

VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY: DIGITAL ACTIVISM AGAINST NON-BINARY GENDER ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM X

Kevin Rasyid Sabili Nasution ^{a*)}, Fakhrur Rozi ^{a)}

^{a)} State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Medan, Indonesia

^{*)}Corresponding Author: kevin0603213115@uinsu.ac.id

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Abstract. This article analyses digital activism that rejects non-binary gender identities on Social Media Platform X, considering how online activity can reshape social norms and traditional values in Indonesia. This study employs a qualitative methodology with a virtual ethnographic approach to observe and analyse the behaviour and interactions of social media users concerning non-binary gender issues. Data were collected through post analysis and direct observation of user tweets that formed part of ongoing online discussions. The research provides insight into how non-binary narratives are widely rejected. Findings reveal that digital activism opposing non-binary gender identities often relies on narratives rooted in traditional and religious values, reflecting a broader disapproval of non-binary gender recognition. Social media serves as a catalyst for high engagement and further reinforces the polarisation of these views.

Keywords: virtual ethnography; media x; non-binary; gender rejection

I. INTRODUCTION

Non-binary gender is a term used to describe a gender identity that does not fit entirely within the categories of male or female. Individuals with a non-binary identity may feel that they exist somewhere between the two genders. This identity emerges as a recognition that gender is not limited to just two options. Those who identify as non-binary often express their gender in ways that differ from societal norms.

Thailand has legalised and embraced a broader spectrum of gender diversity, officially recognising 18 gender categories within society. These include conventional categories such as Straight Male and Straight Female, as well as more complex classifications such as Tom (a woman who behaves like a man and is attracted to women), Dee (a woman with a masculine appearance who is attracted to women), and Kathoey or Ladyboy (a man who presents as a woman). There are also variations like Gay Queen (a feminine man who is attracted to men), Gay King (a man who is attracted to men with a masculine role), and Bi-sexual (a woman attracted to both men and women). With its acceptance of gender diversity, Thailand has become a more inclusive environment for identities that do not conform to traditional gender norms [1].

In Indonesia, non-binary gender is still considered a taboo subject and is rarely discussed openly. Indonesian society's generally conservative culture particularly in terms of social and religious norms makes this issue difficult to accept. [2]. Society is still accustomed to viewing gender in only two categories: male and female. When someone expresses a gender identity that falls outside these categories, rejection often follows. This reaction stems from traditional views that regard gender as inherently tied to biological sex, where masculinity is associated with males and femininity with females. In reality, gender and sex are two distinct concepts.

Sex refers to biological characteristics determined by chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive organs, whereas gender

is a social construct related to roles, behaviours, and identities shaped by society. Gender can encompass a broader range of expressions beyond mere masculinity or femininity [3].

One of the main reasons why non-binary gender identities remain difficult to accept is the limited understanding of the concept of gender itself. Many people still equate gender with biological sex. In reality, sex is biological, while gender is a social construct related to roles and expressions. This lack of understanding leads some members of society to feel confused or even to view non-binary identities as deviant.

Rejection of non-binary gender identities is also reinforced by deeply rooted traditional values within society. In many local cultures in Indonesia, the roles of men and women have long been predetermined from clothing and speech styles to duties and responsibilities. When someone steps outside these gender role boundaries, they are often seen as violating prevailing social norms. As a result, non-binary individuals are frequently perceived as abnormal.

Moreover, religious teachings particularly Islam, which is the faith of the majority in Indonesia also influence public perceptions of gender issues. For example, the following verse is often cited:

"And (remember) Lut, when he said to his people, 'Do you commit such immorality as no one has preceded you with from among the worlds?'" (Qur'an, Al-A'raf: 80)

In interpreting Surah Al-A'raf verse 80, Ibn Kathir [4], explains that the actions of the people of Prophet Lut represent a major deviation from the natural order (fitrah) of human creation. They committed *faahisyah* (a grievous and shameful act that exceeds moral and social boundaries), which had never been practiced by any previous nation namely, homosexual acts between men. According to Ibn Kathir, Allah has established a divine order (*sunnatullah*) by creating male and female as pairs, and the behaviour of the people of Lut was a rebellion against that decree. Ibn Kathir emphasises that

any violation of this fundamental gender structure, including imitating the opposite sex, is an act condemned and rejected under Islamic law. Thus, tendencies to blur gender identity or deviate from the divinely ordained binary categories of male and female are considered contrary to the core principles of religion.

