundaries, as recorded in the collective memory of their ancestors. This means that a single company concession can encompass customary territories belonging to multiple clans. In his interview with Greenpeace, Hendrikus Woro, a member of the Awyu tribe, said that the livelihoods of his community are highly dependent on land, forests, rivers, swamps, and other natural resources. All of these have become sources of livelihood, food, medicine, and sociocultural identity (Greenpeace, 2023a). Furthermore, Hendrikus also said that the nibung tree, one of the trees that grows in the Boven Digoel forest, has many uses for the community, such as its fronds which can be made into mats, its shoots for making vegetables and salt, its trunk contents can be used as cough medicine, while its trunk becomes a house floor, and its leaves can be used to wrap sago and build bivouacs. Additionally, he stated that the water in the forest is not polluted, allowing it to be drunk directly (Greenpeace, July 2023), which highlights the depth and dependence of the Awyu community's relationship with nature.

Unfortunately, since 2022, the Awyu community has been facing an administrative agrarian conflict due to disputes over control of customary land with the palm oil company, PT Indo Asiana Lestari (IAL), under the control of Tan Yao Zhu and Tan Yao Zhong from the Whole Asia Group Sdn Bhd Malaysia, which is also responsible for more than 100,000 hectares of sustainable forest management in Indonesia (Project Multatuli, 2024). However, the problem started when the provincial government issued an environmental permit, covering 36,094 hectares of Awyu customary land for this company. The permit was issued for a palm oil plantation without the consent of the local indigenous community, which violates the Awyu's customary rights (Wibawa et al., 2024, p. 116 & 118).

The Awyu community, as a tribe that has lived in the area for generations, believes it has a right to the land. This is supported by the Constitutional Court Decision Number 35/PUU-X/2012, which states that forests located within customary law areas are the property of these indigenous communities. This often becomes a problem because local and central governments often have not issued regulations recognizing customary law communities (Tobroni, 2013, p. 473-474). However, there was previously a law regulating state forest ownership, namely Law No. 41 of 1999, which still recognizes customary forests as equal to state forests. Therefore, without official approval to manage customary forests, the Awyu area is still legally considered a state forest (Farina, 2024, p. 9379). Thus, given the existence of Law No. 32, which approves the feasibility of oil palm planting businesses (Kereh, 2024, p. 11), the forest release permits and the plantation businesses owned by PT IAL remain valid and legal. Moreover, PT IAL and the local government still view palm oil plantations as a means to develop the region and utilize its natural resources (Putri et al., 2024).

Beforehand, a large-scale oil palm plantation project had already been underway in the forest area where the Awyu tribe lived, known as the Tanah Merah Project. This project was planned to clear 280,000 hectares of natural forest for oil palm plantations and began on December 8, 2007 when the Regent of Boven Digoel, South Papua, appointed and granted forest management permits to seven national companies: PT. Usaha Nabati Terpadu, PT. Trimegah Karya Utama, RP. Manunggal Sukses Mandiri, PT. Megakarya Jaya Raya, PT. Kartika Cipta Pratama, PT. Graha Kencana Mulia, and PT. Energi Samudera Kencana (ESK), which had previously also obtained plantation business permits covering 39,190 hectares in the Awyu tribe's customary forest (Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, 2023).

Map 1.2
Division of Forest Areas among 7 Companies in 2007

PEMILIK TANAH

PERUSAHAAN CANGKANG

0KM   40KM

Source: The Gecko Project, 2018

Despite this, permits were still granted by the Head of the Papua Province Investment and One-Stop Integrated Licensing Office, Solayen Tabuni, because the companies had gone through a lengthy process, obtained permits from the local regents, and received recommendations from the Plantation Office. Several years later, tensions escalated in late 2016 when rumors surfaced that the forest would be reopened for oil palm plantations. Fabianus, Chairman of the LMA, an organization established to facilitate communication with indigenous communities regarding development projects, however, instead of siding with the community, Fabianus sent a statement to the Boven Digoel Regent requesting the revocation of PT ESK's IUP and proposing the transfer of the land to PT IAL (Project Multatuli, 2024). In the letter, he implied that the Awyu community had agreed to this arrangement. On August 19, 2017, PT IAL met with the local community and promised thay they will provide clean water, educational facilities, and economic development if they can start the palm oil plantations (Kompasiana, 2023). Thee Awyu tribe still firmly rejected it because there it no of trust from the beginning.

Even facing resistance, PT IAL and the provincial government claimed to have conducted public consultations involving all affected customary landowners and proceeded the Environmental Impact Analysis (AMDAL) and the Principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Conent (FCIP) license. However, the reality showed otherwise, the community never felt invited or informed about the AMDAL, despite PT IAL's concession map clearly showing that the Awyu tribe's territory is included within the company's 2,014-hectare concession (Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, 2023). After this, all the

official permits, such as Environmental Feasibility Decree and Mining Business License are granted to PT IAL in 2021. This was shocked the Awyu Community since they were excluded from the process and learned about it around mid-2022 (Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, 2024)

Map 1.3
Map of the Woro Clan's Customary Forest, Awyu Tribe, which overlaps
With PT IAL's Permit.

Source: Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, 2023

Realizing that PT IAL's permit had been issued, Hendrikus Woro, the Representatives of the Awyu Community, accompanied by legal counsel from the Papua Legal Aid Institute, filed a public information request on July 26, 2022, requesting the release of PT IAL's permit documents. This request was ultimately granted, with copies of PT IAL's documents provided. Seeing the lack of transparency in the process, the Awyu tribe took the matter to court, requesting the revocation of the oil palm plantation permits. Unfortunately, this request remained unanswered. On March 13, 2023, the Awyu community chose to file a lawsuit with the Jayapura State Administrative Court (PTUN) through Environmental Decree Number 82/2021, alleging that the issuance process was legally flawed and violated the rights of indigenous peoples, Law Number 32/2009 concerning Environmental Protection, and the Papuan Special Autonomy Law, all of which emphasize the need for indigenous peoples' involvement in any investment on their land (Project Multatuli, 2024).

After a trial process lasting more than 7 months with more than 90+ written evidence and 6 witnesses, the Jayapura Administrative Court's decision Number 6/G/LH/2023 on November 4, 2023, rejected Hendrikus Woro's lawsuit since it was deemed that PT IAL had fulfilled the authority,

procedure, and substance requirements to open a palm oil plantation. According to the judge, the environmental permit decree did not conflict with local wisdom, ecological sustainability, or the principles of sustainability, nor did it violate the human rights of indigenous peoples (Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, 2023). Following the rejection, the Awyu community's legal team continued their fight to the Manado Administrative Court, which was again disappointed. The Awyu community's lawsuit was rejected because it exceeded the 90-day deadline, as the object of the dispute was known. The object of the dispute was published on November 2, 2021, and the lawsuit was filed in March 2023. This decision was strongly criticized by the Awyu tribe's attorney, Tigor Hutapea, who felt that the PTUN ignored Supreme Court Regulation No. 1 of 2023 Article 18 paragraph (2), regarding the time limit for environmental lawsuits, which can be calculated from the time it is known if there is a potential environmental impact. In fact, the Awyu indigenous community learned about PT IAL's permit in mid-2022, which may explain why the March 2023 lawsuit is still within the time limit under that regulation (Kompasiana, 2023). Undeterred, the Awyu tribe took the matter to the Supreme Court (MA) on Thursday, March 14, 2024, where they held a peaceful demonstration in front of the institution to oversee the appeal. After a long wait, the Supreme Court rejected the Awyu community's appeal in Supreme Court Decision Number 458 K/TUN/LH/2024 (Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, 2024).

With that decision, the formal path for the Awyu community to revoke PT IAL's permit is closed. Since then, the Awyu indigenous community and supporting organizations, such as the Pusaka Bentala Rakyat Foundation and Greenpeace, have joined the Coalition to Save Papua's Customary Forests and intend to continue their resistance through other channels, such as digital advocacy and activism. This concept refers to the use of digital technology, particularly the internet and social media, to raise public awareness about a current social or political issue. This digital space then serves as a platform for various community groups, especially indigenous communities, to voice their concerns and fight for their rights (Putri, 2022, in Priageng et al., 2024, p. 1).

Social perceptions that shape attitudes and behavior are usually determined by media representation. This is because media depictions of social groups can lead to prejudice or discrimination against them. Therefore, the agendas expressed in the media have the power to shape public opinion and policy priorities. Moreover, the media also plays a crucial role in shaping identity, particularly for communities whose visibility and representation remain marginalized in the public sphere (Viyandera, 2019, p. 887). Therefore, the Awyu community's move, accompanied by NGOs and activists, to speak in public is one of the best ways to gain support and advocate for their rights.

In Indonesia, the media and press sectors rank fourth among the pillars of democracy, behind government, law, and religion (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2008, p. 1). This trend began after the recognition of Indonesian sovereignty in 1949, when the vision for building a democratic nation emerged, including press freedom. However, the media's transformation was not truly felt until 1998, after the start of the reform era in Indonesia. Students used online and offline activism, which was then uncontrolled by the government, to mobilize offline demonstrations (Rahmawan et al, 2020, p. 124). Since then, the concept of digital activism has become increasingly widespread in Indonesia. Through this, collective rights to customary forests was hoped to be recognized and respected and resulted in the changes of Papua's stereotype from an empty land to a precious home for indigenous community.

1.2 Research Objective

In general, this study seeks to understand how the Awyu community's land conflict is framed in the digital space. This study analyzes images, texts, hashtags, and symbols to see how discursive strategies are employed to build public solidarity, relating it to what extent they are being represented. This research also demonstrates how voices and aspirations of indigenous communities are conveyed, or conversely, whether knowledge production is carried out by external actors. Ultimately, this study is expected to contribute to the study of digital activism by indigenous communities and study of indigenous communities in digital activism globally.

