



## From Deliberation to Affect: The Transformation of Public Policy Discourse in Indonesia's Hybrid Media System (2020–2024)

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### Abstract

The displacement of Indonesia's capital city (IKN) provides a critical case for examining how long-term public policy discourse is processed within a fragmented, algorithm-driven hybrid media system. Traditional agenda-setting theory, which attributes primary agenda power to mass media, cannot adequately explain this transformation. We therefore investigate the cross-platform dynamics of IKN discourse across online news media, Twitter/X, and TikTok over five years (2020–2024), hypothesizing a shift from text-based deliberation to visual-affective communication. Our sequential mixed-methods design combines longitudinal big data analysis—covering 368,291 news articles, 2.3 million Twitter/X posts, and 164,025 TikTok videos—with Granger causality tests within VAR models to trace temporal lead-lag relationships across five key policy events. The results reveal a punctuated, non-linear pattern of public attention. Twitter/X discourse peaked in 2022 around legislative debates, then declined by approximately 50% in 2023. Conversely, TikTok engagement grew exponentially, reaching 29.6 million interactions by 2024. Daily Spearman correlations show strong intersocial synchronization, with the highest pairwise correlation between Twitter/X and TikTok ( $\rho = 0.765$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Granger causality tests demonstrate event-contingent agenda-setting: ceremonial events (e.g., the August 17th celebration at IKN) exhibit bidirectional causality between online media and TikTok, while deliberative events show top-down influence from online media to both platforms. Notably, we observe a reverse intermedia agenda-setting phenomenon during the August 2024 celebration, where high engagement on TikTok preceded and drove increased coverage in national online media. These findings support our central claim: agenda-setting for national strategic projects has fundamentally transformed from a deliberative model to an affective political model mediated by platform algorithms. We introduce the concept of the Visual Resonance Engine to describe how TikTok compels emotional visual content to preempt and reshape the editorial logic of online journalism. This research contributes to understanding how algorithmic logic intervenes in news priorities, highlighting the shift from rational argumentation to performative visual resonance as the dominant mode of public policy communication.

**Keywords:** Affect; Deliberation; Media System; Public Policy; Transformation.

### Introduction

The relocation of Indonesia's capital city from Jakarta to Nusantara (IKN) represents one of the most ambitious and politically charged national infrastructure projects in the country's modern history. Beyond its immediate physical and economic implications, the IKN project has served as a crucible for examining how public policy communication unfolds within an increasingly fragmented and algorithmically mediated media environment (Tresiana et al., 2023). The Indonesian media landscape has undergone a profound transformation over the past decade, evolving from a traditionally top-down broadcast model into a complex hybrid system where legacy news portals coexist with platform-native social media such as Twitter/X and TikTok (Urbaningrum et al., 2026). This transformation raises fundamental questions about agenda-setting: when a long-term strategic policy is debated across multiple platforms with distinct technological architectures and user engagement logics, which actors drive the public agenda, and through what mechanisms?

Traditional agenda-setting theory, which posits that mass media exert primary influence over the salience of issues in the public mind, was developed in an era of relatively centralized media systems (Wahid et al., 2025). However, its applicability to contemporary hybrid media systems—characterized by fragmented audiences, algorithmic curation, and platform-specific forms of engagement—remains contested (Ruhulessin, 2021). The IKN policy discourse offers a particularly instructive case because it spans both deliberative phases (legislative debates, budgeting, policy formulation) and performative phases (groundbreaking ceremonies, presidential visits, national celebrations), each of which may evoke different communication dynamics across platforms. Prior studies have examined media framing of the IKN project from specific angles, such as comparing positive and negative frames in national news outlets, or analyzing rhetorical strategies in political slogans linked to the project. However, these studies have largely focused on single-platform or cross-sectional analyses, leaving a gap in understanding how agenda-setting evolves *across* platforms over time, particularly as the project transitions from textual deliberation to visual representation.

The central hypothesis of this study is that as the IKN project progressed from legislative phases (2020–2022) to physical implementation and ceremonial events (2023–2024), public discourse underwent a fundamental shift: from text-based, rational argumentation on platforms like Twitter/X to visual, affective, and performative engagement on TikTok (Zinnatullin, 2023). We further hypothesize that this shift is not merely a consequence of platform demographics but is actively driven by algorithmic logics that prioritize emotionally resonant visual content—what we term the *Visual Resonance Engine*. To test these hypotheses, we employ a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design combining longitudinal big data analysis with Granger causality tests within Vector Autoregression (VAR) models, covering 1,827 observation days across five key policy bursts (Oschatz et al., 2024). The objective is to trace the temporal lead-lag relationships between online news media, Twitter/X, and TikTok, thereby identifying the directionality of agenda-setting influence across platforms and over time.

The contribution of this research is threefold. First, we provide empirical evidence for a transformation in public policy agenda-setting within a non-Western, rapidly digitizing democracy, where the shift from deliberation to affect is mediated by platform-specific algorithmic architectures. Second, we introduce the concept of *Algorithmic Intermedia Agenda-Setting* to describe how platform algorithms intervene in and dictate the news priorities of online journalism—a phenomenon that goes beyond traditional intermedia agenda-setting relationships. Third, we identify a reverse agenda-setting feedback loop where high-engagement visual content on TikTok can precede and drive coverage in national online media, challenging the conventional top-down model of media influence. These findings have significant implications for understanding how long-term policy projects are communicated in an age of algorithmic mediation, where the ability to generate emotional resonance may outweigh the capacity for rational deliberation in shaping public attention.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature on agenda-setting theory, hybrid media systems, and the IKN policy context. Section 3 describes our mixed-methods design, including data collection, variable operationalization, and statistical procedures. Section 4 presents the results of descriptive, correlation, and Granger causality analyses across the five-year period. Section 5 discusses the implications of these findings for understanding the transformation of public policy discourse, and Section 6 concludes with theoretical contributions and practical recommendations.