Buya Hamka, in his *Tafsir Al-Azhar* [5], reinforces this perspective by interpreting the behaviour of the people of Lut as a symbol of moral decay and a denial of the divine order of creation. He emphasises that human nature (*fitrah*) was created in pairs male and female and any attempt to distort or erase these boundaries represents a profound moral decline. For Hamka, the blurring of gender identities, as seen in the concept of non-binary gender today, is essentially a continuation of the moral corruption that once led to the destruction of past civilisations. Therefore, the Qur'anic narrative of the people of Lut serves as a theological basis for rejecting gender diversity beyond the two categories divinely established in human nature.

Many religious perspectives strongly affirm the ordained roles of men and women, leading to the perception that non-binary identities contradict these values. As a result, the rejection of non-binary individuals by many is not necessarily driven by personal hatred, but rather by a belief that such identities conflict with the teachings of their faith.

Social media has become a space where non-binary individuals can express themselves more freely [6]. However, at the same time, this space has also become a platform for negative comments, ridicule, and hate speech. Many social media users respond to content related to non-binary identities with demeaning remarks or even personal attacks. This reflects the fact that non-binary identities are openly rejected by segments of the public.

The rejection of non-binary gender in Indonesia can be observed through several indicators, namely the limited understanding of gender and the strong influence of traditional and religious values. These two factors are the main reasons why society finds it difficult to accept gender identities beyond the male and female binary.

This study is urgent in analysing how non-binary issues are rejected on Media X by using virtual ethnography as the methodological approach. Digital activism also serves as the foundation of this research, aiming to observe and capture online activities related to the rejection of non-binary gender identities.

In today's digital era, social media has become a primary arena for identity expression and social interaction. It offers broad opportunities to understand how various identities particularly non-binary gender identities are perceived and represented within public discourse. The importance of sentiment and identity analysis in the context of social media is crucial for exploring the complex and multilayered dynamics of society.

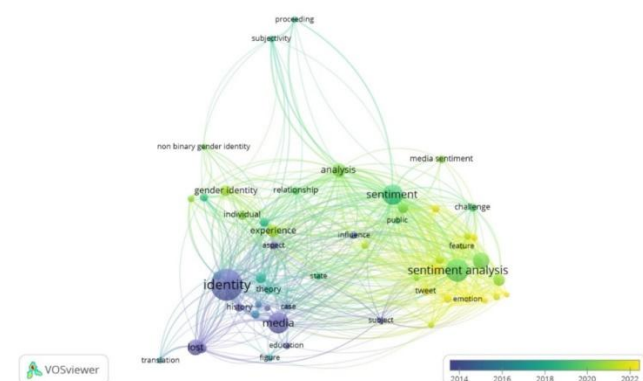


Figure 1. Timeline Visualisation of Non-Binary Studies

The figure above presents a keyword network analysis related to the topics of "sentiment" and "identity" within the context of gender and media studies. Keywords such as "nonbinary gender identity," "media," "sentiment analysis," and "lost" are closely interconnected, reflecting the complex dynamics involving non-binary gender identity and public perception on social media.

In the study *"Sentiment and Lost Identity: The Communicative Dynamics of Non-Binary Individuals in Media X Discourse,"* this visualisation illustrates how sentiment analysis on Social Media Platform X can reveal how non-binary identities are perceived, accepted, or rejected by society. The network also highlights the importance of a deeper understanding of the relationship between the personal experiences of non-binary individuals and the influence of public sentiment, as well as how social media contributes to shaping and validating diverse gender identities.

This research may further explore how communication on Social Media X helps identify dominant sentiments and their impact on the construction and recognition of non-binary identities within public discourse.

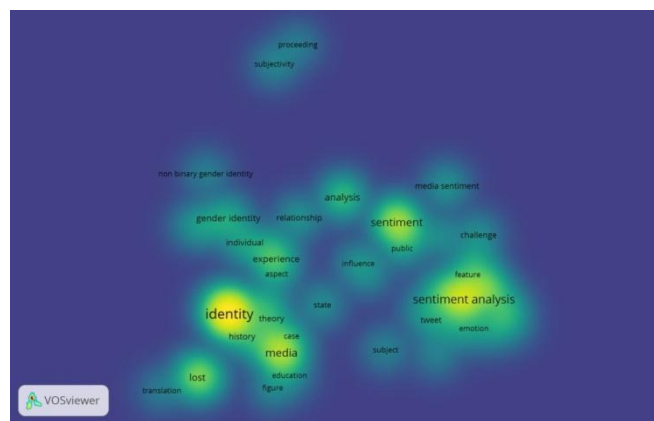


Figure 2. Density Visualisation of Non-Binary Studies

The heatmap above illustrates the concentration of research related to the keywords "identity," "sentiment," "sentiment analysis," "media," and "lost" within gender and media studies. It shows that "identity" and "sentiment" have high concentrations, indicating that these two concepts frequently appear together in the literature. This is relevant to the study *"Sentiment and Lost Identity: The Communicative Dynamics of Non-Binary Individuals in Media X Discourse,"* which focuses on how non-binary identities are perceived and represented on social media.