On the other hand, there has been a considerable amount of literature on land and environmental conflicts in Papua. However, most of this literature focuses on the legal or economic aspects of indigenous communities, while discussions of representation and knowledge production in digital spaces remain relatively unexplored. Furthermore, while there is a wealth of research on digital campaigns and national politics in Indonesia, I found that the voices and experiences of indigenous communities in Papua have received little attention. This research then seeks to provide new insights into how land and indigenous conflicts are shaped, questioned, represented, and reproduced through digital activism, particularly within the context of existing power relations and knowledge production.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the identified problem, the main question for this research paper is:

To what extent does digital activism influence the narratives and representation of the Awyu community's land conflict on social media?

To analyze this main question sufficiently, it is elaborated into sub-questions, which are:

1. How are the Awyu community and their customary land issues framed and produced in social media compared to mainstream media?
2. How do digital influencers or supporting organizations shape the public's opinion with hashtags or digital content?
3. What kind of messages, symbols, and narratives are dominant in the digital campaign related to the Awyu community land conflict?

1.4 Chapters Overview

Overall, this research paper aims to examine the extent to which digital discourse and the parties involved in it represent and shape the issue of customary land rights for the Awyu community. For that, Chapter 1 focuses on discussing the background of the conflict, followed by the problem, research objectives, research questions, and the chapter overview. Chapters 2 and 3 present the theoretical and methodological approaches used in the analysis and data collection. Chapter 4 focuses on what is displayed in public space —visuals, symbols, texts, and hashtags —to examine how the digital activism of the Awyu community conflict is explained, how Awyu is depicted, and how it compares with mainstream media.

Next, chapter 5 shifts its focus to the actors behind the narrative construction, particularly NGOs and digital activists, and examines how the Awyu community is positioned in the production of discourse. The next chapter will finally present a critical evaluation of the effectiveness of digital activism by connecting the visual findings in front of the camera and the production behind it. Thus, it is hoped that these chapters can form a coherent analytical flow that reflects the potential and limitations of digital activism in representing indigenous communities' struggle for their rights.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

To understand how the Awyu community's land conflict narrative is constructed and disseminated through social media, this study draws on Hall's Politics of Representation and Foucault's Power and Knowledge theory and a literature review of Digital Activism that emphasize meaning production, power in discourse, and the dynamics of digital communication.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Politics of Representations

According to Stuart Hall (2005), the main framework in cultural and media studies to understand how meaning is formed is through symbols and language. In this case, representation is not just an accurate reflection of reality, but an active and creative process in giving meaning. Hall states that representation is an important part of a process in which meaning is produced and exchanged between people. In other words, representation mediates meaning through language and symbols, shaping a group's culture and identity. Therefore, representation is a basic need for human communication; without representation media (language, images, symbols), humans cannot understand each other or interact.

The systems of meaning that operate in a particular social and cultural space are never static. Hall's concept of the politics of representation also refers to the struggle for meaning between various social groups. He argues that representation is an arena of cultural struggle, where society attempts to counteract negative representations given by dominant groups and transform them into more positive ones. This is not simply a matter of replacing negative images; it is also a matter of changing the structures of meaning and power that determine how an identity is perceived and understood by the public.

Hall (1997) then differentiates representation into three parts, which are: (1) Reflective - considering language or symbols reflecting meanings that already exist in the real world, (2) Intentional - seeing representation as a manifestation of the speaker's intent or intention (meaning depends on the presenter's point of view). (3) Constructionist - which views meaning as the result of construction through language itself. This constructionist approach is dominant in Hall's thinking and is often

applied in mass media analysis; he emphasizes that meaning is formed 'in' and 'through' the language process.

This view is certainly very relevant to analyze how media messages (including hashtag campaigns) can be 'read' differently by different audiences, considering that the meaning of form is in and through the language process. For example, in the hashtag #AllEyesonPapua, environmental activists can read it as a call to attention to ecological threats, but audiences who are less familiar with the local context might just see it as the recent social media trend. Therefore, it is important to understand that media representation can be produced and consumed differently based on the socio-political background of each audience. In addition, Hall introduces the politics of representation, means that groups (especially minorities) shape the image of how they want to be seen and reach the public space. This idea highlights that representation is political and closely related to symbolic power struggle between groups. Previous studies have used this theory to explore the depiction of marginalized groups in the media. For example, Primada's (2020) research with Hall's theory found that in a national children's film, the Papuan Tribe is shown as a marginalized and minority society. These findings confirm that the media often frames Papua as 'the other' with negative stereotypes.

Furthermore, Hall, in his work Encoding/Decoding (1973, 1980), also introduced a communication model that rejects the linear view, in which the distribution of true meaning is never simply sent from the message creator to the recipient, but always through a process of packaging and interpretation. In this case, message creators, such as NGOs, package meaning in a certain way according to their interests and ideology, and the audience will understand the message based on their social position and experience. This then results in several possibilities where the audience may accept the meaning according to the message creator's interest, the audience accepts part of the meaning and interprets the other part, or the audience rejects the dominant meaning and interprets it themselves. This model then shows that meaning always works in different social relations.

In the Awyu community conflict, this shows how their identities and conflicts on social media can be framed in certain ways. The theory of representation allows me to examine the construction of meaning in digital content related to the Awyu: for example, whether the #AllEyesonPapua campaign portrays the Awyu as victims of rights violations, or whether it is portrayed by one party as dangerous rebels. By analyzing the images, words, and narratives used in hashtags and posts, this theory helps reveal hidden cultural assumptions and ideologies.

Hall offers a framework to analyze how the meaning of "Papua" or "Awyu" is shaped by mass and social media, the difference between the intention of spreading the message (by activists or media), and the meaning read by the public. For example: who is depicted as a "victim" or "criminal", what are the symbols of local wisdom or military police attributes that appear, how is the tone of language that is cornering or supporting, and more. These patterns will show how the Awyu identity is constructed visually and verbally. Thus, Hall's theory of representation becomes the basis for identifying narrative frames in hashtag campaigns about the Awyu community conflict.

2.2.1 Power and Knowledge Theory

We should admit . . . that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault, 1977: 27, cited in Rose, 2016, p. 138)

Ultimately, the conflict between the Awyu community and the government, as well as the palm oil company, cannot be separated from the exercise of power. Michel Foucault (1926–1984) offers a critical perspective on the relationship between power and knowledge that is very relevant for media analysis. In his writings, Foucault argues that power and knowledge mutually support one another. He shows that knowledge is not a neutral product of reason, but is shaped by power relations: whoever has power determines the 'truth' that applies. Conversely, claims of scientific truth or public discourse are also used to legitimize power. In this context, everything that is considered "true" or "normal" is the effect of a temporary discourse regime.

Foucault also introduced the term "regime of truth," where every society has mechanisms and institutions that determine what can be considered legitimate truth. This truth is then the result of social and political processes where power and knowledge interact. Legal systems and institutions then work to shape and maintain this system. In other words, control of discourse in institutions depends on the power held by the ruler, particularly in determining what is true.

Furthermore, He explained that power can be productive, enabling knowledge, truth, and identity to be produced without oppression. For example, in his writings in "Discipline and Punish" (1977, pp. 7-9), Foucault argued that the modern prison system can create obedient subjects through surveillance and discipline rather than through painful physical punishment. In this context, it is evident that power is not always based on violence but rather on knowledge and behavior.

Foucault's concept of power/knowledge has been used to analyze how media and institutions shape "official narratives." For example, media analysis often shows how state officials or mining companies use their influence to control the news, for example, labeling a conflict as a "security disturbance" to justify a crackdown. In the case of customary land conflicts, the elites tend to produce discourses that benefit them. These discourses are repeated in the mainstream media so that they are accepted as "truth." For example, the Awyu people are represented as disruptors of order who threaten "national development," when in fact they are defending their customary rights. Foucault reminds us that it is in this discourse that latent power operates, shaping who can speak and who is silenced.

The Papuan customary land conflict is heavily influenced by hegemonic power relations between the central state, the military, corporations, and indigenous peoples. This view helps explain how the negative narrative about Papua continues to be maintained to guarantee certain powers. Because of this, when the Awyu people post news about customary land, they challenge the discourse regime promoted by the mainstream media and disrupt the long-established system. Foucault's analysis will pay attention to "who is speaking" and "whose knowledge counts" - whether only the government's voice or also the customary voice is considered valid. This can also include an analysis of who is behind the most influential accounts (whether pro-government or pro-customary), and how platform algorithms may influence information exposure.

Hall and Foucault's perspectives are combined to examine how power structures shape the production of knowledge and meaning in the digital activism process. Halo also draws on Foucault's ideas to connect his own, which is why these two theories are very relevant to combine.

2.2. Literature Review

2.2.1 Digital Activism

Digital activism refers to the use of digital technology, from the internet and social media to other modern communication tools for social development. The concept of digital activism itself emerged over time when activists began utilizing online channels for political engagement as a new and more participatory space which has substantially changed the methods, rhetoric, and scope of activism (Sorce & Dumitrica, 2022, p. 158). In other words, the continued development of technology provides optimism that digital activism can become a place where individuals can easily discuss, gather, and coordinate political systems through digital spaces (Brodock, 2010, p. 72).

Karatzogiani (2015 in Alamiyah, 2024, p. 2574) explains that digital activism can be divided into 4 phases of development; The first phase was in 1994-2001 where the discovery of the World Wide Web opened this digital space, as well as the emergence of the Zapatista movement, to the dissemination of online information related to ethno-religious wars such as Falun Gong in China, Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Kosovo war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The second phase began in 2001-2007, where digital activism became more widespread due to the 9/11 attacks and the Afghan war. In this conflict, the global community began to carry out anti-war protests and fight against one-sided narratives about the war. The third phase was in 2007-2010 when Barack Obama, utilized the power of social media to win the United States of America's presidential election. The final phase took place in 2010-2014 where digital activism began with the release of videos on WikiLeaks, the Arab Spring revolution and the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement (*Ibid*, p. 2575).

