



Influencers and Political Messages on Social Media: The Case of Jerome Polin's Posts on Nadiem Makarim's Trial

Vidya Adiwijaya¹, Ivyela Rethalia Giroth², Verawaty Tanjaya³, Lawrensca Patterson⁴, Kenny Andrew⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} Universitas Bunda Mulia, Jl. Jalur Sutera Barat Kav. 7-9, Alam Sutera, Tangerang, Indonesia

Vidyaadiwiyaya734@gmail.com

Abstract. This study, titled "Influencer and Political Messages on Social Media: The Case of Jerome Polin's Posts on Nadiem Makarim's Trial," aims to analyze how influencer Jerome Polin acts as an opinion leader by constructing narratives and interpreting public issues regarding Nadiem Makarim's trial on social media. Utilizing a qualitative approach with qualitative content analysis, this research examines eight purposively sampled posts from Jerome Polin's Threads and Instagram accounts. The findings reveal that Polin successfully framed the issue by positioning Nadiem as a symbol of integrity facing legal injustice. Employing strong emotional appeals, colloquial language, and rhetorical questions, Polin polarized the discourse and transformed an individual legal case into a collective public concern, effectively mobilizing public discourse. Theoretically, this study expands the Two-Step Flow of Communication theory by demonstrating how modern digital influencers mediate and construct meaning, rather than merely transmitting information. Practically, it highlights the significant role of influencers in shaping public opinion and emotional responses toward legal and political issues in the digital public sphere.

Keywords: Digital Narrative, Opinion Leader, Public Discourse.

1 Introduction

The Nadiem Makarim case related to the policy polemic that has been investigated by the Attorney General's Office since May 2025 remains one of the issues attracting public attention until today. This event elicited various responses on social media, including from public figures who also expressed their opinions regarding the Nadiem Makarim case. The emergence of both support and criticism spread across various social media platforms demonstrates the dynamic narratives developing in the digital space. One of the public figures who became the center of attention after sharing his opinion regarding this case is Jerome Polin through his Threads account, which was also reposted on his personal Instagram account.

His post strongly attracted public attention and received over 52,000 likes, over 7,900 reposts, over 1,600 comments, and over 2,800 shares. On his personal Instagram, he also reposted his post from Threads and received over 540,000 likes, over 82,000

reposts, and over 13,000 comments. In this regard, the post generated many pro and con responses from the public regarding the Nadiem Makarim case. This high interaction indicates that the uploaded content did not merely serve as an information source but also triggered diverse responses from the public. Some users expressed support for Jerome Polin's views, while others delivered criticism or questioned the arguments built in his post.

This phenomenon demonstrates that social media has evolved into a public discourse space, where people form opinions, interpret an event, and influence others' views through digital interaction [2]. In this context, Jerome Polin becomes interesting to study because his image as an educational figure and his academic track record give his views a distinctive persuasive weight in the eyes of the audience, especially the youth who constitute his follower base.

Jerome Polin's posts through his personal Threads account became one of the most attention-grabbing to the public. He consistently expressed his views at every stage of the case, starting from his response to the 18-year prison demand to his reaction to the 10-year prison sentence handed down to Nadiem Makarim. These statements were delivered in an emotional and personal tone, thus not only conveying information but also expressing attitudes and moral judgments toward the ongoing legal process. The high engagement numbers on these posts serve as a strong indicator that the content delivered by Jerome Polin has significant reach and influence. This level of engagement is unusual for purely informative posts, but rather indicates emotional resonance and cognitive involvement from the audience regarding the raised issue.

The responses that emerged were not singular; some audiences expressed support and understanding of Jerome Polin's views, while others instead criticized the underlying arguments and questioned his position as a public figure commenting on an ongoing legal process. This reveals how the statements he uploaded were not just conveying personal opinions, but potentially served as a frame of reference for the audience in interpreting the facts of the case, which ideally should be placed alongside, not as a substitute for, official statements from law enforcement agencies or other formal information sources [14].

Besides Jerome Polin, several other public figures such as Maudy Ayunda and Pandji also conveyed similar responses, showing that this phenomenon is not a singular event but a broader pattern of public figure involvement in coloring the discourse of the case.

This phenomenon is relevant to be analyzed through a communication perspective regarding the shifting role of influencers in the digital space [6]. If in their early emergence influencers were generally positioned as entertainment or lifestyle content creators, the development of the social media ecosystem has driven a shift in this role to opinion leaders, namely parties who help shape the audience's perspective on a public issue, although this does not necessarily replace the function of official information sources. Influencers are considered to have an increasingly strategic and important position as opinion leaders who are perceived to possess strong persuasive power due to holding aspects of credibility and relational proximity to the audience, including in helping the audience construct meaning regarding an issue [8].

This concept aligns with the classic two-step flow of communication idea which positions influential figures as intermediaries between the flow of information and the reception of opinions by the wider public. Here, an opinion leader is not only an information relayer but also capable of carrying out the processes of selection,

interpretation, and message packaging based on their perspective before it is received by the audience [15]. Research on opinion leadership on social media shows that individuals acting as opinion leaders have different patterns of information consumption, curation, and distribution, allowing their position to play a role in determining what information can attract attention and how that information is delivered to their social network. Thus, the two-step flow theory becomes relevant for this research in dissecting the phenomenon of Jerome Polin's posts regarding the Nadiem Makarim case, which can be seen not merely as a public figure's participation on social media, but also as a concrete example of narrative construction practice in the digital space [9].