## Literature Review

Agenda-setting theory has evolved substantially since McCombs and Shaw's foundational work on the Chapel Hill study, which demonstrated that media influence what audiences think *about* rather than what they think (Moon, 2023). The theory has since expanded through multiple levels including attribute agenda-setting, network agenda-setting, and intermedia agenda-setting, each progressively accounting for more complex media environments. However, the contemporary media landscape has introduced challenges that strain these classical formulations. The rise of algorithmic curation, platform-native content creation, and fragmented audience attention structures calls into question the assumption that legacy media remain the primary gatekeepers of issue salience (Dewa et al., 2022). For instance, large-scale network analyses of US online media have shown that partisan and emerging online outlets can now lead the news agenda, displacing elite newspapers from their traditional gatekeeping position.

The concept of the hybrid media system provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding these transformations (Hurst et al., 2022). Chadwick argues that contemporary media environments are defined by the interpenetration of older and newer media logics, where actors from different sectors compete, cooperate, and mutually adapt (Shin & Lee, 2021). Within this framework, no single platform can be understood in isolation; rather, the system's dynamics emerge from the interactions between platforms, each with its own technological affordances, user communities, and algorithmic architectures. This perspective is particularly relevant for analyzing how public policy discourse moves across platforms—from text-based deliberation on Twitter/X to visual-performance engagement on TikTok—as the nature of the communication shifts from rational argumentation to affective resonance.

Recent scholarship has begun to explore the role of affect in politically relevant social media interactions. Papacharissi's concept of *affective publics* theorizes how digitally networked publics form around shared emotional orientations rather than purely rational deliberative processes, with sentiment and intensity functioning as key drivers of political engagement (Ho & Barton, 2022). This is particularly evident on platforms like TikTok, where algorithmic recommendations prioritize content that generates high emotional engagement—what we term the *Visual Resonance Engine*—rather than content that provides factual or analytical depth. Studies of climate change communication on Twitter/X, for example, have found that visual framing strategies emphasizing impact and blame generate significantly higher engagement than informational content (Lee, 2024). Similarly, research on manifestation content on TikTok reveals how platform affordances—including ritualized interaction cycles, collapsing temporalities, and visibility-as-empowerment—become entangled with belief systems, effectively reshaping spiritual practices through commercial platform logics.

Intermedia agenda-setting research has increasingly incorporated social media platforms as both sources and recipients of news agenda influence (Colin-Jaeger & Dold, 2025). Harder, Sevenans, and Van Aelst propose a “news story” approach that captures how content spreads through the media ecosystem, and their analysis of the 2014 Belgian election reveals that online media outlets strongly affect slower-paced news organizations (Schmidt, 2024). However, they also emphasize that the directionality of influence varies depending on the type of Twitter user: media actors on Twitter exert vastly more agenda-setting influence than non-media actors. This finding aligns with multivariate time-

series analyses of the US immigration issue, where agenda-setting effects were largely absent before the 2016 election but became significantly more pronounced afterward, suggesting that contextual factors such as political salience moderate intermedia dynamics.

The role of algorithms in mediating these dynamics deserves particular attention. Van Dijck and Poell argue that algorithms are not neutral technical artifacts but are outcomes of media logics, shaped by human agency in design and programming decisions (Stark et al., 2021). This perspective implies that platform algorithms do not simply transmit existing agendas but actively reconfigure them by determining which content receives visibility, engagement, and amplification (Boossabong & Chamchong, 2021). For news content on TikTok, research has identified specific frictions that disadvantage conventional journalistic practices: the platform's infrastructure supports vertical video, disallows timestamps and hyperlinks, and compels participation in algorithmic trends, creating what one study terms "sociotechnical frictions" that require workarounds from content creators.

While prior studies have examined specific aspects of the IKN discourse—such as comparative framing analysis between national news outlets or rhetorical strategies in political campaign slogans—none have traced the temporal dynamics of agenda-setting across multiple platforms over an extended period (McEvoy & Todd, 2025). Moreover, existing research has not systematically examined the shift from textual deliberation to visual-affective engagement as a function of policy lifecycle phases (Kraeger, 2022). The present study addresses these gaps by providing a longitudinal, cross-platform analysis of IKN discourse, introducing the concept of Algorithmic Intermedia Agenda-Setting to account for how platform algorithms intervene in news priority formation.

## Methods

The research design employed in this study is a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative big data analysis with qualitative interpretation of discourse dynamics (Johnson, 2014). This design was selected to enable systematic identification of cross-platform communication patterns at a macro level while simultaneously allowing contextual understanding of narrative structures during peak attention episodes. The quantitative phase formed the primary analytical backbone, using longitudinal time-series analysis to map communication patterns across three distinct platforms—online news media, Twitter/X, and TikTok—over a five-year observation window. The qualitative phase subsequently followed to interpret the agenda-building mechanisms employed by governmental actors during identified event bursts, though the present paper focuses primarily on the quantitative findings.

The temporal scope of the study covered 1,827 days, from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2024. This period was chosen to span the full lifecycle of the IKN policy discourse, from its initial legislative proposal through the ratification of the IKN Law, the presidential campaign debates, and the ceremonial events marking the project's physical implementation. All content units were aggregated at the daily level to ensure temporal synchronization across platforms for statistical testing, a necessary step given the different posting frequencies and engagement rhythms characteristic of each platform.