Furthermore, Vegh (2013 in Alamiyah 2024, p. 2575) proposed three categories of online activism: advocacy, mobilization, and active or reactive activism. Advocacy activism itself means providing information on issues that have not received public or mainstream media attention in the digital space. This activism then allows the information provider to build solidarity, apply pressure, and demand collective action. Mobilization is a follow-up to advocacy, where coordination is carried out to ensure concrete action on the ground. Active and reactive activism are used as forms of defiance with the intention that political agendas or social change can be conveyed forcefully to the government. However, this activism often creates new problems since it uses hacking which can impact cybersecurity.

Over time, diverse forms of digital activism have emerged, such as social media campaigns, online petitions, hashtags, and more. This development has encouraged global activists to expand their use of online communication to create two-way communication between themselves and the public (Seo, Kim & Yang, 2009 in Moscato 2016, p. 3). The target audience or initiator of activism is also no longer limited to those with internet access, but also includes indigenous communities who are often excluded from decision-making. Digital activism, then, provides new opportunities for indigenous communities and the general public to unite and voice their opinions without intermediaries globally.

In Moscato's (2016) work, one of digital activism phenomenon that effectively utilized hashtags to become internationally renowned was #IdleNoMore in Canada. The use of this hashtag successfully drew public attention to digital discussions and actions for First Nations communities there. Support then continued to grow, even media outlets that had initially neglected the issue began

contributing. This demonstrates that hashtags and social media can elevate land rights and the conditions of First Nations communities into the mainstream public sphere, ultimately influencing national politics.

Besides hashtags, the representation of indigenous communities in public spaces is also a form of digital activism, particularly in the way they express themselves through personal stories or opinions to challenge mainstream narratives and provide new knowledge to the public. For example, Petray (2011) shows how aboriginal communities in Australia created community pages and groups on Facebook to share information about indigenous rights. They also actively voiced their historical identities, experiences, and cultures when negative stereotypes appeared in mainstream media. This activity then formed online solidarity, where the public could obtain information about aboriginal communities directly from them. In this case, the community successfully challenged negative stereotypes, produced their own alternative narratives, and strengthened solidarity between them and global audiences.

Graham (2016), in his article "*Article Toward Representational Sovereignty: Rewards and Challenges of Indigenous Media in the A'uwẽ-Xavante Communities of Eténhiritipa Pimentel Barbosa,"* introduced the concept of "representational sovereignty, " where indigenous communities then strive to take control of their own image and identity narrative in the public eye. In a span of 25 years, the Aúwe-Xavante indigenous community shifted from passive users of media, which was only published by outsiders, to active producers of their own content. One of Graham's main points is that this disseminated content does not destroy the purity of their culture but rather becomes a new way for them to express themselves. This development then becomes educational material for the younger generation and a medium for the indigenous community's cultural diplomacy to the outside world.

However, adopting technology is certainly not an easy process. The Xavante indigenous community faces many challenges in carrying out this agenda, such as video archiving, maintaining long-term financial support, and more. Therefore, adapting to technology is not the key factor in this community's digital activism, but rather how the media team ensures that the next generation can continue this agenda through education and the improvement of their technological skills. Therefore, the process of digital activism is not only limited to public attention, but also internal solidarity in striving for sovereign self-representation (*ibid,* p. 14*).*

While it remains debatable whether digital activism has a significant impact on indigenous communities, Carlson & Frazer (2020, p. 4) pointed out that the media itself is ambivalent, meaning that it can be good and bad based on how people react towards it. In other words, public spaces can connect voices between groups to challenge the existing injustices or perpetuate them. In the colonial settler view, there is an idea called "settler gaze" which shows how indigenous community acts based on how they react to outsider's perspectives: policing or politics of hope.

Policing itself refers to indigenous communities' anxious that their stories might get twisted, sparking unfair labels once seen by outsiders - this worry ties back them because of the racism fear. . In contrast, the politics of hope pushes those communities to fight back through uplifting contents, showing memorable moments alongside traditions, countering the oppressive colonial narratives. Therefore, this way of speaking up or reacting from the communities shapes their stand in justice work, regardless of the stacked system against them.

While digital activism has significant potential to support the struggles of indigenous peoples, its participatory nature also presents challenges. The terms "slaktivism" or "click activism" emerged due to perceived inaction, as online actions have no tangible impact on offline actions (Scholz, 2010, p. 27). On the other hand, authoritarian governments often respond to activism with repression, including internet censorship, hacking, and defamation lawsuits. Furthermore, the proliferation of misinformation and polarization poses new risks in the digital era (Al-Ra'zie et al., 2025, p. 172).

Despite numerous challenges, the development of digital activism as a participatory public space remains quite rapid, as solidarity continues to form globally. This allows the voices of indigenous peoples to resonate more against historical injustices, often ignored or distorted by the needs of mainstream media or elites. Digital activism can then become an alternative means for indigenous peoples to advocate for their rights.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

From the methodological perspective, this study is conducted in digital ethnography and discourse analysis, which is expected to clarify how far the interactions and practices of social media users in the Awyu community conflict, especially with the contents produced, such as posters, photos, videos, text, colour used, and more.

3.1 Digital Ethnography

In general, digital ethnography is a qualitative research method in which researchers adapt and observe interactions occurring in digital spaces. Initially, this method was popular with researchers living with local communities, but the rapid development of digital technology has led to its expansion into online platforms. The primary focus is on absorbing these online environments, such as social media or virtual communities. Similar to conventional ethnography, researchers can also participate in public spaces, for example, by joining Facebook communities, following Instagram accounts that discuss community rights, or engaging with hashtag trends. This method can also be combined with interviews, interactive content analysis (comments, text, videos, or images, and hashtags), and participant observation (Horst et al., 2016, p. 8-9).

This concept then leads to a more fluid understanding of the "*field*" or research space, not tied to a specific physical location. Rather than having clear spatial boundaries, digital fields tend to change as research progresses and evolves with the platform. Hine (2017) then stated that fields often must be defined based on the phenomena or issues being followed on the platform. In other words, researchers need to follow trends in various digital spaces to understand ongoing social interactions. Furthermore, Airoldi (2018) offers a conceptual framework for multiple fields in social media: contextual fields, where communities are bound within a specific group, or meta-fields, which are a collection of communicative content linked by hashtags or keywords. Such developments allow ethnographers to explore such collections of content, allowing ethnography to move beyond a multi-site approach to a system that is not bound by a fixed site. Kristiyono and Ida (2019, p. 116) also emphasized that the use of digital ethnography can also enrich data collection because researchers are directly in the field or, in this case, online sites. This means that by being in the middle of a digital

conversation, researchers can record emotional nuances, understand community jargon, and see the development of discussions in real time.

Therefore, in the case of Awyu, I joined the campaign supporters virtually, looking at how activists coordinate during the conflict. In this case, the Awyu people who live far from the virtual world, with the help of communities or organizations, shared stories of their struggle and love for the forest. This method has helped me understand the Awyu perspective in depth also by looking at posters, videos, and their activities during the legal process. For example, I conducted formal interviews, asking for the context of uploaded traditional ceremony images, or witnessed firsthand how the activists and NGOs as the producer chose certain contents to post. All of these activities were combined as my digital research field.

Technically, the application of digital ethnography in this study includes: (1) Observation – following social media accounts managed by related institutions, and observing user posts and interactions; (2) Participation – analysing directly in online discussion forums, livestream events, and social media contents to see how the case is described; (3) Documentation – storing archives of important conversations, images, and videos for further analysis; (4) Context Analysis to compare online data with offline events, such as news in mainstream media about Awyu, to obtain a complete picture (Ardévol, 2014).

Moreover, Horst et al. (2016, p. 9-10) explain that in ethnographic research, researchers can not always ask questions directly to the audience, but instead study their daily routines and activities together. This principle also needs to be applied to digital ethnographic studies more generally. In this case, to understand other aspects of the research target's life, researchers need to understand how digital media becomes part of the community's life. Therefore, digital ethnographic research methods need to be *'non-digital-centric''*, realizing that there are times when digital media research does not always have to be conducted using digital technology. In this case, I also conducted semi-structured interviews, where I explored respondents' views flexibly according to the research needs. The questions asked, outside of those already specified (Appendix 1), were generally not standardized. This is in line with the idea (Kimber, 2023, p. 49) that researchers in ethnographic interviews, even though they already have a list of questions, can take advantage of the interview opportunity to start a discussion with specific questions, following the source's flow on other topics, which ultimately provides information to him.

For that, the main participants of this study are digital contents originating from social media accounts of individuals or organizations that are actively involved in hashtag campaigns related to the Awyu community land conflict, such as Greenpeace, Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, Project Mutatuli, and others. This also includes activists who provide support or are involved in online discussions, which are Papuan and environmental activists Papuas who are digitally active. All interviewed participants were given comprehensive information about the purpose of the study and their rights as participants.

Table 3.1

List of Interviews Informants

Name	Occupation	Organization
Dorthea Elisabeth Wabiser	Activist	Pusaka Bentala Rakyat
Dina Danomira	Activist	-
Tigor Hutapea	Legal Counsel/Lawyer	Pusaka Bentala Rakyat
Praktikto Dwi Rahardjo	Digital Campaign Officer	Greenpeace Indonesia

Source: Author, 2025

This method allowed me to build a holistic understanding of Awyu digital identities and their communication strategies. In this way, digital ethnography complements the theoretical approaches above. Representation theory and discourse analysis require content data; digital ethnography is a way to obtain it reflectively. When looking at Awyu hashtag activism, this method helped me to uncover the stories behind the hashtags: what motivates users, how solidarity is formed, and how Awyu culture is reflected or transformed in everyday social media. This approach as a whole assisted me in analysing the voices of the Awyu community itself in the "digital field" without ignoring their cultural context.