The high concentration of "sentiment analysis" suggests that public feelings and reactions toward non-binary identities are a central concern. Furthermore, keywords such as "nonbinary gender identity" and "media sentiment" indicate that discussions around non-binary gender identity on social media are closely linked to public sentiment analysis.

Therefore, this research can explore how public sentiment on Social Media X influences the construction of non-binary identities and how this impacts individuals' experiences in seeking recognition and validation of their identities. Research on non-binary gender has been extensively explored in various studies employing diverse methodological approaches. A study by Bower-Brown et al [7], employed a qualitative method to explore the experiences of binary-trans, non-binary, and gender-questioning adolescents in schools across the UK. The primary focus of their study was on how educational institutions respond to non-binary gender identities, which differs from the present research that places greater emphasis on the discursive dynamics within social

media. Nonetheless, their findings offer valuable insight into the social challenges faced by non-binary individuals, which may also resonate with how they are perceived within digital spaces. Hansen & Żółtak [8], conducted a survey on social perceptions of non-binary individuals across various life contexts. This study provides a general overview of how society views non-binary individuals but does not specifically examine the debates and reactions that arise on social media. This comparison highlights that my research places greater emphasis on the forms of interaction occurring in digital spaces and how social media shapes public perceptions of non-binary gender, in contrast to Hansen & Żółtak's study, which adopts a broader scope.

Meanwhile, Poirier et al. [9], and Schudson & Morgenroth [10], mengkaji isu gender non-binary dari perspektif teoritis. Poirier et al. conducted a literature review on non-binary and transgender gender identities among adolescents, offering a deep conceptual understanding but not specifically addressing the evolving social dynamics on social media. Similarly, Schudson & Morgenroth examined the concept of non-binary gender within the field of psychology. While both studies provide a strong theoretical foundation, my research contributes to the understanding of how this concept interacts with public opinion on social media, where negative sentiment and polarisation frequently occur.

Research by Vijlbrief et al. [11], employed a qualitative method to examine how young adults in Amsterdam transcend the binary concept of gender in their daily lives. This study focuses on the personal and social experiences of non-binary individuals within the Dutch cultural context, which differs significantly from the focus of my research, which explores responses and narratives on Indonesian social media. This geographical and cultural distinction is important, as the level of acceptance toward non-binary gender identities is strongly influenced by the prevailing social values and norms in each country. Therefore, my research complements the existing literature by providing a specific analysis of how non-binary gender is discussed on social media, particularly within the Indonesian context, where traditional gender norms remain deeply rooted [12]

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a virtual ethnographic approach to analyse patterns of interaction and social dynamics in digital media, particularly concerning the discourse on non-binary identities on Media X. Adopting a critical paradigm, the research aims to uncover power structures and inequalities within digital media discourse and to understand how individuals construct shared meanings within the context of online communication. The primary focus of this study is to analyse the subjective perspectives of individuals engaged in discussions about non-binary identities.

The main data source was gathered from user-generated posts on social media using the Brand24 application. Brand24 is a social media monitoring tool used to track public conversations around specific issues or keywords in real-time. Users simply register on its official website and enter the desired keywords such as digital campaign names or specific hashtags. Brand24 then automatically collects and analyses data from various digital platforms such as X, Instagram, Facebook, forums, and blogs. The tool provides information such as conversation volume, sentiment (positive, negative, or neutral), engagement levels, and the identification of key influencers involved in the discussions. Brand24 was chosen for its ability to deliver comprehensive data and accessible visualisations. In addition, secondary data were obtained from academic journals, research reports, and relevant media articles to enrich the theoretical context [13]. The combination of these two

data sources enables a comprehensive analysis of digital activism related to non-binary identities on Media X.