Social media also plays a crucial role in accelerating the circulation of information and opinions in society [9]. The algorithmic characteristics of digital platforms, which tend to prioritize content with high interaction levels, make opinion-laden posts from public figures easier to reach audiences on a large scale and in a short time [9]. The engagement level of a post, as seen in this case, in turn also influences the extent to which a message is received, trusted, and redistributed by other users [10]. Besides algorithmic factors, the source credibility of the figure delivering the message also becomes an important variable in the process of public opinion reception. When a message is delivered by a figure perceived to have integrity and competence, such as the image attached to Jerome Polin, the audience tends to be more open to paying attention to the delivered narrative, even if the source is not an official information source or an authoritative legal source. This condition shows an expansion in the variety of public trust references, which now no longer rely solely on formal institutions and sources, but are also colored by figures trusted personally, as a complement to the existing information ecosystem.

There is still limited previous research specifically analyzing the narrative content produced by influencers to understand how information, interpretations, judgments, and personal perspectives are constructed and mediated to audiences in the context of digital public discourse [5]. This gap becomes increasingly relevant when the figure delivering the message has a broad audience reach, established credibility, and the ability to package complex issues into communication forms that are more accessible and easily understood by digital audiences [14]. Therefore, there is still research space that can be developed in this study, particularly in using the two-step flow of communication perspective not only to identify influencer communication movements but focusing more on examining how influencers carry out their role as opinion leaders through narrative construction regarding legal cases that also involve other public figures.

Based on this gap, this research attempts to analyze Jerome Polin's Instagram content regarding the Nadiem Makarim case using a qualitative content analysis approach with a two-step flow of communication perspective. This research focuses on how Jerome Polin executes his role as an opinion leader through narrative construction, information selection, interpretation, and judgments conveyed in the content regarding the case. This research is not directed at determining the right or wrong of Jerome Polin's position nor to test the legal validity of the Nadiem Makarim case, but rather to understand how a public figure mediates and constructs a public issue through digital messages delivered to his audience. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to digital communication studies by expanding the application of the two-step flow theory in the

context of influencer communication, specifically to understand how opinion leaders on social media play a role in shaping and disseminating interpretations regarding public issues through the narratives they produce.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Two-Step Flow of Communication

The development of social media has transformed the pattern of information dissemination from one-way communication to a more interactive process. These changes still demonstrate the relevance of the Two-Step Flow of Communication theory, explaining that media influence on audiences does not occur directly, but through intermediary individuals who first receive, interpret, and relay information to others. The communication flow occurs in two stages, namely from the media to opinion leaders, and then from opinion leaders to the wider public. In the current social media era, the process of translating and relaying information by these opinion leaders is mostly packaged and distributed through digital narratives.

According to Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944), communication flows in two stages, from the media to opinion leaders and subsequently from opinion leaders to the wider public, a process that remains relevant in understanding influencers as contemporary opinion leaders in social media environments [13].

2.2 Digital Narrative

In the context of digital communication, the information mediation process does not only occur through the delivery of facts but also through narratives strategically constructed by the communicator. A digital narrative is a process of conveying meaning, experience, or messages through digital media by integrating various forms of content, such as text, images, video, audio, and user interaction to build a shared understanding in the digital space [12]. Usually, the method used in digital narratives is the Digital Storytelling method. Digital Storytelling is understood as a communication approach that utilizes storylines to create more engaging and meaningful content that can increase audience engagement through positive emotional experiences [12]. Therefore, digital narratives become a form of communication that allows opinion leaders to build public interpretation of an issue.

2.3 Influencer as Opinion Leader

As social media evolves, influencers are defined as individuals who build an audience through social media and have the ability to influence the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of their followers based on credibility, expertise, and the relationships established with the audience [3].

The function of influencers is no longer limited to being information conveyors or brand promotion supporters, but has evolved into communication actors who play a role in shaping public conversation, directing issue interpretation, and creating two-way interactions that encourage user participation in the digital space [7].

These changes show that influencers now execute a role that aligns with the opinion leader concept, namely as parties who receive, interpret, and redistribute information to the audience so they can influence the formation of opinions, attitudes, and decisions of their followers through their credibility and influence on social media [3].

2.4 Social Media as a Public Discourse Space

As Social media has evolved into a public discourse space that allows the public to exchange information, express opinions, and participate in discourse formation openly through digital interactions without being limited by space and time [16].

Unlike conventional mass media which tends to be one-way, social media creates a more participatory communication pattern so that every user has the opportunity to become both a producer and disseminator of information in the digital public space. This condition encourages dynamic discussions because various actors, ranging from individuals and communities to influencers, can interact with each other and influence the direction of public conversation. However, the openness of this discourse space also presents challenges in the form of the increasing ease with which various unverified narratives, opinions, or claims spread and gain legitimacy through user participation, so the quality of public discourse is determined not only by the truth of the information but also by a narrative's ability to attract attention and gain support on social media [7].

3 Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a Qualitative Content Analysis method that is not only capable of identifying manifest messages but also latent messages from the analyzed document [11]. Content analysis allows researchers to understand media content tendencies through three dimensions: context related to the social situation surrounding the text or document under study, process explaining how media messages are actually produced and constructed, and the emergence of meaning depicting the gradual formation of message meaning based on the process of understanding and interpreting the studied document [1].

There are two types of data used in this study, namely primary and secondary data. Primary data is information collected by researchers directly from the source. Meanwhile, secondary data is information collected by other parties [4]. The primary data in this study was collected directly through the data source, using a visual method in the form of screenshots on the @jeromepolin Instagram posts. Secondary data supporting this research comes from written sources such as books, journals, internet information sources, and documents that can strengthen the data from the research conducted by the researchers.