3.2 Discourse Analysis

This research also employs a multimodal discourse analysis to examine the visual representation and digital activism of the Awyu community on Instagram. This approach focuses on how the meaning of a message is shaped by the interaction of various digital semiotics, such as images and text. As stated

by Kress and Leeuwen (2006), visual analysis comprises three main functions —representational, interactional, and compositional —that complement each other in conveying meaning (Deng, 2023, p. 167).

The first function, representational, is used to answer the depiction of indigenous communities on social media. The actions and agendas that occur directly are the main key in this process to understand the meaning of the main subject. The second function, interactional, examines how the image and the audience interact, or in other words, how the audience understands how the image speaks. This sees how eye contact, social distance, shooting angle, and attitude play roles in attracting the public. Furthermore, the third function, compositional, is used to examine all existing elements, from framing (image grouping), and highlighting (size, text, and more), to the information provided by each image (ibid, p. 167).

In this research, these three functions work together to highlight how the Awyu community and NGOs, through their content, attempt to draw public attention to the case. Representation demonstrates the cultural symbols and narratives present in public spaces, such as traditional clothing, ornaments, and the term "environmental warrior." Meanwhile, community interaction with the audience is evident in various content pieces where Awyu representatives look directly into the camera and convey messages through their dances. The final function, which includes additional elements, draws audience empathy into the conflict narrative. Informational value is then obtained from the placement of text or symbolic elements in certain locations, such as the words 'Save Indigenous Papuans Forest' behind a photo of an Awyu community dance or the use of borders and dividing lines in Instagram posts that show the contrast between Awyu traditions and modern messages. The compositional function is also used to examine the overall message structure of the Awyu community's digital activism, starting from the use of hashtags, the layout and content of the text, to other elements that frame the Awyu activist discourse to be relevant and informative.

Furthermore, a social media discourse analysis framework is also applied to examine how the use of all the points above shapes their interactions on social media. Zappavigna (2011) introduced the concept of ambient affiliation, where social connectedness forms when people express certain values, emotions, or concerns online through open and traceable semiotic markers, such as hashtags. These temporary communities then gather online because of similar interests so they can exchange information. This interaction is temporary because it does not require a formal structure or fixed

membership to unite each individual, but rather continues following the shared awareness formed by the visibility of the hashtags.

The data for this study was primarily drawn from Instagram posts relevant to the conflict and activism that began in May 2024 until late 2024, when the hashtag #AllEyesonPapua went viral after the Awyu community expressed their concern in front of the Supreme Court. Each unit of analysis consisted of three main components: the uploaded photo, poster, or video, the caption or accompanying text narrative, and the hashtags contained in the post. Data were also purposely selected using criteria related to the Awyu issue, such as posts featuring cultural symbols, offline actions, and narratives of struggle. Researchers also identified relevant hashtags, such as #AllEyesonPapua, #PapuaIsNotAnEmptyLand, #SaveIndigenousPapuansForest, and #SaveAwyu, to identify relevant posts.

The selection results include dozens of relevant posts from several NGOs that have been contacted, which are Greenpeace Indonesia, Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, and Project Multatuli. However, due to collaboration, some posts are also affiliated with other organizations. In addition, these posts were also selected based on differences in content and relevance, especially since the three have different ways of campaigning for Awyu issues, such as Greenpeace with environmental values, Pusaka Bentala with indigenous peoples' rights values, and Project Multatuli, which even works in film. This documentation includes storing posters and images, copying and translating full texts, and engagement results from Greenpeace Indonesia.

Instagram becomes the main platform in this research because most of the content is distributed through this platform, such as petition posters and conflict information in Instagram stories using the Add Yours feature. Moreover, We are Social (2025 in GoodStats, 2025) reported that Indonesia ranked fourth among the largest Instagram user bases, around 108.05 million users, proving the active presence of Indonesians on digital platforms. In addition, Greenpeace Indonesia and Pusaka Bentala Rakyat's campaigner also stated that Instagram had the highest engagement during the Awyu Community campaign. However, other social media, such as X and YouTube, were also used because some posts were relevant to explain certain points. Other data were also obtained from local Indonesian media. All data was collected manually without using special software and analysing with this method, especially with Kress and Leeuwen' (2006) perspectives.

All in all, this concept provides an understanding of how social media content discussing the Awyu community functions as a discursive strategy for building transnational solidarity. Although there is no interaction between each other, uploaded contents, such as reposts, comments, and hashtag engagement, provide an opportunity for social media users to engage in a shared struggle. Thus, each Instagram posts act as an entity that builds collective meaning and solidarity.

3.3 Positionality, Ethical Considerations and Limitation

As someone who also comes from the same island, I realize that my position is not entirely neutral and that I am also not an outsider in this context. I bring my identity, moral experiences, and emotional attachment to the issues and the indigenous Papuan community, which provides me with broader cultural access and deeper empathy to understand the contents portrayed in this digital campaigns. This closeness also makes me aware that I am not merely an observer, but part of the research discourse. Therefore, I acknowledge that any interpretation I make may be biased, because I am not a neutral observer of the injustices experienced by the Awyu community.

However, throughout the research process, I strived to maintain the integrity by not adding or subtracting the materials and ensuring that the narrative constructed did not distort the voices of the community. Given the limited direct access to the entire Awyu community during this process, I was also careful not to claim the position of spokesperson. Any use of data from Instagram and online sources are required to comply with the principle of fair use for academic purposes, without revealing any personal information of users other than information such as names and occupations that have been publicly displayed. Thus, this research strives to maintain a moral responsibility to respect the Awyu community and other actors involved.

This study also has several limitations: 1. Limited direct access to the Awyu community, considering that the community is still in trial process against the national strategic project that threatens their land; 2. The data analyzed mostly comes from social media, means that the results of the study emphasize more on experiences in the public space rather than the reality of the Awyu community; 3. The dynamic nature of social media makes the collected data change quickly due viral issues after the #ALLEyesonPapua digital campaign; 4. I also realized that there were language limitations during this research process, which is why several sentences in this article were corrected using the help of Google Docs and Translate. Despite these limitations, this study is still expected to provide meaningful academic contributions for anyone.

Chapter 4

Digital Narrative Construction in the Awyu's Customary Land

This chapter focuses on what appears before the public, starting with how the Awyu people's struggle first went viral, how visual strategies and symbolism work, and a comparison between representations on social media and mainstream coverage to examine differences in narrative use.

4.1 Digital Narrative Arenas: From Street to Screen

In this cutting-edge era, social media has become widely recognised as an arena for social movements and community struggles. Individuals and groups now have new ways to directly engage in political and social agendas outside of formal channels, such as elections or physical demonstrations. This development is made possible by rapid access to information, as well as easy content refreshment and coordination (Martinez Sainz & Hanna, 2023).

The key characteristics of social media—interactivity, inclusivity, and peer-based action—make it easier for groups that are often marginalized in formal political contexts, such as young people and indigenous people, to build solidarity, strengthen collective identities, and influence public discourse in ways that previously seemed impossible. This activism then opens up opportunities for people to become active citizens, consciously exercising their civil and political rights. Furthermore, this involvement fosters what is known as rights competence which is awareness that is not limited to individual rights but also the capacity to demand and articulate those rights in various areas of the public sphere (Birnhack & Perry-Hazan, 2021).

In the case of the Awyu community, social media also emerged as a space for the articulation of rights rooted in the community's philosophy and collective memory of land and forests as part of life. Therefore, the Awyu's digital struggle can be read as a process of building rights competence, where existing customary rights are pursued through digital media to challenge oppressive structures. The Awyu community's struggle through social media then began to emerge alongside their legal struggle when indigenous representatives held a peaceful demonstration and traditional ritual in front of the Supreme Court (MA) Building in Jakarta on May 27, 2024. The touching moment when the indigenous community appeared in traditional clothing, shields, and arrows, and carried a clump of

customary soil as a symbol, was then immortalized and disseminated through photos and videos on social media (Mongabay, 2024).

Figure. 4.1
Representatives of the Awyu and Moi Indigenous Peoples in front of the Supreme Court Building

Source: Mongabay, 2024

Shortly after the action at the Indonesian Supreme Court, social media was filled with posters with the slogan #AlleyesonPapua, following the trending hashtag #AllEyesonRafah at the time, making the framing feel more familiar and powerful. One of the initial posts that went viral came from the X account @tanyakanrl on May 31, 2024, containing a black and white poster created by AI with a narrative about the rights of the Papuan people being forcibly taken away by the authorities.

Figure 4.2
Viral Tweet of #AllEyesonPapua

Source: X @tanyakanrl from Kumparan 2024

The tweet then continued to explode, being viewed more than 1.1 million times and liked by thousands of people in a matter of days (Kumparan, 2024). Waves of retweets and responses continued to emerge, making #AllEyesonPapua, #PapuaIsNotAnEmptyLand, and others increasingly trending on the X platform. This was especially true with the presence of several influencers and environmental activists who were actively providing information about what was happening. In fact, as of June 5, 2024, the hashtag had entered the trending topic list with more than 20,000 tweets (Indonesia Expat, 2024).

This poster was actually started on Instagram by the account @gandawakstra. After going viral, its spread accelerated on Instagram, especially with Instagram Stories playing a vital role during this digital activism through the "Add Yours" feature. Through this feature, the public was invited to participate in re-uploading the poster while adding their messages of support. The poster was recorded as having been shared more than 2.8 million times through the Stories feature by June 4, 2024. This virality then shows that the offline action on May 27th had a significant impact in the online space, attracting a much wider public attention.

its virality grew even wider when Greenpeace Indonesia, the Pusaka Bentala Rakyat Foundation, and several other organizations also provided easily shareable visual materials, such as posters or videos containing illustrations of Papuan forests and other short messages along with links to online petitions (Mongabay, 2024). The Reels (Short Video) feature was effective in reaching users' explore pages who had not yet followed Instagram accounts actively discussing the Awyu tribe. For example, a video of a peaceful demonstration by the Awyu tribe produced by the WeSpeakUp Organization reached 3.9 million views and was shared more than 15,000 times on TikTok and 49 million views on Instagram. As a result, within a few days, the campaign's Instagram content reached 16.3 million accounts, according to internal data from the WeSpeakUp organization (2024).