Data collection for this study on non-binary digital activism on social media platform X will take place from 25 January 2025 to 22 February 2025 and will be carried out in three main phases. The first phase, preparation and planning (25–31 January 2025), involves setting up the necessary tools and resources, including defining observation criteria, identifying relevant accounts and topics, and configuring analysis parameters in applications such as Brand24.

The second phase, data collection (1–15 February 2025), will focus on real-time observation of social media activity on platform X to monitor posts and interactions related to non-binary activism. Documentation will be conducted by saving screenshots and relevant comments, which will then be transformed into scientific tabulations. In the final phase, data analysis (16–22 February 2025), the researcher will analyse the collected data to identify patterns and discourse surrounding non-binary gender activism, using Brand24 to obtain a more comprehensive picture of how this form of activism unfolds on social media.

Through these three phases, the researcher aims to provide an in-depth depiction of the dynamics of non-binary digital activism on Platform X. Data analysis follows the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana method [14], which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involves filtering relevant information and identifying patterns of support or rejection toward non-binary identities. Data display is carried out using matrices and diagrams to map the relationships among factors influencing public perception, thereby generating a deeper understanding of the non-binary gender discourse on social media.

To ensure the validity of the findings, this study employs source triangulation. Source triangulation compares data from various types of information to test the consistency of the findings. This approach enhances the research's validity, making the results reliable for both academic discourse and practical implications [15]

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Virtual Ethnographic Study on Non-Binary Gender Issues

Virtual ethnography is a research method used to understand behaviour, culture, and communication patterns within digital communities. In the context of non-binary gender issues, virtual ethnography enables researchers to observe how non-binary identities are presented, discussed, and treated by social media users, particularly on Media X. Through this approach, researchers can explore interactions related to non-binary issues without the need for direct face-to-face engagement with participants [16].

The process of virtual ethnography begins by selecting a digital space where the topic of interest is actively discussed [17]. In the context of non-binary gender issues, the researcher will examine specific hashtags, user accounts, or relevant interactions on Media X. Activities such as observing posts, comments, and user reactions form a crucial part of the data collection process. The researcher documents how issues related to non-binary identities are framed, as well as how the public responds to individuals who identify as non-binary.

Virtual ethnography does not stop at data collection; it also emphasises understanding the meanings behind these digital interactions [18]. By paying attention to the language used, the style of expression, and the patterns of interaction that emerge, the researcher can capture how non-binary gender is discussed on Media X.

In analysing non-binary gender issues, virtual ethnography enables researchers to observe patterns of rejection, support, or even confusion that arise in online discussions. Researchers can identify forms of digital discrimination, such as demeaning comments and sarcastic remarks, while also documenting how non-binary individuals respond—whether through resistance, education, or humour. All of these interactions serve as analytical material to understand the social dynamics shaping public attitudes toward non-binary gender.

Virtual ethnography provides a space to explore more deeply how non-binary gender identities are rejected on Social Media X. Through this approach, researchers can construct a comprehensive picture of how Indonesian society on Media X perceives and responds to the existence of non-binary individuals.

Digital Activism Against Non-Binary Gender on Media X

Social Media Platform X has become one of the most active digital spaces for the dissemination of public opinion, including on the issue of non-binary gender. However, it is also a space where strong rejection of non-binary identities frequently

emerges. Numerous posts voice doubt, denial, and even hate speech towards individuals who do not identify within the traditional gender binary. Critical comments, demeaning jokes, and personal attacks are commonly found in discussions involving this topic.

This rejection is typically driven by views that consider non-binary gender to be in conflict with prevailing social norms. Some users express their opposition by insisting that only two genders exist and rejecting all forms of expression beyond these categories. Additionally, rejection also appears in the form of content that spreads misinformation or stigmas about the non-binary community. This indicates that Media X is not only a space for discussion, but also a reflection of societal attitudes that oppose non-binary gender identities.

The researcher has compiled several tweets related to non-binary gender on Media X to examine how the topic is debated. Tweets from selected accounts have been analysed to identify forms of digital activism surrounding non-binary gender, as presented in the following tabulation:

Table 1. Non-Binary Activism within Negative Sentiment (in bahasa)