Data were systematically collected using two proprietary big data analytics systems developed by Indonesia Indicator: Intelligence Media Analytics (IMA) and Intelligence Socio Analytics (ISA). The IMA system was used to collect online media data from 6,583 news portals operating in Indonesia. The total news corpus analyzed comprised 368,291 articles that contained mentions of the new capital city (IKN) in their headlines or body text. The ISA system was used to extract social media data from two platforms: Twitter/X and TikTok. On Twitter/X, we collected 2,306,554 public posts that contained keywords related to the IKN project, with accumulated engagements on this platform reaching 5,985,653 actions encompassing likes, retweets, replies, and quotes. On TikTok, data collection yielded 164,025 public videos that were relevant to the IKN discourse. This population of visual content generated a massive level of public resonance, with total interactions amounting to 50,803,513 actions, including likes, shares, comments, and saves.

To precisely measure agenda-setting effectiveness, we differentiated variables into two distinct pathways. The first pathway, the Production Pathway, measured the intensity of content output as an indicator of issue salience. This was operationalized as the volume of articles per day for online media and the volume of posts per day for Twitter/X and TikTok. The second pathway, the Resonance Pathway, measured the intensity of active public response through engagement metrics, including likes, shares, comments, and retweets aggregated at the daily level. This distinction allowed us to separate the act of agenda-setting (producing content) from the act of agenda-receiving (engaging with content), a differentiation that is critical for understanding how platform algorithms mediate between production and resonance.

## Statistical Analysis Techniques

The statistical analysis was conducted in three sequential stages: descriptive analysis, static correlation testing, and temporal causality testing. Each stage served a distinct analytical purpose and employed different statistical techniques appropriate to the nature of the data.

Descriptive analysis mapped daily and annual fluctuation trends in content volume and engagement metrics across all three platforms. To facilitate visual comparison between series with vastly different scales—for example, Twitter/X volume was orders of magnitude larger than TikTok volume, while TikTok engagement was orders of magnitude larger than Twitter/X engagement—we applied Min-Max normalization to the data. This normalization scaled each

time series to a range of [0,1] using the formula  $x' = (x - x_{\min}) / (x_{\max} - x_{\min})$ , where  $x$  is the original value,  $x_{\min}$  is the minimum value in the series, and  $x_{\max}$  is the maximum value. It is important to note that this normalization was applied only for visual comparison purposes and did not alter the results of subsequent statistical tests, which retained the original values or relevant transformations such as logarithmic transformation and/or differencing as required for time-series stationarity.

Static correlation tests employed both Pearson and Spearman correlation coefficients to examine the consistency of agenda movement across platform pairs. The Spearman correlation, which is based on rank-order rather than raw values, was particularly important given the non-normal distribution of social media data. We computed correlations for three platform pairs: Media–Twitter/X, Media–TikTok, and Twitter/X–TikTok. For the engagement-volume relationship, correlation aimed to examine the association between the intensity of issue production in online media (volume) and the level of audience resonance (engagement) on Twitter/X and TikTok. For the tone-engagement relationship, we compared the average engagement on Twitter/X and TikTok based on positive, negative, and neutral tone categories, as classified by a sentiment analysis model applied to the content.

The temporal causality test applied the Granger causality test within a Vector Autoregression (VAR) framework to determine the direction of influence—that is, which platform’s activity “leads” and which “lags”—across the five main peak attention episodes identified in the data. These event bursts were: (1) Corona versus IKN (March 2020), where the pandemic briefly overshadowed the capital city discourse; (2) Condition and Progress of IKN Development (December 2021), where the government released periodic updates on project status; (3) Discussion and Ratification of the IKN Law (2022), the legislative peak; (4) Presidential Debate on IKN (2023), a deliberative event; and (5) August 17th Celebrations at IKN (August 2024), a ceremonial event.

The Granger causality test, following the formulation of Granger (Granger, 1969), examines whether lagged values of one time series  $X_t$  significantly improve the prediction of another time series  $Y_t$  beyond the predictive power of  $Y_t$ ’s own lagged values alone. In the VAR model, we estimated equations of the form:

$$Y_t = \alpha_0 + \sum_{i=1}^p \beta_i Y_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^p \gamma_i X_{t-i} + \epsilon_t$$

where  $Y_t$  is the volume or engagement metric for the dependent platform at time  $t$ ,  $X_{t-i}$  represents the lagged values of the independent platform’s activity,  $p$  is the optimal lag length selected based on the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC),  $\beta_i$  and  $\gamma_i$  are coefficients to be estimated, and  $\epsilon_t$  is the error term. A statistically significant  $F$ -test on the joint significance of the  $\gamma_i$  coefficients indicates that  $X$  Granger-causes  $Y$ . We also tested the reverse direction to determine whether the relationship was unidirectional or bidirectional. Stationarity of the time series was ensured through the Augmented Dickey-Fuller test, and where necessary, first-differencing was applied to achieve stationarity before model estimation. This method was applied separately to each of the five event bursts to capture the context-dependent nature of agenda-setting dynamics.

## Results

The results reveal systematic transformations in cross-platform agenda-setting dynamics for the IKN policy discourse across the five-year observation period. Temporal patterns demonstrate a punctuated, non-linear trajectory of public attention, accompanied by a significant shift in the dominant mode of communication—from text-based deliberation on Twitter/X to visual-affective engagement on TikTok. The following subsections detail the temporal dynamics and platform-specific patterns that characterize this transformation.