4 Results and Discussion

Posts made by Jerome Polin on the Threads social media during Nadiem Makarim's trial regarding the Chromebook procurement policy case at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology influenced the formation of public perception towards the case. Currently, Threads has grown into one of the platforms actively used

by the public to convey and respond to political issues. In this study, the unit of analysis was taken from Threads posts by the @jeromepolin account related to Nadiem Makarim and the case that befell him. There are 11 of Jerome Polin's posts on Threads related to the Chromebook procurement policy case at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology from May 13 to June 30, 2026.

Table 1. Jerome Polin's posts on Threads related to Nadiem Makarim's Case from May 13 to June 30, 2026 (Research Source, 2026)

Date	Content
May 13, 2026	"Seeing Mas Nadiem sentenced to 18 years in prison, ultimately all high-quality people with integrity will be afraid to enter/cooperate with the government, and eventually, it will be filled with corrupt people. We are doomed, aren't we?"
May 14, 2026	"Is the public prosecution team who gave the demand for Mas Nadiem Makarim living peacefully now? Are their families peaceful? Can they sleep? If they are still living peacefully, that's sick."
May 14, 2026	"Politics is indeed dirty. Becoming an official means you can't be too straight. If you're clean, no need to enter politics. So are we just going to accept situations like this? I've thought about making a change for a long time, but it seems impossible, right? How can we lose to the bad guys? So what can we do? The ultimate solution: just work in the private sector. Is that the only way? But even in the private sector, regulations can be made difficult, taxes increased, etc. *Sigh* I'm confused."
May 14, 2026	"At school, kids are taught to be honest, have integrity, not cheat, etc. There's already a good example of the result, yet he is demanded 18 years in prison and a 5.7T fine instead. How would kids react seeing that news? Seeing reality like this, who would want to be a good person? By logic, it's better to be a cheater but safe rather than good but criminalized. The impact of this is not small. This is a snowball effect. This is not just a problem for us now, but could be a huge problem for future generations."
May 14, 2026	"Seeing Mas Nadiem Makarim and Mas Ibam demanded years in prison even though they weren't proven guilty, and then seeing this news..... I'm out of words. Sick."
May 15, 2026	"The buzzers are starting to act up, guys :)) Many have the narrative 'Why defend Nadiem, during his term he ruined Indonesian education blah blah'. Even though this time everyone is speaking up because Nadiem was given an 18-year demand + a 5.7T fine for a procurement case, where during the trial no evidence of wrongdoing could be found. This is what threatens all of us and the future of the nation's generation who want to contribute. It's amazing how these buzzers are willing to ruin the nation for a meager amount of money..."
May 15, 2026	"Since I started speaking up about politics, government, etc., I've memorized which accounts will definitely become buzzers to twist narratives, attack personally, or assassinate character, so the focus shifts. If you pay attention to their posts, the content is definitely all the same. The narrative is the same, only the

	language style is different. No need to mention examples, you guys should already know hahaha"
May 16, 2026	"For the buzzers attacking me, honestly, I pity you. I know you need to eat so you have to post like that. It is okay. I'm glad I can be a source of income for you. Because if there is no subject to counter, you wouldn't get orders, right? Keep up the spirit, hopefully, one day you can get a good job, one where you don't have to sacrifice your conscience hahaha"
May 17, 2026	"Last but not least, many think people are defending 'Nadiem'. No. Those people's concern is defending justice and law enforcement. If no evidence of wrongdoing was found during the trial, but he is demanded the maximum, and his punishment even exceeds proven criminals and corruptors, just be prepared that anyone can be hit. If someone of Nadiem's caliber can be treated like that, let alone all of us whose power and contribution are not as big as his. Let's wait and see what happens next."
June 30, 2026	"Not proven guilty, sentenced to 10 years in prison and an 800m fine. It seems like there's no more hope for righteous people in this sick country."
June 30, 2026	"Honestly at this point I'm confused, what can we as citizens do? Speaking up on social media has been done, not heard. Countered with buzzers again. Demonstrations have been done, no change. Countered with paid demonstrations. What other ways are there? Are we really that helpless? Truly confused and wondering, is there still hope?"

The authors found that most of Jerome Polin's posts share an interconnected theme, namely regarding the Nadiem Makarim trial case. Therefore, the authors selected eight posts using a purposive sampling technique, considering relevance to the research focus. The criteria for post selection include: (1) containing Jerome Polin's opinion or assessment of the Nadiem Makarim trial case; (2) obtaining a high level of engagement; (3) demonstrating Jerome Polin's characteristics as an opinion leader through the interpretation or framing of the issue; (4) containing messages that potentially influence how the audience understands the case; and (5) representing narrative development from the beginning to the end of the studied post period.

Table 2. Curated Jerome Polin's posts on Threads related to Nadiem Makarim’s Case from May 13 to June 30, 2026 (Research Source, 2026)

Date	Information
May 13, 2026	"Seeing Mas Nadiem sentenced to 18 years in prison, ultimately all high-quality people with integrity will be afraid to enter/cooperate with the government, and eventually, it will be filled with corrupt people. We are doomed, aren't we?"
May 14, 2026	"Is the public prosecution team who gave the demand for Mas Nadiem Makarim living peacefully now? Are their families peaceful? Can they sleep? If they are still living peacefully, that's sick."