According to Greenpeace's own report, during the May-June 2024 period, the #AllEyesonPapua campaign on their Instagram account achieved 343,000 engagements (a combination of likes, comments, and other interactions). The engagement rate per post was also relatively high, with almost all posts reaching between 6 and 14%. One of Greenpeace's official posts about the Awyu community's activities also received the highest number of interactions, with around 92,241 engagements, with comments expressing support and sympathy for the issue.

The momentum in the offline space was also successfully carried over to social media and sparked a new wave of support. That same year, Pusaka Bentala Rakyat published a campaign poster featuring a visual representation of indigenous peoples, outlining the extent of the land the company would acquire, citing the importance of forests to indigenous peoples, and closing with an invitation to fill out the petition link. This poster not only served as a call-to-action, directly linking the Awyu indigenous people's struggle to direct participation, namely the petition. Once the poster was widely circulated on Instagram via the Add Yours feature, the link was also widely accessed. By July 22, 2024, the Awyu indigenous people had received 253,823 signatures from the public and submitted them directly to the Indonesian Supreme Court. (Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, 2024). Despite the granting of the petition, this number continued to rise as the campaign went viral, especially when the petition submission was accompanied by members of the public. Thus, developments on the ground (the submission of the petition) immediately triggered a reaction online – the public reacted with comments, reposts, and even moral support – which further emphasized the high level of attention paid to this issue.

Figure 4.3

Screenshots of Instagram Story about the Awyu Community's Conflict

with the Add Yours feature
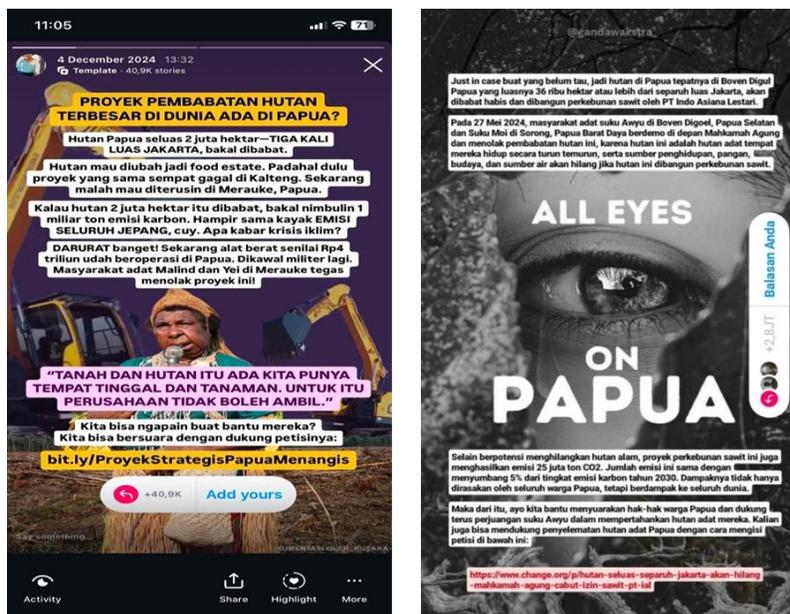
Source: Instagram Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, 2024; Instagram @gandawakstra_, 2024

The chronology above shows that the emergence of the Awyu issue on social media was not an uncoordinated event, but rather a deliberate effort and planning. It began with a dramatic and

photogenic demonstration on the ground (in keeping with the visual nature of digital culture), then expanded online through posters, hashtags, and petitions. The escalation in intensity was driven by the encouragement of key actors who maintained the momentum until it reached its peak.

4.2 Symbolism and Visual Strategies on Social Media

Visual discourse analysis offers a highly relevant framework for observing and examining how images, symbols, and text are mobilized in digital spaces to shape socio-political meaning. In the context of digital activism, visual representations are not always neutral but contain communicative intent aimed at framing an issue to invite public participation (Machin, 2013; Rose, 2016). Social semiotic theory, as outlined by Kress and Leeuwen (2006, p. 362), emphasizes that visual images are communicative practices that have a specific points, such as through gaze direction, social distance, framing, composition, color, and typography, which function as codes to mediate the relationship between the presented subject and the audience. In other words, visuals can speak directly to the audience like verbal speech, not just show. Out of many images displayed in the Awyu community's digital campaign from May 2024 to the present, several images are used quite frequently and demonstrate how visuality is used to engineer representations of indigenous peoples and bind public solidarity.

As this issue entered the digital space, campaigns by Greenpeace Indonesia, the Pusaka Bentala Rakyat Foundation, and others showed how symbols, images, and language were mobilized to shape the story Instead of focusing only on the conflict story, they used cultural symbols, visualizations of ecological damage, along with catchy phrases and tags. These turned local battles into something bigger, where the Awyu community is not presented as victims but as resilient defenders and the issue is not a concern of only one community group, but the entire public (Tigor Hutapea, 2025).

One of the most striking aspects is the visual selection and poses in the photographs and portraits circulating on official and individual accounts. Two photos from Greenpeace posts show Awyu traditional figures staring directly into the camera, creating what is known in visual grammar as a demand image. This gaze functions like a demand, as if the subject is asking for something from the audience due to the imaginary relationship created, such as ongoing eye contact. According to Kress and Leeuwen (2006, p. 371), this demand image is an interactive image act that calls the audience to be present and respond to the existing moral demands. The focal point is clearly located in how the figure's eyes are framed close-up so that their facial expression dominates the image. The black and white background of the image also conveys a sense of seriousness and drama. In visual semiotics, the

absence of color is often interpreted as a sign of crisis, sadness, or a precarious condition because it removes the atmosphere of life provided by color (Ibid., p. 198 & 227), making the figure's eyes the primary point of salience (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p. 143).

Figure 4.4

Posters of Awyu Community's Representatives on Instagram
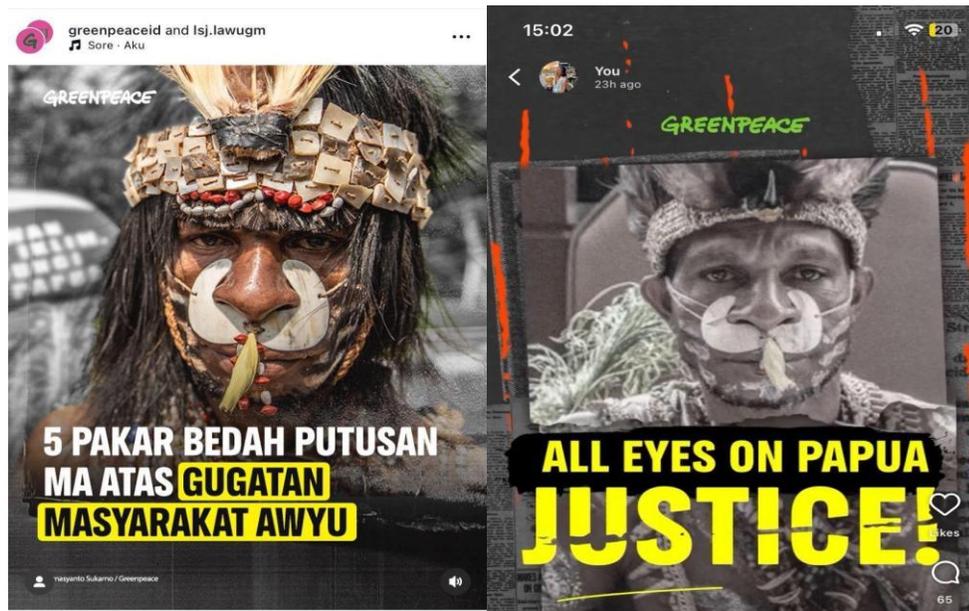
Source: Instagram Greenpeace Indonesia

The bright-bold yellow of the capital lettering stands out strongly, playing a huge role in pushing focus that this conflict is urgent. Using the framework of visual rhetoric, tone strategy to emphasize persuasive goals and grab attention is with contrasting color images (Arola et al., 2014, p. 102). The text also represents anchorage since it anchors the interpretation of the audience, awakening them that the images are not just visual statements but part of a legal challenge where there must be a response. Although AllEyesonPapua takes cues from the spread of AllEyesonRafah, looking deeper at what the "eyes" means in the slogan and the direct gaze in the image, also reinforces the audience towards awareness. This representation fits with Hall's (1997) points that meaning is not stuck between subjects or objects, instead it grows through words and pictures shaped by shared culture. The eye sign might be interpreted as attention or surveillance, depending on the culture of each audience. Thus, this contents represents the Awyu community through a symbol of land watched over by public worldwide, suggesting what happens to Papua's forest is a shared responsibility.

Therefore, overall, Instagram users are invited to take a position as partners in solidarity directly through the gaze and text on the poster. This strategy also demonstrates how the media, in this case, NGO posts, package indigenous representations not as passive figures, but as subjects who gaze and call out. Not limited to expressions or gazes, the presence of indigenous attributes in both posters—such as nose rings, feather crowns, and facial makeup—also plays a crucial role in establishing ethos, namely the credibility and moral authority of indigenous figures as representatives of the community. Rose (2006, p. 218) explains that this cultural combination binds personal effects and structural legitimacy, where the image of custom is not depicted exotically, but rather as a legal subject demanding justice.