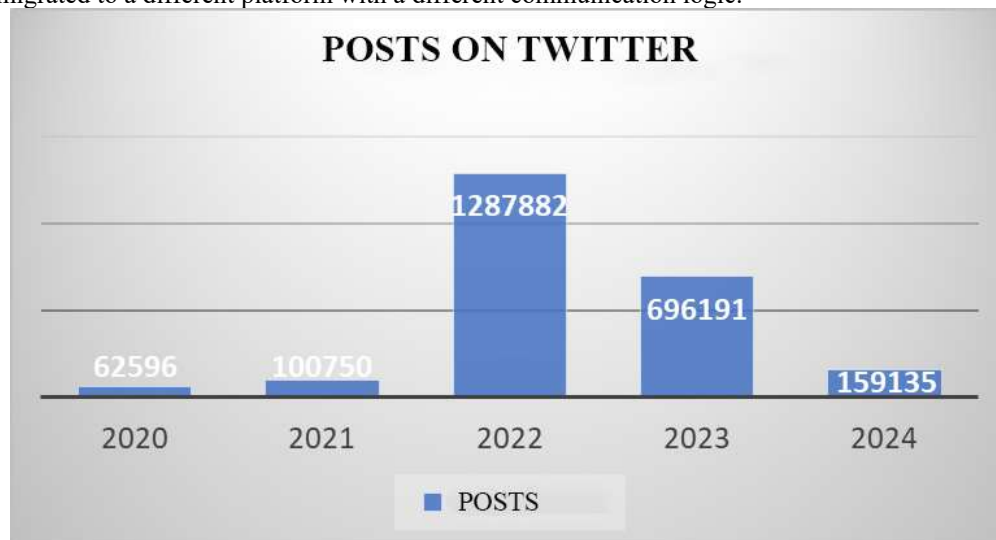
### Temporal Dynamics and Twitter/X Discourse Patterns

The analysis of daily and annual content volume across the three platforms revealed a pronounced non-linear, episodic pattern of public attention that aligns with punctuated equilibrium theory—a phenomenon wherein policy attention remains stable for extended periods before dramatically shifting in response to focal events. This pattern was particularly evident on Twitter/X, which exhibited the most volatile trajectory among the platforms.

In 2020, when the IKN project was first formally proposed by the Indonesian government, Twitter/X discourse was relatively subdued, with a total of 62,596 posts. This initial phase was characterized by scattered mentions, often competing for attention with the dominant news cycle concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. The discourse began to gain moderate traction in 2021, growing to 100,750 posts, as the government began releasing periodic updates on the project’s feasibility and design. However, the most dramatic shift occurred in 2022, when Twitter/X volume surged to 1,287,882 posts—a more than twelvefold increase from the previous year. This peak corresponded precisely with the legislative phase of the policy lifecycle, specifically the discussion and ratification of the IKN Law in Indonesia’s parliament. During this period, the textual content of Twitter/X posts was dominated by debates over legislation, legal frameworks, budgeting allocations, and the procedural legitimacy of the project. These discussions were primarily textual and argumentative in nature, reflecting what Habermas would term deliberative discourse.

Following this legislative peak, Twitter/X activity exhibited a steep and sustained decline. In 2023, the volume of posts dropped by approximately 50% to 696,191 posts, even though the project continued to be a subject of national media coverage. This decline became more pronounced in 2024, with only 159,135 posts recorded—a reduction of nearly 88% from the 2022 peak. The progressive diminution of Twitter/X discourse cannot be attributed to a decline

in the IKN project's overall public salience; as will be demonstrated in the next subsection, attention did not disappear but rather migrated to a different platform with a different communication logic.



**Figure 1.** Annual volume of posts on Twitter regarding the IKN issue from 2020 to 2024

As illustrated in Figure 1, the temporal shape of Twitter/X discourse is characterized by a single, sharp peak in 2022 followed by a rapid decay. This pattern is consistent with the hypothesis that Twitter/X functions as a platform for event-driven, text-based deliberation—its engagement is maximized during periods of formal debate and procedural decision-making, when users have arguments to articulate, positions to defend, and legal texts to dissect. In contrast, during the subsequent implementation and ceremonial phases of the policy cycle (2023-2024), the deliberative function of Twitter/X became less relevant, as the focus shifted from “what should be done” to “what is being done.” The daily-level Spearman correlation analysis across the total observation period provides additional evidence for the synchronization of agenda-setting dynamics. The correlation between online media and Twitter/X was  $\rho = 0.587$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a moderate-to-strong positive relationship between news coverage volume and Twitter/X discourse intensity. This correlation is consistent with traditional intermedia agenda-setting models that posit a reciprocal relationship between legacy media and social media platforms. However, the correlation was not uniform across the entire five-year period. During the legislative peak of 2022, the correlation strengthened considerably, suggesting that during deliberative events, the agenda-setting relationship between media and Twitter/X becomes more tightly coupled as journalists and users engage in a shared, text-focused communication ecology.