May 14, 2026	"At school, kids are taught to be honest, have integrity, not cheat, etc. There's already a good example of the result, yet he is demanded 18 years in prison and a 5.7T fine instead. How would kids react seeing that news? Seeing reality like this, who would want to be a good person? By logic, it's better to be a cheater but safe rather than good but criminalized. The impact of this is not small. This is a snowball effect. This is not just a problem for us now, but could be a huge problem for future generations."
May 14, 2026	"Seeing Mas Nadiem Makarim and Mas Ibam demanded years in prison even though they weren't proven guilty, and then seeing this news..... I'm out of words. Sick."
May 15, 2026	"The buzzers are starting to act up, guys :) Many have the narrative 'Why defend Nadiem, during his term he ruined Indonesian education blah blah'. Even though this time everyone is speaking up because Nadiem was given an 18-year demand + a 5.7T fine for a procurement case, where during the trial no evidence of wrongdoing could be found. This is what threatens all of us and the future of the nation's generation who want to contribute. It's amazing how these buzzers are willing to ruin the nation for a meager amount of money..."
May 17, 2026	"Last but not least, many think people are defending 'Nadiem'. No. Those people's concern is defending justice and law enforcement. If no evidence of wrongdoing was found during the trial, but he is demanded the maximum, and his punishment even exceeds proven criminals and corruptors, just be prepared that anyone can be hit. If someone of Nadiem's caliber can be treated like that, let alone all of us whose power and contribution are not as big as his. Let's wait and see what happens next."
June 30, 2026	"Not proven guilty, sentenced to 10 years in prison and an 800m fine. It seems like there's no more hope for righteous people in this sick country."
June 30, 2026	"Honestly at this point I'm confused, what can we as citizens do? Speaking up on social media has been done, not heard. Countered with buzzers again. Demonstrations have been done, no change. Countered with paid demonstrations. What other ways are there? Are we really that helpless? Truly confused and wondering, is there still hope?"

Symbol Analysis

Framing Nadiem Makarim as a Victim of Legal Injustice. The analysis results assess that Jerome Polin is an influencer on the Threads social media who supported Nadiem Makarim in the trial of the Chromebook procurement case at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology and showed opposition to the related Prosecutor's demands. In his series of posts, Jerome Polin consistently framed Nadiem Makarim as being in the position of a victim of a legal process perceived as unfair.

As in his post on May 13, 2026, which contains the sentence "Seeing Mas Nadiem sentenced to 18 years in prison" and "all high-quality people with integrity will be afraid to enter/cooperate with the government", the word "Mas" indicates the use of a personal greeting that reflects an impression of closeness and humanization towards Nadiem, while the word "sentenced to prison" symbolically positions Nadiem as the party receiving punishment. This is followed by the use of the term "high-quality and with integrity" which also provides a positive symbolization of Nadiem's character. Thus, implicitly, the punishment he received is constructed as something that seems unequal to the quality and integrity attached to his figure.

This framing is further reinforced through the sentence "We are doomed, aren't we?" which illustrates concern about the condition of the legal and government systems more broadly with an impression of representing the majority of the audience's voice due to the use of "we". Thus, Jerome invites the audience to reach a perception that Nadiem is not only positioned as an individual facing a legal process, but also as a symbol of individuals with integrity who are considered to be victims of the system as one example of a representative case that has the potential to cause fear among good and competent people to contribute to the country.

A similar thing is more explicitly seen in the May 14, 2026 post, especially through the statement "Seeing Mas Nadiem Makarim and Mas Ibam demanded years in prison even though they weren't proven guilty" and "There's already a good example of the result, yet he is demanded 18 years in prison and a 5.7T fine instead." The words "even though" and "instead" serve as contrast symbols connecting two conditions considered contradictory, namely between the lack of proven guilt and the heavy sentence demand. This meaning is reinforced through the rhetorical question "who would want to be a good person??" and the statement "it's better to be a cheater but safe rather than good but criminalized?" which implicitly places Nadiem's case as a symbol of threat to the values of honesty and integrity.

In the May 17, 2026 post, this framing is increasingly emphasized through the statement "those people's concern is defending justice and law enforcement" and "if no evidence of wrongdoing was found during the trial, but he is demanded the maximum". The word choice of "defending justice" and "law enforcement" shifts the focus of defense from Nadiem's figure personally towards more universal values, while the phrase "if someone of Nadiem's caliber can be treated like that, let alone all of us" positions Nadiem as a representation of society having a more vulnerable or weaker position when faced with legal authority.

Thus, through the entire series of Jerome's posts regarding the related case, Nadiem is consistently constructed not only as an individual facing a legal process but as a symbol of a victim of legal injustice.

The Use of Emotional Appeal. In addition, one of the most prominent communication strategies in Jerome Polin's posts is the use of language laden with emotional content. Unlike the style of conveying legal information which is generally formal, systematic, and distanced, Jerome instead chooses spontaneous and personal expressions such as "sick", "I'm out of words", "confused", "sick country", to the rhetorical question "is there still hope?". This diction selection places Jerome not as a party merely reporting case developments, but as an individual who also "feels" and is emotionally impacted

by the event, so his position before the audience resembles a friend sharing anxiety, not an objective source delivering facts.

In terms of communication function, such emotional language works in a different way from logic- or evidence-based arguments. When the audience reads expressions like "sick" or "I'm out of words", what is responded to affectively is not the validity of the legal argument put forward, but the feelings transmitted by the writer. This process is known in communication studies as emotional contagion, where the audience tends to adopt the mood displayed by the communicator before having the chance to critically evaluate the message content. Consequently, the audience's assessment of the Nadiem Makarim trial case has the potential to be shaped primarily by emotional resonance rather than by consideration of the facts and the actual ongoing legal process.

The second aspect that needs to be scrutinized is the choice of language register. Jerome consistently uses colloquial language commonly used in informal interactions on social media, instead of the standard language used by mainstream media. This register creates an impression of familiarity and equality between Jerome and his followers, as if he is speaking as part of the audience itself, not as an outsider or someone above them. This effect strengthens Jerome's relational credibility as an opinion leader, because the proximity of the language style makes the audience feel the message delivered comes from an "insider" who understands and shares the same anxieties, not from a distanced interested party.