No	Name	Tweet Content
1	hawooroo	halo! aku mau reminder kalau aku bukan perempuan. aku mengidentifikasi diri sebagai trans non-biner, dan aku akan sangat menghargai kalau kalian bisa menghindari panggil aku mbak/ibu/sis/neng. terima kasih dan selamat Hari Visibilitas Transgender!
2	markitchi	@astoadzeneca @raihanaulia_rar kayanya utk skrg prioritasnya lebih ke keamanan AFAB ka, untuk identitas gender dan orang yg dibawah kategori non-biner, lebih baik dikondisikan dgn situasi nya aja semisal kita bawa notion queer ke indo pun, sulit
3	stringquartet	Cewe tolol, cowo juga tolol. Semua gender tolol, non-binary juga tolol. Hidup tolol.
4	bijiapelhijau	Perempuan/nonbiner ganteng dan cakep pun nggak masalah—selagi kalian menarik, mengapa enggak? :3
5	192819374018a	@grok lgbtq++ kan penganut non biner, kenapa disebut biseksual bukan multiseksual? artinya mereka kontradiktif dong cuma mengakui dua gender?
6	ltsrajanu	Diskursus soal toilet genderless ditentang karena realitanya, masyarakat kita belum siap. Bukan karena semua orang benci trans/non-biner. Kalo kita ngomongin konteks sosial, ya harus jujur juga soal di mana kita berdiri.
7	Zaxveline	Stigma terhadap Identitas Gender Non-Biner: Di masyarakat yang masih konservatif, individu yang tidak sesuai dengan norma gender biner (pria atau wanita) sering menghadapi stigma atau diskriminasi. Misalnya, memakai jilbab atau pakaian longgar dapat membuat mereka tampak...

Source: Researcher's Observation, 2025

From the tweets above, it is evident that digital activism surrounding non-binary identities has generated a wide range of opinions. This diversity stems from differing levels of understanding among Media X users. By observing these digital activities, it can be concluded that responses to the non-binary gender issue range from support and opposition to neutrality. The tweets reflect various perspectives on non-binary gender, highlighting the diverse attitudes present in society. Some tweets express neutral stances, such as respectful requests to be addressed according to non-binary identity—these promote inclusivity and recognition of gender diversity, even though they do not directly challenge existing social norms. Others show supportive attitudes, such as the statement "handsome and attractive women/non-binary folks are totally fine," which embraces freedom of expression beyond traditional gender boundaries. Such tweets advocate for diversity and provide a sense of validation for non-binary individuals. However, there are also tweets that express opposing views, such as "all genders are dumb, non-binary included," clearly reflecting negative and discriminatory

attitudes toward non-binary individuals. Additionally, criticism of genderless toilets on the grounds of societal unpreparedness illustrates a conservative stance and resistance to inclusive social change. To examine the rejection of non-binary issues more thoroughly, the researcher presents public sentiment data on the topic of non-binary gender, as generated by the Brand24 application:

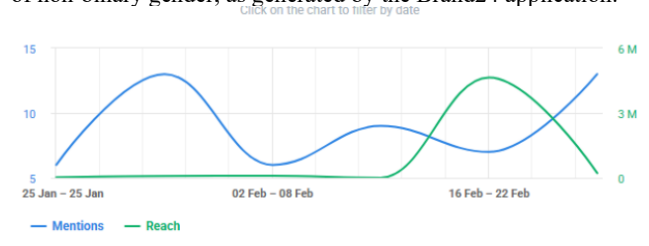


Figure 1. Public Interest Level in Non-Binary Issues on Media X (Source: Brand24, 2025)

The graph above illustrates a comparison between the number of people mentioning a topic (mentions) and the number of people who viewed the topic (reach) on social media during the period from January to February. The data shows that the number of mentions fluctuated and peaked in early February. Following that, the number of people who saw the topic (reach) also increased, reaching its highest point at 4,640,547. This indicates a time lag between the volume of discussions and the topic.

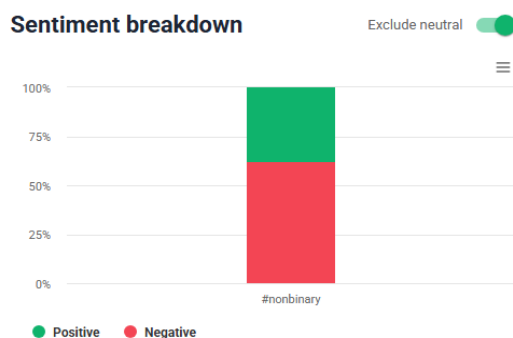


Figure 2. Sentiment Breakdown on Non-Binary Topics on Media X
(Source: Brand24, 2025)

The sentiment breakdown graph reflects public perceptions of the hashtags #nonbinary, #non-binary, #nonbiner, and #non-biner on Media X, revealing that negative responses dominate, accounting for 63% of total sentiment. The analysis period, from 16 to 22 February 2025, indicates that this issue has garnered significant attention. Despite the high level of reach, the prevalence of negative sentiment suggests a considerable degree of rejection or disapproval from the public toward non-binary gender identities. This may indicate that a portion of society continues to reject non-binary identities and upholds traditional gender norms.