Notably, the Granger causality tests applied to specific event bursts revealed event-contingent patterns that complicate a simple unidirectional model of media influence. During the deliberative events of 2022 and 2023—specifically the IKN Law ratification and the presidential debate—the causality direction was predominantly top-down from online media to Twitter/X and TikTok, meaning that news coverage preceded and predicted social media discourse. This finding aligns with traditional gatekeeping models, where professional journalists maintain the power to define which issues become salient. However, during the ceremonial August 17th celebration at IKN in August 2024, a reverse intermedia agenda-setting phenomenon was observed: high engagement on TikTok preceded and drove increased coverage in national online media. This finding suggests that during ceremonial, visually-rich events, the direction of agenda-setting influence can reverse, with visual content on TikTok forcing editorial priorities in legacy journalism. The qualitative inspection of Twitter/X content during the 2022 peak further supports the characterization of this platform as a deliberative space. Discourse was structured around argumentation: users cited legal documents, debated parliamentary procedures, scrutinized budget allocations, and invoked moral and environmental principles. This form of engagement is rational and text-intensive, leveraging the platform's affordances for threading, quoting, and linking to external sources. However, such engagement is also cognitively demanding and emotionally sterile compared to visual platforms—it requires sustained attention, literacy in policy jargon, and a willingness to engage in extended textual exchanges. These characteristics may explain why Twitter/X discourse declined rapidly after the legislative phase ended, as the policy moved into a stage where visual representation (e.g., construction progress, ceremonial events) replaced textual argumentation as the primary communication mode.

The declining curve of Twitter/X discourse, coupled with its strong correlation with media coverage during legislative phases, suggests that Twitter/X serves as an extension of the traditional media agenda during deliberative moments but loses its agenda-setting relevance when the communication mode shifts from argument to affect. This finding foreshadows the complementary pattern observed on TikTok, which we turn to next.

### Exponential Growth of TikTok Content and Engagement

In stark contrast to the decline observed on Twitter/X, TikTok exhibited an exponential growth trajectory in both content production and public engagement throughout the study period. This growth pattern underscores a

fundamental transformation in how public policy discourse is consumed and amplified within the hybrid media system, moving from text-based deliberation toward visual-affective resonance.

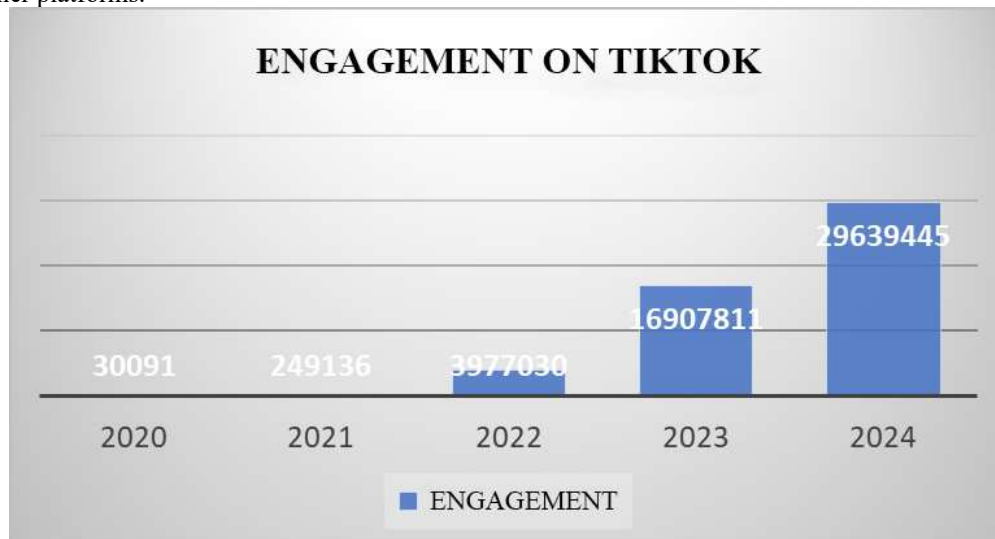
In 2020, when the IKN project was initially proposed, TikTok's involvement was negligible, with only 61 posts recorded across the entire year. This minimal presence reflected the platform's nascent stage in Indonesian political discourse and the inherently textual nature of early policy discussions, which did not lend themselves to the short-form, visually-oriented format of TikTok. The following year, 2021, saw a modest increase to 1,117 posts, indicating early experimentation by content creators who began to incorporate the capital city relocation into their video narratives. However, the true inflection point occurred in 2022, when the volume of TikTok posts surged to 23,387—a twentyfold increase from the previous year. This surge coincided with the legislative peak on Twitter/X, suggesting that the ratification of the IKN Law served as a cross-platform catalyst, generating content across both deliberative and visual platforms through different communicative modes.

The growth trajectory accelerated further in 2023, with 39,167 posts, and reached its apex in 2024 with 100,293 posts. This final year represents a 430% increase from 2022 and a 90-fold increase from the baseline year of 2020. The exponential growth pattern, illustrated in Figure 2, demonstrates that as the IKN project transitioned from legislative debate to physical implementation and ceremonial events, TikTok became the dominant platform for public discourse, effectively absorbing the audience attention that was receding from Twitter/X.



**Figure 2.** Annual volume of posts on TikTok regarding the new capital city IKN from 2020 to 2024

More dramatic than the content volume growth is the trajectory of public engagement metrics on TikTok. In 2020, total engagement—comprising likes, shares, comments, and saves—was recorded at only 30,091 interactions. This figure grew moderately to 249,136 in 2021, before exploding to 3,977,030 in 2022—a 16-fold increase from the previous year. The growth continued to accelerate in 2023, reaching 16,907,811 engagements, and peaked in 2024 at 29,639,445 interactions. Over the five-year period, TikTok engagement grew by an astonishing 985-fold from its 2020 baseline, with the cumulative total across all years reaching 50,803,513 interactions from 164,025 videos. This yields an average engagement rate of approximately 310 interactions per video, a figure that far exceeds typical engagement rates on other platforms.