The emotional content in Jerome's posts also functions as an amplifier of audience engagement technically on the platform. Posts that provoke emotional responses—whether sympathy, anger, or anxiety—empirically tend to generate higher interactions in the form of likes, reposts, and comments compared to purely informative posts. This aligns with the data in the early part of the study which recorded Jerome's posts receiving hundreds of thousands of interactions, an unusual number to be achieved by content purely reporting facts. This high engagement then triggers an algorithmic effect, where posts with high interaction are prioritized more by the platform to reach a wider audience, so the emotional content not only affects the psychological reception of the message but also expands its reach of distribution technically.

Connecting Individual Cases with Public Interest. The next finding is that Jerome Polin consistently expands the issue from that case (individual) into a societal problem in general. This can be seen in his post on May 14, 2026, which reads, "This is not just a problem for us now, but could be a huge problem for future generations." Through this statement, Jerome no longer positions the case as an individual legal issue, but constructs it as a threat that impacts community life in general and even future generations. The use of the word "future generations" also becomes a symbol representing concern about the continuity of integrity values and the leadership quality of the nation's future generations.

The same pattern also appears in the May 15, 2026 post, when Jerome writes, "This is what threatens all of us and the future of the nation's generation who want to contribute." The use of the word "all of us" serves as a collective symbol that expands the scope of the issue so it is no longer understood as a problem only experienced by Nadiem Makarim. Meanwhile, the word "future of the nation's generation" represents a broader impact on society and affirms that the consequences of the case are considered to be felt by anyone who also has the desire to contribute to the country.

In the May 17, 2026 post, a similar meaning reappears, namely "just be prepared that anyone can be hit. If someone of Nadiem's caliber can be treated like that, let alone all of us whose power and contribution are not as big as his." In this post, the use of the word "anyone" is a symbol that generalizes the potential impact of the case to all levels of society. Meanwhile, the comparison between "Nadiem" and "all of us" builds the meaning that if someone with Nadiem Makarim's position, influence, and massive contribution can experience this situation, then ordinary people who do not possess such position, influence, and contribution are positioned as a group considered more vulnerable to experiencing the same thing.

Based on these three posts, a pattern of using linguistic symbols that shift the focus of the issue from the individual realm to the collective realm is visible. The use of words such as "all of us", "future generations", "future of the nation's generation", and "anyone" does not only function as language choices, but also as symbols building the meaning that Nadiem Makarim's case has consequences that transcend the individual and relate to broad public interests. Through these symbols, Jerome constructs the case as a shared problem relevant to social life, thus expanding the scope of meaning of the event being discussed.

Building Polarization with Group Identification. Based on the results of identifying the symbols that appear, there is a tendency that a narrative can build boundaries between aligned parties (ingroup) and parties positioned as opponents or attackers (outgroup), thus potentially strengthening opinion polarization in the digital space. This can be seen from his posts on May 15, 2026 "people defending justice" vs "buzzers ruining the nation" & June 30, 2026 "citizens" vs "buzzers" as well as "real demonstrations" vs "paid demonstrations". In both of these tweets, Jerome Polin builds group identification through the use of symbols distinguishing between ingroup and outgroup. The ingroup is indicated by words such as "everyone speaking up", "all of us", "the nation's generation who want to contribute", and "we as citizens", which form a collective identity as a society fighting for justice, possessing a sense of care for the nation's future, and desiring a fair legal process. Conversely, the outgroup is represented by phrases like "buzzers", "buzzers starting to act up", and "paid demonstrations", where these phrases contain negative connotations because the mentioned groups are deemed as groups spreading counter-narratives, hindering public aspirations, and acting based on certain interests. These symbols do not only function as identity markers, but also create boundaries between groups considered to have moral purposes and groups considered as obstacles to common interests.

Through this construction, the audience is indirectly directed to identify themselves as being in the "we" group fighting for justice, while viewing the "they" group as parties weakening the public voice. This strategy strengthens a sense of solidarity within the group (ingroup) while clarifying the existence of the outside group (outgroup) as its opponent.

In the Two-Step Flow of Communication perspective, Jerome Polin does not only play a role as an information relayer regarding the Nadiem Makarim trial case, but Jerome Polin also interprets the event by providing a framework of thinking regarding who is considered defending public interests and who is perceived as hindering them. Thus, the opinion leader's function does not stop at information dissemination, but actively participates in shaping group orientation, so followers are encouraged to

determine their position towards emerging issues based on the interpretation delivered by the communicator.

Discourse Agitation Persuasion to the Audience. Even though through his posts, Jerome Polin does not give direct influence to explicitly move the audience to take physical actions or certain legal steps, analysis of the narrative structure of his posts shows the presence of an indirect call to action that serves as a symbol of a certain invitation message to the audience. This indirect invitation is a form of discourse agitation designed to stimulate cognition, awaken critical awareness such as participating in thinking, questioning, and criticizing the legal process according to the content of his posts, such as the use of words referring to rhetorical questions in the May 14, 2026 post "So what can we do?" and on June 30, 2026 "Is there still hope?".

Both questions highlight the message content or emotional symbols reflecting feelings of despair and affective helplessness. However, on the other hand, it functionally shows that the word use in these rhetorical questions works as cognitive priming aimed at influencing the audience to reject the position of passive observers and participate in voicing and feeling the same thing regarding the post's message emotionally.

Rhetorical questions like "So what can we do?" pose a challenge to the conscience of the audience who also feels the same as Jerome Polin to participate in thinking about how much our participation as citizens matters in the face of power relation structures that risk causing this injustice in accordance with the message of his post. Another question "Is there still hope?" implicitly also triggers the audience personally to try to reflect and re-question the ongoing law enforcement system as fellow citizens facing these conditions.