In contrast, the photo of the action in front of the building actually shows that the Awyu people were not looking at the camera, like an offer image where the audience is invited to see, reflect, and understand what problems are being faced by the Awyu people. In visual analysis, this lack of contact functions as an offer image, which does not directly address the audience, but only the observer (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006, p. 119). The photo that went viral shows an Awyu tribal representative in front of the Indonesian Supreme Court building dancing, or performing a traditional ritual, along with several people holding a large banner that reads "Save Indigenous Papuans' Forest." This photo of prayer and traditional dance action is very different from the two previous photos because there is no slightest pressure or invitation given, either through eye contact or body movement. However, the subject of the image, dancing, accompanied by the facade of the Supreme Court building behind it, expands the meaning from merely a traditional subject to a structural critique of the center of legal power.

Figure 4.5

Awyu Community Traditional Ceremony in front of the Supreme Court Building

Source: Greenpeace Indonesia, 2024

The presence of English text behind the traditional ceremony also indicates that the action is not limited to the national sphere, but extends to the global. From Machin's perspective (2013: 29), the use of color, typography, and language across audiences is a semiotic strategy to broaden the message's reach. Thus, the ritual documented in front of the Supreme Court not only represents the Awyu people in terms of customs and culture, but also serves as a critique of laws that are unequal to indigenous peoples. The composition and angle of the shot also convey a direct meaning to the audience. The photo is taken from a lower angle, looking up towards the Awyu community's representative and the people behind them. This makes the protesters appear less significant than the state institutions behind them, thus diminishing the perceived inequalities between the common people and the state, demonstrating their resilience and strength in confronting a large bureaucracy.

However, the clear distance created by the towering fence also suggests a distance between the indigenous community and access to formal justice. However, the Awyu community's courage in performing traditional rituals can be seen as an attempt to bridge this gap, bringing their voices and presence directly to state institutions. Representation itself also speaks to political power, where who is visible or invisible determines whether their experiences are acknowledged. This action and struggle also provide the audience with a counter-narrative to the dominant narrative that palm oil development equates to economic development by presenting the faces of those who do not experience these benefits.

When compared, the variations between the demands and offers in these three photographs form complementary digital campaign points. The close-up portraits emphasize closeness and moral demands, while the action photos invite structural assertiveness to the legal system in Indonesia. The existing writings also present a clear narrative of the ecological crisis for the public, both nationally and globally. All of this forms the rhythm of discourse from seeing - understanding - acting, as stated by Krees and Leewuen (2006, p. 153), where multimodality allows for a movement of meaning that is not harmonious, but communicative, so that the audience can feel empathy and reflect.

Furthermore, despite the devastating impact of this conflict on the Awyu indigenous people, there is no visible content depicting helpless victims or inciting pity. The images above represent the issue symbolically and collectively, showing the Awyu as a community asking the public to see how they are fighting for their "home." Each photo offers a unique perspective rarely seen in typical demonstrations in Indonesia. Nevertheless, audiences can still feel a sense of sympathy for the Awyu who have come from far away in the hope of justice. Therefore, the content displayed does not display any emotional uplift by exploiting images of violence or misery; instead, it simply depicts the indigenous people's struggle against injustice.

4.3 Awyu Representations in Social, Alternative and Mainstream Media

In the process, social, alternative, and mainstream media also have their own perspectives on framing the conflict. Mainstream media, such as national news portals Kompas, Detik.com, and others, generally have a wider audience and adhere to the prevailing journalistic standards. They are more neutral and strive to provide factual reports without excessive opinion. Research from the University of Indonesia shows that mainstream media articles tend to avoid subjective language, use a neutral perspective, and rarely include the author's opinion. For example, Bailey et al. (2007, in Karasova 2018, p. 51) reflect on mainstream media as large-scale, audience-oriented news, generally owned by corporations or the state, structured, and channeling dominant discourses to society. Often, advertising and profit are the primary orientations of this type of media business model. Therefore, its reporting is more easily influenced by the interests of governments and capital owners (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, in Karasova, 2018, p. 50).

In contrast, alternative media typically focus more on informative advocacy and the fight for social change by presenting progressive narratives and boldly including critical opinions (Zikri, 2016).

In this case, alternative media operates on a small and independent scale, and generally focuses on community, non-commercial, and provides space for marginalized groups or issues. Furthermore, alternative media also seeks to challenge the assumptions and representations disseminated by mainstream media with community-based production (Coyer et al., 2007 in Karasova 2008, p. 51). In this digital era, the presence of alternative media has increased significantly because marginalized groups have begun to use social media as a new way to voice their aspirations, given that mainstream media does not always provide sufficient space for them. Digital transformation then allows for new spaces of participation to become a means of resistance against the dominance of conventional media.

In other words, mainstream media generally serves as a formal news provider without one-sided opinions and avoiding bias, but also do not alter or challenge the problem, while alternative media focuses more on expressing their opinions in pursuit of a specific agenda. This distinction is crucial in understanding how issues like the Awyu case are presented by both types of media. Although organizations involved in the Awyu community's struggle do not define themselves as media actors, they often occupy this alternative space by producing counter-discourse through research, digital campaigns, and the distribution of content on their platforms.

On social media, particularly through the channels of national activists and organizations such as Greenpeace Indonesia, the Pusaka Bentala Rakyat Foundation, and other organizations within the Save Papua Forest Coalition, the Awyu people are portrayed as active and courageous defenders of their indigenous lands. For example, Greenpeace, in its press release titled *Perjuangan Masyarakat Awyu Pertahankan Hutan Adat dari Perusahaan Sawit* (Greenpeace Indonesia, 2024) wrote

The struggle of the Awyu indigenous people to defend their customary forests continues to encounter obstacles..., Hendrikus Woro - environmental activist from the Awyu tribe "(Greenpeace Indonesia, 2024)

This sentence explicitly portrays Awyu as an environmental activist and reflects their perspective that they are fighting for environmental justice. Furthermore, the legal points presented also focus more on the rejected lawsuit and urge the responsible parties to take action:

"The cassation appeal is the next battle for the Awyu indigenous people to defend their customary forests. The Supreme Court must view this lawsuit in light of the environmental issues they themselves have created to render a fair ruling for the Awyu indigenous people "

This narrative clearly demonstrates support for the Awyu community, using persuasive language, especially as it is a direct quote from Awyu's attorney, focusing on justice for indigenous people. Similarly, on Instagram, the language used tends to be advocative and emotional, with Hendrikus Woro, a prominent figure in the Awyu community, frequently quoted as expressing his disappointment and grief over the destruction of customary land. These assertive, bold, and sometimes emotional statements, often filled with sadness or anger, are then disseminated on social platforms and garner public sympathy.

Figures 4.6

Screenshots of Greenpeace Indonesia and Pusaka Bentala Rakyat's posts quoting Awyu Community's Representatives[1]

Source: Instagram @greenpeaceid and @bentalarakyat

Not only from the organizational side, the activists' Instagram accounts also played an active role in spreading Awyu's struggle through a combination of text, photos, and videos. Two of these Instagram accounts are activists from Greenpeace Indonesia, Sekar Banjaran Aji, and from Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, Dorthea Elisabeth. One of the video uploads from Sekar's Instagram (@out_of_thecourt) features Mr. Hendrikus Woro expressing his gratitude for the public's support

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[1] Translations : Picture 1: "I am tired and sad because all this time there is no support from the local or central government. To whom should I put my hope? Where should I walk?" (Author, 2025)
Picture 2: "This is the decision we have been waiting for. Enough is Enough, company should not disturb our customary land….. Hopefully, we can regain our customary forests to manage them for the Awyu people's children and grandchildren"
Picture 3: "We have traveled a long, complicated, and expensive journey from Papua to the capital city of Jakarta to ask the Supreme Court to restore our violated rights by canceling the permit of the palm oil company we are currently fighting against"

throughout the legal process. One of the displayed texts is: *Mr. Franky is still standing strong with his smile… We can learn from Mr. Franky not to give up.* The choice of language used by Sekar, such as "standing strong", "smiling", and "not giving up", also shows Awyu as an active and resilient subject, thus eliminating the image of suffering and replacing it with struggle or resistance.

In another post by activist Dorthea, the Awyu people are highlighted not as a marginalized group or the losers, but as the moral center of the struggle. For example, when she wrote *"This isn't just a random soil that the indigenous people of Awyu and Moi brought when they came to ask judges to take sides…"*, this narrative positions the Awyu community as an active participant in bringing evidence and symbols to the state institutions, rather than being passive victims. Here, Dorthea emphasized The Awyu as a community who bravely confronts the judicial system and corporate power to fight for their rights.

Figures 4.7

Screenshots of Instagram Posts from Activists who Support the Awyu Community

Source: Instagram @out_of_thecourt and @dortheaelisabethhh

By focusing the narrative on the steadfastness of Hendrikus Woro, as a representative of the Awyu community, Sekar demonstrates the identity of the Awyu community, which can personify suffering as well as fighting spirit and high resilience. Another consistent narrative is the slogan "*Papua is not empty land.*" Here, the Awyu people are represented as the rightful owners of the land whose rights are ignored by the state and corporations. Activists repeat and emphasize this slogan in various posts to undermine the state's discourse on "*empty land for investment.*" In other words, they emphasize the Awyu as the rightful owners who have long cared for the land, not merely temporary residents.

In the Indonesian news landscape, alternative media also play a significant role, such as Project Multatuli, which is directly involved in the struggle of the Awyu people by emphasizing the voices of marginalized groups. Their work model focuses on long-form reporting that explores a case from the perspective of the victim or community. This is quite evident in their special series on YouTube, entitled "Awyu Triology." Project Multatuli presents ethnographic descriptions: how the Awyu people depend on the forest for food, medicine, and traditional rituals; how Awyu women process sago; and how children live amidst the threat of deforestation.