**Figure 3.** Engagement on TikTok from 2020 to 2024

The divergence between content volume growth and engagement growth is noteworthy. While content volume grew 90-fold from 2020 to 2024, engagement grew 985-fold over the same period. This multiplicative effect—where each additional video generated progressively more engagement per unit—suggests that the platform’s algorithmic recommendation system, what we term the *Visual Resonance Engine*, became increasingly efficient at amplifying IKN-related content as the content corpus grew. This phenomenon is consistent with network effects in algorithmically curated platforms, where early content establishes topical clusters that subsequent content can tap into through hashtags, sounds, and visual templates.

The daily Spearman correlation analysis reinforces the structural coupling between TikTok and other platforms. The correlation between online media volume and TikTok volume across the total study period was  $\rho = 0.694$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a strong positive relationship between news coverage and visual content production. The correlation between Twitter/X and TikTok was even higher at  $\rho = 0.765$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), representing the strongest pairwise correlation among all platform combinations. In 2024 specifically, this intersocial synchronization remained strong at  $\rho = 0.704$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that as the IKN project entered its ceremonial phase, the two social media platforms became tightly coupled in their attention dynamics, even as the dominant communicative mode shifted from text to video.

Granger causality tests applied to the ceremonial event burst of August 2024 revealed a significant reverse intermedia agenda-setting pattern. During the August 17th Independence Day celebration held at the IKN construction site, high engagement on TikTok—driven by viral videos of the ceremony’s visual spectacle, including drone shows, traditional dances, and panoramic views of the partially completed capital—preceded and statistically predicted increased coverage in national online media. This finding challenges the traditional top-down model of intermedia agenda-setting, where legacy media are assumed to be the primary agenda-setters. Instead, it suggests that during visually-rich, emotionally resonant events, TikTok functions not merely as a secondary amplifier but as a primary agenda-setter that can force editorial priorities in traditional journalism. The algorithmic prioritization of high-engagement visual content on TikTok effectively creates a feedback loop: content that resonates emotionally with audiences on TikTok gains visibility through algorithmic amplification, which in turn attracts journalistic attention, thereby generating a secondary news cycle driven by visual resonance rather than textual deliberation.

Qualitative inspection of the top-performing TikTok videos reveals consistent patterns. High-engagement content during the 2024 ceremonial phase predominantly featured visual spectacle—aerial drone footage of the future capital, time-lapse construction montages set to patriotic music, behind-the-scenes preparation for the August 17th celebration, and emotional testimonials from construction workers and local residents. This content was characterized by its performative and affective nature, prioritizing emotional resonance over informational depth. Unlike the argumentative, text-based discourse of Twitter/X, TikTok content about IKN in 2024 was dominated by what Papacharissi terms *affective publics*—digitally networked collectives that form around shared emotional orientations rather than rational argumentation. The algorithmic architecture of TikTok, which privileges content that generates high engagement metrics such as completion rates, shares, and comments, actively selects for this form of affective communication over deliberative discourse.

The exponential growth of TikTok content and engagement, coupled with the identified reverse causality during ceremonial events, provides robust empirical support for the central hypothesis of this study: as the IKN project progressed from legislative phases to physical implementation, public discourse underwent a fundamental shift from text-based deliberation to visual-affective engagement. Within this transformed landscape, the power to set the national agenda depends increasingly on an issue’s ability to transform into visual content that resonates emotionally with digital audiences. TikTok, functioning as a *Visual Resonance Engine*, has emerged as a platform that can not only amplify but also preempt and reshape the editorial logic of online journalism, marking a new phase in the evolution of intermedia agenda-setting within hybrid media systems.

## Discussion

The findings presented in this study carry substantial theoretical implications for our understanding of agenda-setting dynamics in the contemporary hybrid media environment. The observed transformation from deliberative to affective communication modes challenges the foundational assumptions of traditional agenda-setting theory, which posits that the transfer of issue salience from media to public operates primarily through cognitive processes of attention and awareness (Zeigermann & Ettelt, 2023). When McCombs and Shaw first articulated the agenda-setting hypothesis, the media landscape was characterized by a limited number of channels broadcasting relatively uniform content to a mass audience. In such an environment, the primary mechanism of agenda-setting was the repeated exposure to a particular issue across these channels, which gradually increased its perceived importance in the public mind (Sacramento & Boossabong, 2023). Our findings suggest that this model is no longer adequate to describe the dynamics of issue salience in a fragmented, algorithm-driven ecosystem where platforms operate according to fundamentally different communication logics. The punctuated equilibrium pattern observed across all three platforms—where attention remained stable for extended periods before dramatically shifting in response to focal events—indicates that the contemporary agenda-setting process is not a smooth, linear accumulation of issue salience but rather a series of rapid, episodic bursts triggered by specific events that align with the algorithmic and communicative affordances of each platform.

The emergence of the *Visual Resonance Engine* as a theoretical construct represents a necessary extension of the agenda-setting framework to account for the role of algorithmic mediation in shaping news priorities. Traditional intermedia agenda-setting theory has focused on the transfer of salience between different types of media organizations, typically examining how elite newspapers influence the agendas of television networks or smaller news outlets (Pitasse Fragoso, 2022). Our findings complicate this model by demonstrating that a social media platform like TikTok, driven by an algorithmic logic that prioritizes visual content and emotional engagement, can function as a primary agenda-setter that influences the editorial decisions of professional journalists. The reverse causality observed during the August 2024 ceremonial event provides empirical evidence for this phenomenon: high engagement on TikTok preceded and statistically predicted increased coverage in national online media. This finding suggests that the power to set the national agenda is no longer concentrated in the hands of professional journalists but is increasingly distributed across algorithmic systems that amplify content based on its capacity to generate emotional resonance (Thompson et al., 2021). The concept of the *Visual Resonance Engine* captures this dynamic by describing how TikTok's algorithmic architecture actively selects for content that triggers high levels of engagement, thereby creating a feedback loop in which emotionally resonant visual content gains visibility, attracts journalistic attention, and subsequently generates secondary news cycles.