Jerome Polin through his posts indirectly succeeded in changing audience passivity and transforming his personal anxiety into public discourse. In accordance with the characteristics of digital/online platforms which are utilized to create participatory communication where two-way interaction occurs between the opinion leader and the audience. The audience also replies and responds to Jerome Polin's agitating posts and is driven towards the formation of discourse, such as being emotionally influenced to attempting to provide persuasion to fellow audiences.

Through symbol analysis showing how this discourse agitation strategy works, it reveals a public figure facilitating his audience to participate in analyzing through thinking and questioning, to criticizing legal decisions personally. This shows that Jerome Polin's communication through his posts is a participatory symbol in line with social media characteristics enabling two-way interaction between opinion leaders and the audience.

Two-Step Flow of Communication Analysis

Opinion Leader Credibility. In the perspective of the two-step flow of communication theory, Jerome Polin can be positioned as one of the opinion leaders in the digital discourse regarding the Nadiem Makarim case. This is not only related to the number of followers he has but also to his visibility as a public figure and influencer who has built a digital identity in the social media space. The dynamically large development of

interactions on each of his posts provides space for Jerome to express his views and interpretations, including related to issues currently drawing public attention. In his post on May 13, 2026, which contains the statement "Seeing Mas Nadiem sentenced to 18 years in prison, ultimately all high-quality people with integrity will be afraid to enter/cooperate with the government", as well as the May 14, 2026 post stating "By logic, it's better to be a cheater but safe rather than good but criminalized?", Jerome does not merely convey information regarding the case but also accompanies it with interpretations and judgments based on his perspective. In the two-step flow framework, this kind of communication character demonstrates the opinion leader function, namely when a figure does not only receive and disseminate information, but also relies on personal capability in providing meaning to an issue before the information is received by his audience.

At the same time, the position as an opinion leader does not mean that every expressed view automatically represents an objective fact or absolutely represents the views of the entire audience. In this context, Jerome's freedom to express opinions needs to be placed alongside the communication responsibility inherent in public figures with a broad audience reach, because there is a great possibility that his overall message moves to become an opinion reference. As in his May 15, 2026 post which contains the statement "The buzzers are starting to act up, guys :))" and the June 30, 2026 post stating "Not proven guilty, sentenced to 10 years in prison and an 800m fine", the delivered messages show the presence of a certain position and interpretation towards the case development. These statements have the potential to influence how some audiences understand the issue, although the actual level of influence remains diverse depending on the reception, interpretation, and response of each message receiver. Therefore, opinion leader credibility in the two-step flow perspective is also related to the increasingly large potential consequences of the messages delivered. Thus, freedom of speech and communication responsibility can be viewed as two aspects going hand-in-hand in a public figure's role as an opinion leader in the digital space.

Issue Interpretation. Based on the Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory proposed by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, communication influence does not always flow directly from media to audiences. Information will first be received and interpreted by opinion leaders, who then forward it to the public through their personal delivery methods and interpretations. Therefore, opinion leaders do not only play a role as information relayers, but also act as parties giving meaning and understanding to an issue.

In the context of the case in this study, Jerome Polin demonstrates this function through the way he interprets the Nadiem Makarim trial case via his posts. Jerome does not only relay existing legal process developments but consistently directs the discussion to his personal thoughts and interpretations regarding the case.

In Jerome Polin's posts, the first interpretation that appears is the depiction of Nadiem Makarim as a victim of legal injustice. This is seen from statements such as "even though they weren't proven guilty", "no evidence of wrongdoing could be found", and "criminalized". Through these word choices, Jerome provides a judgment that Nadiem was treated unfairly in the legal process. Thus, Jerome builds a narrative that

the case is not just a law enforcement process, but a form of injustice against an individual.

Besides interpreting Nadiem Makarim's position, Jerome also provides an interpretation of the law enforcement system. In his post on May 14, 2026, Jerome questions, "Is the public prosecution team living peacefully now?" This statement does not only criticize the given demands but also contains a moral judgment against the prosecutors as the parties responsible in the legal process of the case. In another post, Jerome refers to the condition of Indonesia as a "sick country", which reinforces the interpretation that the problem does not only lie in one case, but in a legal system considered not functioning as it should. Through this, Jerome directs the audience's attention to view the case as a reflection of broader law enforcement problems.

Jerome also connects the Nadiem Makarim case with the government condition in Indonesia. In the May 13, 2026 post, he states that if people with integrity are treated like Nadiem, then "all high-quality people with integrity will be afraid to enter or cooperate with the government." This statement indicates a cause-and-effect relationship built by Jerome between the legal process and the quality of human resources in the government. Through this interpretation, Nadiem's case is no longer viewed as an individual problem, but as an event that has the potential to influence government sustainability and public interest in contributing to the public sector in the future.

In addition, it is also visible how Jerome expands the impact of the case to society in general. Statements such as "this is not just a problem for us now", "threatens all of us", and "anyone can be hit" show an effort to construct Nadiem's case as a collective or shared problem. The use of the words "all of us" and "future generations" shows that Jerome links the case with broad public interests, not just the parties involved in the trial. In the Two-Step Flow perspective, this form of interpretation shows how an opinion leader provides a broader context to an event so that the issue is viewed as increasingly relevant to community life.

Jerome also provides interpretations regarding other parties holding differing views through the use of terms like "buzzers", "twist narratives", and "assassinate character." These terms are not used neutrally but contain a judgment that these parties deliberately divert the focus of discussion from the case to personal attacks. By giving certain labels to opposing groups, Jerome does not merely convey the presence of other parties in the debate, but also builds meaning regarding who is considered supporting and fighting for justice and who is deemed to be hindering the creation of objective discussions.