Digital activism rejecting non-binary gender identities on Media X reflects how technology can serve as a tool of mobilisation for groups seeking to preserve traditional social norms. From the perspective of Howard Rheingold [19], digitalisation has enabled individuals to form organised online communities that disseminate specific ideologies. Digital activism not only serves as a tool for individuals to uphold existing ideologies but also functions as a means to reaffirm and assert those ideologies within digital spaces.

This can be observed through the lens of Rheingold [20] concept of digital activism. Issues related to non-binary gender on Media X tend to receive widespread rejection, largely because the majority of Indonesian society adheres more strongly to traditional cultural norms, such as the binary concept of male and female gender. As a result, individuals who identify as non-binary are not afforded significant acceptance or space within Indonesian society.

In this study, the interpretation of digital interactions on social media platform X reveals that Indonesian society's response to non-binary gender is not limited to expressions of rejection, but also reflects deeply rooted cultural, religious, and social norms. Through virtual ethnographic analysis, it was found that language, communication styles, and user response patterns shape a social framework that upholds traditional gender norms. This interpretation shows that the presence of non-binary gender identities in digital spaces is not only met with rejection but also highlights how the majority of Indonesian society maintains the binary gender norm of male and female.

Triangulation with various academic sources demonstrates that discourse on non-binary gender identity on social media particularly on platform X reveals a complex and layered dynamic. Keyword network and heatmap visualisations expose the dominance of the concepts of "identity" and "sentiment" in related academic studies, indicating a close relationship between public perception and the validation of non-binary identities. The study by Bower-Brown et al. (2023) highlights institutional challenges within the education sector, while Hansen & Žóltak (2022) offer a broader perspective on social perception, and Poirier et al. (2019) as well as Schudson & Morgenroth (2022) provide theoretical frameworks without directly addressing digital interaction. This comparison shows that research within the context of Indonesian social media occupies a new space, focusing on how public sentiment shapes the construction of non-binary identity.

In addition, triangulation with the study by Vijlbrief et al. (2020) indicates that geographical and cultural factors play a crucial role in the acceptance of non-binary identities, with more inclusive experiences observed in Amsterdam, as opposed to Indonesia, which, according to the Contemporary Study (2025), still strongly upholds traditional gender norms. These findings suggest that resistance to non-binary expression on Indonesian social media is not merely the result of a lack of information, but also of rigid socio-religious structures. Thus, this study fills a gap in the literature by exploring how social media becomes a site for identity negotiation within a culture that remains conservative toward gender diversity.

Source triangulation drawing on social media observations, literature reviews, and sentiment analysis—reveals the complex dynamics of non-binary gender discourse in Indonesia. Observations of tweets on platform X show expressions of affirmation from individuals such as hawooroo and bijiapelhijau, yet these are also met with rejection and mockery, as reflected in tweets by stringquartz and 192819374018a. Tweets from users like markitchi and Itsrajanu highlight how cultural barriers still strongly limit the acceptance of non-binary identities. The sentiment analysis graph reinforces these findings, with 63% of public responses to non-binary issues on Media X tending toward the negative, despite the topic reaching a peak audience of 4,640,547. These results are consistent with studies [12], which highlight that traditional gender norms in Indonesia continue to dominate, shaping social rejection of non-binary gender expression. Thus, this study reinforces the understanding that social media is not only a space for expression, but also a site of rejection for non-binary gender identities within a society that upholds the traditional male-female gender binary.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Social Media Platform X has become a crucial space for revealing how the issue of non-binary gender is perceived and openly debated by Indonesia's digital society. Through a virtual ethnographic approach, it was found that non-binary identities continue to face strong rejection, driven by deeply rooted traditional and religious values. Negative sentiment dominates social media discourse, indicating that the majority of users still adhere to binary gender views and struggle to accept identities beyond male and female. The digital activism that emerges on Media X, as explained through Howard Rheingold's theory, illustrates how communities can spontaneously organise themselves to voice their perspectives. Although diverse discussions do occur, sentiment analysis confirms that the non-binary issue remains widely rejected. This research underscores the importance of virtual ethnography and digital activism as essential approaches to understanding the digital dynamics surrounding non-binary identities.

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