The practical implications of these findings are significant for policymakers, journalists, and communication strategists operating within hybrid media systems. For policymakers, the shift from deliberative to affective communication modes means that the traditional tools of public communication—press releases, policy briefs, and media interviews—may no longer be sufficient to generate public awareness and support for long-term strategic projects (Ravazzi, 2026). The IKN discourse demonstrates that legislative arguments and technical explanations, which dominated Twitter/X during the 2022 peak, failed to sustain public attention beyond the ratification phase. In contrast, visual content depicting the ceremonial aspects of the project, such as the August 17th celebration, generated exponentially higher levels of engagement on TikTok. This suggests that policymakers seeking to maintain public salience for long-term projects must invest in the production of visually compelling content that can be disseminated through algorithmically curated platforms. This does not mean abandoning substantive communication but rather recognizing that substantive information must be embedded within visual formats that resonate emotionally with digital audiences (Galvin, 2025). For journalists, the findings underscore the growing pressure to adapt editorial practices to the logics of visual platforms. The reverse agenda-setting phenomenon observed in this study indicates that journalists are increasingly responding to the attention signals generated by TikTok, rather than independently determining which issues deserve coverage. This raises important normative questions about the gatekeeping function of journalism in an era where algorithmic amplification can force editorial priorities. Journalists must develop strategies for maintaining editorial independence while also engaging with the visual communication logics that dominate contemporary public discourse.

The establishment of the new capital city in Indonesia offers a concrete example of how these dynamics play out in practice. During the legislative phase, the IKN project was primarily communicated through textual channels—parliamentary debates, media reports, and policy documents (Todd et al., 2023). This mode of communication was effective in generating public discourse on Twitter/X, which reached its peak volume in 2022. However, as the project moved into the implementation phase, the focus shifted from “what should be done” to “what is being done,” and the communication mode shifted accordingly. The exponential growth of TikTok content and engagement from 2023 onward demonstrates that the project's public salience was sustained not through continued deliberative discourse but through the visual documentation of physical progress—construction updates, ceremonial events, and panoramic views of the emerging city. This visual documentation was not merely a passive record of the project's progress but an active force in shaping public perception and attention (Buhmann & Fieseler, 2021). The reverse causality observed during the August 2024 celebration, where TikTok engagement preceded online media coverage, suggests that the visual representation of the project on TikTok effectively created a newsworthy event that journalists felt compelled to cover. This represents a fundamental transformation in the relationship between social media and journalism, where the former no longer merely amplifies the latter's agenda but actively shapes it.

Despite the robust empirical basis of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged that qualify the generalizability of the findings. First, the data collection was limited to three platforms—online news media, Twitter/X, and TikTok—and did not include other significant platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, or WhatsApp (Howlett, 2022). The exclusion of Instagram is particularly noteworthy given its visual-centric nature and its widespread use in Indonesia. It is possible that the dynamics observed on TikTok are also present on Instagram, or that Instagram serves a different function within the hybrid media system, perhaps occupying a middle ground between the deliberative logic of Twitter/X and the affective logic of TikTok. The inclusion of Instagram in future research could provide a more complete picture of the visual communication ecosystem. Second, the study focused on a single policy issue—the relocation of Indonesia's capital city—within a single national context (Bogliacino et al., 2021). The IKN project is unique in its scale, its long-term nature, and its symbolic significance as a national project. It is unclear whether the same patterns of transformation from deliberative to affective communication would be observed for other types of policy issues, such as environmental regulations, healthcare reforms, or economic policies that lack the same visual and ceremonial dimensions. Issues that are inherently abstract or technical in nature may not lend themselves as easily to visual representation and may therefore remain within the deliberative communication mode for longer periods.

Third, the methodological approach relied on quantitative analysis of volume and engagement metrics, with limited qualitative interpretation of content. While the Granger causality tests provided evidence of temporal lead-lag relationships, they did not reveal the specific mechanisms through which cross-platform influence operates (Marciano, 2023). For example, the reverse causality observed during the August 2024 celebration could be driven by several mechanisms: journalists may be actively monitoring TikTok for trending content, TikTok users may be sharing links to news articles that then generate engagement, or there may be a common third variable, such as a coordinated campaign by government communication teams, that simultaneously drives engagement on both platforms. The current study design cannot distinguish between these mechanisms (Banerjee & John, 2024). A more granular analysis, incorporating qualitative content analysis of the most influential videos and posts, would be necessary to identify the specific discursive and visual strategies that drive cross-platform influence. Fourth, the study did not account for the role of political actors, government communication teams, and strategic communication campaigns in shaping the discourse. The IKN project is a flagship initiative of the Indonesian government, and it is likely that the government actively managed the narrative across platforms, potentially through the use of influencers, paid content, and strategic scheduling of events. The presence of such strategic communication efforts could confound the observed agenda-setting dynamics, as the apparent organic emergence of visual content on TikTok may in fact be the result of coordinated campaign strategies.