The final interpretation found is the depiction of the country's condition through the Nadiem Makarim case. In the June 30, 2026 post, Jerome writes, "It seems like there's no more hope for righteous people in this sick country" and questions, "is there still hope?" This statement indicates that Jerome interprets the trial verdict as a symbol of the overall condition of the country. A case that was originally an individual's legal matter is then interpreted as a representation of a justice crisis, a decline in trust towards state institutions, and the emergence of pessimism regarding the future. In the Two-Step Flow of Communication perspective, interpretations like this show how an opinion leader does not only pass on information but builds a broader meaning so that an event is understood as part of the social and political conditions currently faced by all layers of society.

Opinion Formation. After an issue is interpreted by an opinion leader, the next stage in the Two-Step Flow of Communication framework is how that interpretation is forwarded in such a way that it forms opinions among the receiving audience. At this stage, the opinion leader no longer merely conveys meaning about an event, but starts directing the audience to adopt a certain stance on the discussed issue. In the context of Jerome Polin's posts regarding the Nadiem Makarim trial case, this opinion formation process occurs through a combination of emotional content, moral judgment, and labeling against parties considered opponents, which altogether steer the audience towards one specific viewpoint.

The first mechanism found is the use of emotional language as a tool to form opinions. Almost all of Jerome's posts contain emotion-laden expressions, such as "sick", "I'm out of words", "confused", to calling Indonesia a "sick country". These word choices indicate that Jerome does not convey his views through formal or neutral language like mainstream media reports, but through personal expressions resembling daily emotional outpouring. This style of language shortens the distance between the communicator and the audience, so the delivered message is more easily absorbed affectively rather than being evaluated analytically. When the audience shares the disappointment, anxiety, or anger displayed by Jerome, the resulting opinion tends to be more influenced by this emotional resonance compared to consideration of the legal facts applying to the case.

The second mechanism is the insertion of moral judgments that directly herd the audience to a certain conclusion. This is evident in the May 14, 2026 post, when Jerome writes, "Is the public prosecution team who gave the demand for Mas Nadiem Makarim living peacefully now? If they are still living peacefully, that's sick." The rhetorical question is not actually meant to obtain a factual answer, but to instill a judgment that the prosecution party has acted unfairly. By stating explicit and personal right-or-wrong judgments, Jerome narrows the space for the audience to interpret the case independently. The opinions formed in the audience then tend to follow the direction of moral judgment that has been pre-established by Jerome, not the result of the audience's complete evaluation process of the core matter.

The third mechanism that also forms opinions is the labeling of parties with differing views. In the May 15 and 16, 2026 posts, Jerome uses terms like "buzzers", "twist narratives", and "assassinate character" to refer to groups criticizing his views. He even asserts, "I know you need to eat so you have to post like that," which implicitly positions himself as the party acting sincerely, in contrast to the other group depicted as acting solely based on economic interests. Such labeling simplifies a complex legal issue into a simpler choice for the audience, namely to side with one of the groups, without the need to deeply trace the underlying legal arguments. Thus, the public opinion formed is influenced more by emotional alignment with Jerome's figure than by a substantial understanding of the trial facts.

In the final stage of his post series, this opinion formation process then undergoes a more general meaning expansion. In the June 30, 2026 post, Jerome writes, "It seems like there's no more hope for righteous people in this sick country," accompanied by the question "is there still hope?" This statement no longer speaks specifically about the facts of Nadiem Makarim's trial, but directs the audience to a much broader opinion, namely the belief regarding the collapse of justice and the loss of hope at the state level entirely. Through this shift, an opinion initially formed on the basis of a single

individual legal case transforms into a more general and systemic view of the nation's condition.

The opinion formation process carried out by Jerome Polin does not occur singularly, but through the accumulation of three mutually reinforcing mechanisms, namely emotional appeal, moral judgment, and group labeling, which then culminate in the generalization of opinions into a broader perspective of the country's condition. This finding reinforces the basic assumption in the Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory, that an opinion leader does not merely function as an information channel for their audience, but plays an active role in shaping and directing the public's perspective on an event, so the opinions formed in society are very likely a reflection of the interpretation framework previously built by the opinion leader.

Proximity to the Audience. From Jerome Polin's 8 posts, it is very apparent that Jerome Polin does not only convey information regarding the developments of the Nadiem Makarim trial case, but also builds close communication relations with the audience through the way messages are delivered. In the perspective of Two-Step Flow Communication [13], opinion leaders act as parties who receive information from various sources, then interpret and relay it back to the public through a certain point of view. In these tweets, Jerome Polin does not merely repeat the information that has been reported by the media, but provides interpretations regarding the meaning and impact of the event on society. This demonstrates that Jerome Polin executes the function of an opinion leader as an interpreter, assisting the audience in understanding the issue through the perspective that Jerome Polin builds.

Jerome Polin's proximity to the audience can be assessed from the use of language placing himself as part of the group experiencing the same anxiety. The use of words like "all of us", "we as citizens", and discussions about "the future of the nation's generation" show that Jerome Polin does not position himself as a public figure speaking to his followers from a higher position, but as a member of society who also feels the impact of the event. This communication strategy builds a collective identity between Jerome Polin and his followers or audience, so his followers or audience share the same feelings and interests as Jerome Polin. In the context of Two-Step Flow Communication, homophily becomes one of the factors strengthening the effectiveness of an opinion leader's influence because audiences tend to more easily accept interpretations from individuals deemed to have values and interests aligned with theirs.