Figure 4.8

Screenshots of Awyu Triologi II Documenter on YouTube made by Project Multatuli in collaboration with Greenpeace Indonesia, Perempuan Berkabar, and Pusaka Bentala Rakyat
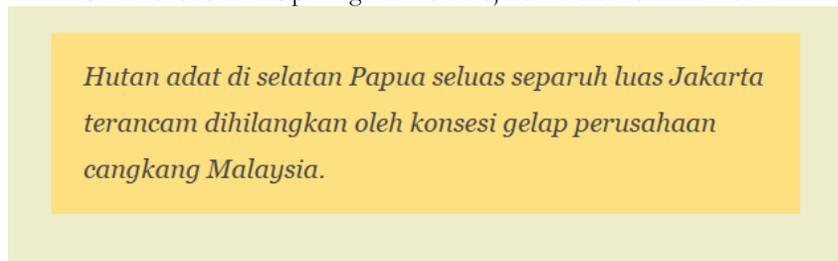

Source: Youtube Project Multatuli, 2024

Despite having published only the first two films, this documentary not only complements the textual coverage but also strengthens the public's emotional engagement. With this film, the public not only understands that there is a "36,000-hectare oil palm permit," but also appreciates the consequences of forest loss for the community's survival. Furthermore, these three films also contain more narratives delivered directly by indigenous community representatives, Hendrikus Woro and Rikarda Maa, without any seemingly orchestrated narration, thus demonstrating how Awyu plays a significant role as the subject of the narrative. The presence of this documentary emphasizes Project Multatuli's strategy: using digital media to present authentic representations of indigenous communities in the public sphere.

In addition to crafting a bottom-up narrative, Project Multatuli also explicitly positions itself as an advocate. For example, they frequently highlight the limitations of indigenous communities in

accessing justice and criticize how state institutions favor corporations. In their coverage of Awyu, they wrote that indigenous peoples' lawsuits often *"get stuck in bureaucracy"* or *"are lost due to rigid legal procedures"* (Project Multatuli, 2024). In the article "The Awyu Community's Struggle to Save Lives", the Multatuli project (2024) wrote:

Figures 4.9[2]
Screenshot of the Opening mark of Project Multatuli's Web Article

Hutan adat di selatan Papua seluas separuh luas Jakarta terancam dihilangkan oleh konsesi gelap perusahaan cangkang Malaysia.

Source: Project Multatuli, 2024

The sentence above directly shows how forests are positioned as the main subject belonging to indigenous communities. This demonstrates how this alternative media serves not only as an information channel but also as an organization that provides social criticism of structural inequality. Thus, the narrative on social and alternative media clearly provides a more tangible portion of support for the Awyu community, given that more people read or watch news on social media than on websites or television. So far, these posts and articles have presented a grassroots perspective, portraying the Awyu as empowered subjects with the courage and moral legitimacy to defend their customary rights.

In Hall's (1997) view, Project Multatuli's approach demonstrates how minority groups with marginalized voices are taking over representational space. While in many mainstream media outlets, indigenous or minority groups are often portrayed as victims or backward, this report reveals a different image. They present themselves as forest guardians performing prayer rituals rather than anarchists, subtly challenging narratives that might view them as obstacles to development or opponents of the law. This kind of representation can then disrupt the dominant discourse, allowing the public to see the Awyu community's claims as rooted in cultural values rather than baseless emotional sentiment.

On the other hand, mainstream media often frames the Awyu community as a news object within a formal, legalistic context. Reporting focuses more on events and procedures: lawsuits, court

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[2]Translation: The customary forest in South Papua, half the size of Jakarta, is threatened with being wiped out by a shady concession by a Malaysian shell company.

decisions, and the viral #AllEyesonPapua story. They report these events more descriptively, with the chronology of events and demands as the primary focus. For example, when the Jayapura Administrative Court (PTUN) rejected the Awyu community's lawsuit, the media focused on the case chronology and the legal basis for the decision, particularly the environmental impact assessment (AMDAL) and its review (Kompas, 2023).

One example of a local news portal that actively reports on the issues of the Awyu community is Detikcom, one of the largest digital news portals in Indonesia owned by Trans Media under CT Corp (Kalyana & Sulistyani, 2025). According to Tapsell (2020), several media outlets that were once independent later changed their stance to support certain political groups following changes in ownership; one of these was Detikcom. Clearly, this news portal focuses more on legal demands, namely the cancellation of palm oil permits, such as:

"The Awyu tribe… demanded that the Supreme Court revoke the palm oil company's permit to protect Papua's customary forests" (Detiknews, 2024)

Here, the emphasis is on the facts of the lawsuit filed: detik.com simply notes that they are demanding that the Supreme Court revoke the palm oil permit" to protect customary forests. This mainstream narrative is objective and to the point, without any added rhetoric. A follow-up report in detik.com also highlighted the hopes for a peaceful protest:

""Through this peaceful action, the indigenous people of the Awyu and Moi tribes hope that the Supreme Court will issue a legal decision that protects their customary forests" (ibid)

While the narrative appears sympathetic, the phrases "expecting" and "protecting customary forests" are still positive but remain journalistically neutral, reporting what the community expects without the news author's comments. The legal points presented also adequately position the Awyu community as one of the cassation applicants, in the context of the 36,094-hectare environmental permit case for PT Indo Asiana Lestari. There are no direct quotes from the indigenous community; the presentation is primarily procedural facts (names of parties, location, environmental decree number, cassation case number). As a result, mainstream reporting portrays the Awyu more as the object of the legal case. This is also reflected in the details of the Detik news story.

"The cassation applicant… Hendrikus Woro, one of the Awyu indigenous people… Against the Investment Office… and PT Indo Asiana Lestari"

This news focused on the formal identities of the applicant and defendant (ibid.). Overall, mainstream national media tended to position the Awyu people within the framework of formal news objects. The Awyu people's words were quoted relatively rarely in mainstream news, replaced by neutral descriptions of the legal process or the chronology of events on the ground without condemning any party. Furthermore, Detik (travel section) also published an introductory article about All Eyes on Papua and the Awyu Tribe (June 2024). This article cited Greenpeace sources but was written as general news without adding any opinion. For example, it quoted a statement from an Awyu figure:

> *"The forest is an 'eternal account' for us indigenous people,' said environmental activist from the Awyu Tribe, Hendrikus Franky Woro."*

Ultimately, even though both media outlets cover the same issue, their narratives differ, given that each organization has its own values and focus. Alternative media generally use more advocacy language to support the Awyu struggle and highlight injustices, while mainstream media report more concisely and factually on the Awyu community's activities and demands, remaining neutral.

Chapter 5

Voice, Control, and Digital Strategy: Who is Behind the Camera?

This chapter examines how narratives are produced behind the scenes, focusing on the roles of NGOs and digital activists. It also examines the extent to which the Awyu community is positioned at the center of this production as a site of struggle. Thus, this chapter highlights the dynamics of discourse production and the distribution of power in digital campaigns to see who is shaping the narrative? Whose voice is amplified? Whose story is being told? To questions about who is actually producing visibility and whose perspective frames the movement?.

5.1 NGOs and Activists as Narrative Producers?

In the Awyu community's digital campaign, national NGOs and their activists' roles extend beyond technical facilitation to include serving as narrative producers that guide the public's understanding of the customary land conflict. Both in front of and behind the camera, much of the content circulating stems from a well-planned communication strategy. In the context of the #AllEyesonPapua campaign, the NGOs involved act as digital authors, assuming the role of media producers and leveraging digital technology to drive social change (Hands, 2011, p. 54). Greenpeace and Pusaka Bentala Rakyat produce key content —text and visuals—through their Instagram accounts and other social media platforms, which is then quoted, reshared, and adopted by the digital community. In other words, these two NGOs serve as primary references because their posts frame the issues.

According to Praktitos, the campaign's content is not simply about providing images and information; it also needs to be packaged simply and emotionally to engage readers, meaning that meaning is not only conveyed but also produced through the choice of symbols, narratives, and distribution media.. In other words, behind every publication, some producers standardize and disseminate messages to reach a wider audience. One of the strategies is the use of a standard narrative that is repeated and easily understood by the public. For example, Pusaka Bentala Rakyat initiated an online petition with the main point being "A Forest Half the Size of Jakarta Will Disappear," which clearly does not come from the Awyu language, but is the result of their own research (Dorthea, 2025). The information, which compares 36,000 hectares of deforestation to the area of Indonesia's former

capital, Jakarta, provides people outside Papua with immediate insight into the big threat facing them and the Awyu people. Pratktito also acknowledged that this standard narrative is an effective way to maintain campaign consistency in social medias. He stated that without standardization, the message would be difficult to reach the general public.

Similar efforts are also being implemented in disseminating information on climate issues, where Greenpeace consistently links the Awyu case to the framework of the global climate crisis. In various publications, Greenpeace frequently presents a narrative about the worsening climate crisis due to this land grabbing, such as: "Papua's tropical rainforests are Indonesia's last lungs" (Greenpeace Indonesia, 2024). This is also carried over into Greenpeace Asia's landmark international campaign, where they also introduce the Awyu people as a symbol of the fight against global warming. According to Tigor Hutapea (2025), this is the reason why the public is invited to join the Awyu struggle, as it no longer concerns land issues but the wider public. Therefore, the legal issue also brings the name of the public to a broader audience and involves every individual.