These limitations point toward several productive directions for future research. There is a need for comparative studies that examine the dynamics of cross-platform agenda-setting across different types of policy issues, to determine whether the transition from deliberative to affective communication is a general phenomenon or one that is specific to certain issue characteristics (Fleck, 2025). Future research should explore issues that vary along dimensions such as visual potential, technical complexity, and emotional resonance. For example, a comparison between the IKN project and a technically complex issue such as tax reform, which lacks visual appeal, could reveal whether the shift to affective communication is contingent on the availability of visually compelling content. Additionally, future research should investigate the role of different visual platforms within the hybrid media system (van Assche et al., 2022). The exclusion of Instagram from this study is a significant gap, given the platform's emphasis on visual content and its widespread use in the Indonesian context. A comparative analysis of the communication dynamics on TikTok versus Instagram could reveal whether the *Visual Resonance Engine* concept is specific to TikTok's algorithmic architecture or whether it represents a more general property of visual platforms that prioritize engagement metrics.

There is also a need for research that employs more granular, mixed-methods approaches to unpack the mechanisms of cross-platform influence. The quantitative approach used in this study can identify the direction and timing of influence but cannot explain why or how the influence occurs. Future research should combine quantitative time-series analysis with qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews with journalists, social media managers, and content creators to understand the decision-making processes that underlie cross-platform agenda-setting (Green & Chen, 2021). For example, interviews with journalists at major Indonesian news outlets could reveal whether they actively monitor TikTok for trending topics, how they evaluate the newsworthiness of TikTok content, and what factors influence their decisions to cover stories that are trending on visual platforms (Willis et al., 2024). Similarly, interviews with TikTok content creators who produce IKN-related content could shed light on their motivations, their strategies for maximizing engagement, and their perceptions of their role in the public discourse. Such qualitative insights could complement the quantitative findings and provide a more complete understanding of the dynamics at play.

Understudied areas include the role of platform algorithms as independent actors in the agenda-setting process. The concept of the *Visual Resonance Engine* suggests that TikTok's algorithmic architecture actively selects for emotionally resonant visual content, thereby shaping the visibility and salience of policy issues (Perlaviciute, 2022). However, the specific algorithmic mechanisms that drive this selection process remain opaque due to the proprietary nature of platform algorithms. Future research should explore methods for inferring algorithmic behavior from observational data, such as analyzing the distribution of engagement across different types of content, examining the temporal patterns of viral spread, and comparing the characteristics of algorithmically promoted content to user-generated content. Such research could illuminate the algorithmic logic that governs the transformation from deliberative to affective communication and could inform the development of more transparent and accountable algorithmic systems (Stephenson, 2025). Finally, the role of strategic communication by political actors in shaping cross-platform dynamics warrants further investigation. The observed patterns of content volume and engagement may not be purely organic but may reflect the influence of government communication strategies, political campaigns, and astroturfing operations. Future research should attempt to disentangle organic from strategic content by analyzing the characteristics of accounts that generate content, the timing of content production relative to official events, and the presence of coordinated messaging patterns. Such research could reveal the extent to which the transformation from deliberative to affective communication is driven by grassroots user behavior versus centralized strategic communication, with important implications for understanding the democratic quality of public discourse in hybrid media systems.

## Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how public policy discourse concerning Indonesia's capital city relocation was processed across a fragmented, algorithmically mediated hybrid media system over five years. We hypothesized a

fundamental shift from text-based deliberation on Twitter/X to visual-affective resonance on TikTok as the project progressed from legislative debate to physical implementation. The empirical evidence strongly supports this claim, revealing a punctuated, non-linear trajectory of public attention that migrated across platforms in accordance with the dominant communication mode demanded by each policy phase. Twitter/X peaked during the legislative events of 2022 and then declined sharply, while TikTok engagement grew exponentially to reach nearly 30 million interactions by 2024. The most significant contribution of this research lies in documenting the reverse intermedia agenda-setting phenomenon during the August 2024 ceremonial event, where high engagement on TikTok preceded and drove increased coverage in national online media. This finding challenges the traditional top-down model of media influence by demonstrating that an algorithmically curated visual platform can function as a primary agenda-setter, forcing editorial priorities in legacy journalism. We have introduced the concept of the Visual Resonance Engine to describe this mechanism, where TikTok's algorithmic architecture actively selects for emotionally resonant visual content, thereby creating a feedback loop that compels journalistic attention and reshapes the news cycle. This work extends agenda-setting theory by accounting for the independent role of platform algorithms in mediating the transfer of issue salience, suggesting that the power to define national priorities is increasingly distributed across algorithmic systems rather than concentrated in professional journalism.

Several fertile avenues for future research emerge from the limitations of this study. Comparative investigations across different types of policy issues are necessary to determine whether the transition from deliberative to affective communication is a general phenomenon or one contingent on the visual potential of the issue itself. The inclusion of Instagram and other visual platforms in future analyses would provide a more complete picture of the visual communication ecosystem, while qualitative methods such as interviews with journalists and content creators could illuminate the specific mechanisms through which cross-platform influence operates. Moreover, the role of strategic communication by political actors in shaping the observed dynamics remains an open question, as the apparent organic emergence of viral content may be confounded by coordinated government campaigns. Disentangling organic from strategic content production would have significant implications for understanding the democratic quality of public discourse in hybrid media systems. As platform algorithms become increasingly central to the formation of public attention, the need for transparent and accountable algorithmic systems becomes ever more pressing, particularly for long-term national strategic projects that require sustained public engagement beyond the ephemeral cycles of visual resonance.

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