Besides building a collective identity, Jerome Polin also creates proximity through the use of rhetorical questions in several of his tweets, such as "we are doomed, aren't we?" and "what other ways are there?" These questions are not aimed at getting a direct answer, but are forms of invitations to the audience to think, reflect, and engage emotionally with the discussed issue. This method of delivery makes the communication process participatory because the audience does not only act as passive information receivers but is also invited to actively build meaning towards the event. This strategy can strengthen the interpersonal relationship between Jerome Polin and his followers or audience, making the communication feel much closer compared to the delivery of formal or objective information.

Proximity to the audience is also reinforced through the use of examples close to daily life. Jerome Polin does not only discuss complex legal processes, but connects them with children's character education, the future of the younger generation, up to

society's position as citizens. By linking legal issues into more familiar social experiences, Jerome Polin helps the audience understand the impact of the event in the context of their own lives. In the Two-Step Flow Communication theory, an opinion leader's ability to translate complex issues into easily understandable narratives is one form of interpretation process making messages more readily accepted by the audience.

Furthermore, Jerome Polin consistently displays open emotional expressions by revealing phrases such as "I'm out of words, sick.", "Truly confused", and "Is there still hope?". The expression of these words shows the presence of self-disclosure, namely the communicator's openness in expressing personal feelings to the audience. Such openness creates an authentic impression because Jerome Polin does not just express opinions, but also shows the emotional responses he feels towards the event. In digital communication, perceptions of authenticity are a crucial factor that can increase audience trust toward opinion leaders, making the delivered messages easier to be accepted and believed.

Overall, Jerome Polin's eight tweets demonstrate that his influence as an opinion leader is not only built through follower count or popularity alone, but also through communication strategies creating psychological proximity with the audience. The use of collective identity, rhetorical questions, examples relevant to community life, as well as emotional expressions considered authentic, demonstrates that Jerome Polin strives to build interpersonal relationships with his followers. Thus, consistent with the Two-Step Flow Communication theory, Jerome Polin does not only function as an information relay, but also as a communicator who interprets an event and shapes how the audience understands the issue through relationships based on proximity, trust, and shared experiences.

Public Discourse Mobilization. In the Two-Step Flow of Communication view, the second stage is generally understood as the personal influence from opinion leaders to their followers, namely Jerome Polin himself to the audience through his posts. In the digital platform ecosystem, the function of an opinion leader is not only limited to receiving, interpreting, and transmitting information but also encouraging the mobilization of public discourse. This leads to digital dialogues that are participatory and interactive, as well as transformations from what was initially passive message reception into spaces for reproducing public discourse.

Through his posts, Jerome Polin has effectively executed this discourse mobilization function where he does not position himself as a singular authority solely providing information, but also gives indirect invitations to conduct public discourse in the digital space by throwing rhetorical questions in his posts such as "So what can we do?" or "Is there still hope?". The implementation of this discourse agitation question strategy is a design to interpret the cognition and affection of the audience to also participate in responding and engaging in discourse within the digital space.

The mobilization of discourse by opinion leaders in this regard is due to a process through the mechanism of using emotion-laden rhetorical questions in the uploaded narratives, such as the May 13, 2026 post stating "We are doomed, aren't we?" or the May 30, 2026 post "Is there still hope?". These questions are intended to obtain cognitive stimulation and trigger the critical thinking of the audience to emotionally influence the re-evaluation of the problems emerging and discussed in the post. Jerome Polin expresses the despair he personally experiences through his posts, thus inviting

the audience to also feel the same thing as Jerome Polin as an opinion leader, indirectly driving the audience to voice their thoughts in the digital space which causes discourse to occur.

The discourse that occurs is certainly a real-time two-way interaction where the digital space facilitates these continuous conversations. Through the high numbers of audiences commenting and reposting, it shows that the narrative built by Jerome Polin successfully triggered an agitation that started with radical actions to audience expressions of despair. This discourse mobilization heavily explains that the Two Step Flow Communication theory view bears high relevance to the flow of public discourse occurrence, starting from the high responses and reposts on the posts. It begins with the opinion leader functioning to share rhetorical questions through narratives and trigger digital debate and agitation among audiences.

5 Conclusion

Based on the perspective of the Two-Step Flow of Communication theory, Jerome Polin acts as an opinion leader in the legal issue of Nadiem Makarim's trial where he does not merely repeat facts via online platforms, but also performs the process of selecting, translating, to giving meaning or interpretation to information before it is shared with the audience on digital platforms.

Jerome Polin himself also consistently frames Nadiem Makarim as a symbol of an individual with integrity who experienced legal injustice and became a victim. Jerome Polin encourages the audience to determine alignment because he builds clear boundaries between the ingroup, namely parties supporting justice, and the outgroup, namely parties positioned as buzzers or challengers to the narratives posted by Jerome Polin.

The messages used by Jerome Polin also do not utilize formal language, where there are emotional expressions and words used in daily conversations, such as "sick", "I'm out of words", and "sick country". Through this, emotional closeness is created, causing the audience to share the exact same feelings felt by the opinion leader so that public opinion is formed from mutual trust and emotional contagion from Jerome Polin. Words like "all of us" and "future generations" used in the post narratives also form a perception that what is experienced by Nadiem Makarim will also directly risk impacting future leadership, especially the safety of the audience as fellow general public in the eyes of the law relating to the nation's integrity.

Systematically, Jerome Polin applies indirect persuasion techniques using rhetorical questions that encourage agitation to triggering public discourse mobilization on online platforms, so through this research, it proves a shift in the role of digital influencers who now also function as opinion leaders through conveyed public issues. Through emotional narrative delivery, moral judgments, and issue expansion strategies, a mediation bridge is born that constructs the meaning of public cases which ultimately directs a comprehensive public perspective and emotional response in the digital space.

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