Furthermore, Praktito also stated that the timing and distribution of narratives were crucial strategies during the Awyu community campaign. For example, ahead of the Supreme Court hearing in late July 2024, Greenpeace launched a short video depicting traditional prayers, a call for a demonstration with students and activists, and a petition submission in front of the Supreme Court building as part of their next digital campaign. Greenpeace published this video on their Instagram account, and it was shared by mainstream media the following day, demonstrating the importance of public support in their legal proceedings. According to Praktikto (2025), this strategy is carried out to show the judge that there is real social support: *"If it were only a legal hearing, it would be limited. But by spreading the narrative to the public, the pressure would be greater."*

Moreover, NGOs also play a role in shaping transnational narratives. The support of organizations and individuals from various countries who signed the letter of solidarity for the Awyu occurred through the coordination of the advocacy network established by the Save Papua's Forest Coalition. In other words, the work of this network demonstrates how a digital campaign that appears organic to the public is actually the result of a well-planned strategy. The #AllEyesOnPapua campaign successfully bridged local issues with the global agenda because producers actively connected, packaged, and distributed the narrative.

In Hall's view, control over the production of such representations is part of the politics of representation, where who controls the story will determine how the public interprets it. Greenpeace and Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, by taking on the role of digital spokespersons, have the power to determine how the Awyu people should be portrayed. Of course, as progressive organizations, the narratives they construct more generally portray the Awyu people as agents of struggle, for example, by featuring or quoting Hendrikus Woro speaking firmly in the media, or by showing the Awyu people in front of the Supreme Court building (Chapter 4.1).

These processes demonstrate how NGOs and activists act not only as supporters but also as narrative creators that direct the landscape of public discourse toward the Awyu community. Messages are standardized, linked to the climate crisis, and issues that concern the public make them feel impacted, and distribution momentum is managed to ensure audiences understand the issues and maintain the campaign's relevance. From behind the camera, we can see that the success of the #AllEyesOnPapua campaign is not simply the result of public spontaneity, but rather the result of a narrative strategy designed to construct how the public understands the struggle of the Awyu indigenous people.

5.2 Awyu Community's Participations: Subject or Object?

In this land conflict, the Awyu community often appears in the public space as the primary speakers: they speak of land as their mother, the forest as a source of life, and even their rejection of palm oil expansion. Behind their presence on social media is an invisible curation process that determines how the Awyu are presented and when their voices are expressed. Theoretically, representation is a produced meaning practice, where someone's position can be determined based on their role in the discussion, as a subject or object (Hall, 1997, p. 61). However, standing in public space requires a lot of decisions to shape the public's perception of the individual depicted, such as the selection of visuals, images, colors, quotes, and other elements. Therefore, even when the Awyu voices are presented as the main subjects, the feelings that reach the public result from co-production between the community's voice and the support of other actors, such as NGOs and activists.

Field findings show that Greenpeace Indonesia and Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, one of the leading partners of the #AllEyesonPapua campaign, are making considerable efforts to maintain the voice of the Awyu community as the primary point of representation. In an interview with Praktito (2025), He stated that any content featuring visual identities, quotes, or personal stories of Awyu community

members always goes through an approval procedure, including explaining the purpose of the upload, reviewing the displayed text, and selecting visuals. This mechanism is implemented to ensure that the representation of the Awyu community is not merely part of an advocacy strategy, but rather the result of the community's own approval and control.

Dorthea Wabiser, a Pusaka activist, also added that the selection of figures like Hendrikus Woro or other representatives of the Awyu community as spokespersons in Jakarta was not a choice made by the organizations involved, but by the community itself. This was also confirmed by Hendrikus in his presentation in the Project Multatuli report (2024), where when discussions with PT IAL did not align with the community's wishes, the Awyu community then encouraged him to speak out and lead this struggle. This also sufficiently explains why in various press releases, Hendrikus' quotes and statements are always placed at the forefront, such as: "The lives of the Awyu people are highly dependent on land, forests, rivers, swamps, and other natural resources... Forests are an 'eternal account' for indigenous peoples" which is the main opening of the Greenpeace website regarding the Awyu people (Greenpeace, 2024). These messages were then repeated in other campaign channels, advocacy coverage, and national news. Even before the social media campaign took place.

Tigor Hutapea, the legal advisor for the Awyu community, also pointed out that Hendrikus' lawsuit was based on a customary deliberation decision. Therefore, both legal advocacy and digital campaigns were conducted in accordance with the community's affirmation of the decision. Furthermore, while lawyers typically restrict public statements to prevent clients from making statements that could jeopardize their standing, Tigor stated that the Awyu community was granted freedom of expression and voice. This demonstrates how his legal team respected the Awyu community as a legitimate form of political expression.

Awyu's position as the subject of the narrative was further reinforced by various content released on social media and in the news. Take, for example, a publication about a peaceful demonstration in front of the Supreme Court on May 27, 2024, which focuses on quotes from Frengky and Rikada Maa, rather than activists, demonstrating how NGOs attempted to give the Awyu community a central role in this struggle (Chapter 4.3). When 200,000 signatures on an online petition were also submitted to the Supreme Court, the NGO content narrative also emphasized that the demonstration was initiated by the Awyu and Moi communities themselves, with NGOs acting as supporting hands. Finally, after the appeal was rejected, the Greenpeace publication also placed Hendrikus's reaction at the core: "*I am disappointed and hurt because the decision was not in our favor,*" followed

by legal analysis by lawyers and the advocacy team. This pattern indicates that NGOs act not just as producers of distribution, but also the producers of meaning remain the Awyu community itself.

Ultimately, it is crucial to recognize that editorial decisions still rest entirely with NGOs. They determine the story's angle, word choice, and even the photos they upload. Ultimately, it is important to realize that NGOs hold more control over what kind of contents are published, whether it is the focus of the story, the words used, or even which images go up on social media. This means, the Awyu community's viewpoints end up shaped by how these NGOs see them, or in other words filtered before reaching up to the public. While those narratives published always tried to emphasize the community's voice, when it comes to social media, NGOs dominated the campaign as spokesperson most of the time. Hall (1997) pointed out how showing something in a certain way links closely to who holds influence through the accepted meanings. Here, from the Greenpeace and Pustaka Bentala Rakyat's version, the Awyu community is framed as indigenous people who stand strong for control over their territory. Those published contents boost their advocacy interest since publics are emotionally moved by the,. Therefore, the knowledge chosen by these NGOs also gradually becomes the dominant discourse of truth in the public eye. One way or another, control over how the Awyu community representation successfully positioned NGOs as the knowledge producer, while the Awyu community as the main voice of the conversation. Because of this, it comes to a question if the representation made and contents published match well with what the community feel, excluding the spokesperson facilitated by NGO.

What emerges before the public is a sense of consistency, in which the Awyu community, as sovereign subjects, becomes the primary leader in the struggle. However, behind the scenes, this consistency is actually the result of joint deliberations with the community as distributive and meaning producers. In other words, the Awyu community is a producer of meaning, assisted by NGOs and activists to ensure that meaning is seen, heard, and understood by the public. Thus, the Awyu community behind the scenes plays a role in guiding the narrative, but the true production of knowledge is still held by the NGOs involved.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

All in all, debates about digital activism often center on the question of how far digital spaces can bring about real socio-political change. In the context of the Awyu indigenous community, this question is crucial to determining whether digital campaigns, including Instagram contents and online petitions, are truly impacting the struggle to defend customary forests or are simply confined to online activity with no tangible impact.

Ultimately, digital activism is a practice of representation and emotion that does not operate in a vacuum, but rather is fluid and can change with evolving trends. This digital space has become the community's space, where they can provide alternative narratives, frame their identities against old stereotypes, and challenge prevailing injustices. Although knowledge production is in the control of the NGOs involved, the Awyu community still found an alternative space to share their history, experiences, and identities. This digital space has opened up a politics of hope for the Awyu community after being repeatedly thwarted by state institutions. This hope has also succeeded in achieving solidarity and influencing public discourse.

All the contents also became a proof that images speak as well as words, framing the narrative of the Awyu community's struggle in a way that the public can relate to. Each visual element contributes to this, making it clear that the Awyu representation focuses on a community of forest guardians who not only fight for their customary rights but also want to protect the earth from future damages, inviting the public to support forest conservation efforts.

Therefore, this story of digital struggle successfully demonstrates how local wisdom works with modern technology to fight colonial power. Forest issues, once invisible on the surface, have been elevated to become widely discussed humanitarian and environmental issues. Ultimately, these ongoing activities are not a substitute for direct action on the ground or legal efforts, but rather complement these efforts to raise awareness of the importance of forests for indigenous communities. However, it must be acknowledged that the final chapter remains in the real world through dialogue and the courts.

The Awyu people's struggle is far from over; a long process lies ahead. Therefore, further research is needed, involving the Awyu community as active participants. This participatory approach

allows for a deeper understanding of their internal perspectives, not reflected in the media. This allows analysis to extend beyond social media representations and extend beyond knowledge production.[3]

Appendices

Appendix 1 List of Interview Questions

NGO Groups
1. What is your organization's role in advocating for the Awyu customary land conflict? (main tasks/activities)
2. To what extent does your organization engage directly with the Awyu community (e.g., legal assistance, cultural advocacy)?
3. What obstacles do you face in this advocacy? (e.g., political pressure, logistical constraints, disinformation)
4. What campaign strategies does your organization use, especially on social media?
5. Why do you think online activism is important for this conflict? To what extent does it have an impact? Do you have any examples to give in order to demonstrate the impact of this activism?
6. In your opinion, how do power–knowledge relations work in this conflict? Do the Awyu community have access to digital space and involve in the activism or is it mainly organizations? Why?

Activists:
1. What motivated you to get involved in the Awyu customary land advocacy movement?
2. How do you use social media (especially hashtags) in this campaign? How effective do you think it is?
3. What is your experience in communicating with the media or social media when protesting this issue?
4. What challenges do you face as an activist (e.g., security, access to information, funding)?
5. In your opinion, what impact do hashtags like #AllEyesOnPapua have on public awareness? What are the specific challenges of online activism?
6. How is your relationship with indigenous communities (participation or consultation)?
7. How do you see the power dynamics in this conflict narrative? Do you think the community represent themselves more or is it the organization who produce the narratives?

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