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Original Article



Examining Gender Discourse and Childfree Movement in Post-Authoritarian Era: A Case Study of @GITASAV on Instagram

Jordy Satria Widodo ^{a,*}, Muslim Muslim ^a, Dyah Kristyowati ^a, Diana Amaliasari ^a and Padel Muhamad Rallie Rivaldy ^a

^a Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Pakuan University, Bogor Tengah, 16129 Kota Bogor, Jawa Barat, Indonesia

* Correspondence: jordysatriawidodo@unpak.ac.id (J.S.W.)

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Abstract

This article explores Indonesian netizens' sentiments over the issue of childfree articulated by a woman influencer, Gita Savitri, through her Instagram account. This study employed a digital humanities method to analyze keywords using Antconc and sentiments using Voyant Tool from the year of 2020 to 2024. Reception theory by Stuart Hall was used to explain the standing of netizens' dominant ideology and Gender Performativity by Judith Butler was utilized to describe the social construction on childfree decisions done by Gita Savitri. The results show that the phrase and words "Punya Anak" (Having a Child), "Aku" (I), and "Kita" (We) play a significant role in shaping public sentiments. The phrase "Punya Anak" has resulted in 37 negative comments (39,4%), leading to criticisms on the contents and disagreement towards child-free decisions. The word "Kita" portrays the interactions between Gita Savitri and netizens in the collective discourse on childfree. Moreover, the word "Aku" brings about 58 negative comments (50%), which generally reject the concept of childfree. This study indicates that the childfree choice is assumed as the resistance against Indonesian traditional gender norms referred to as state Ibuism, and the woman issues in this case are used to deconstruct and criticize the patriarchal power structures. Thus, Instagram is an essential space for critical dialogues, enabling changes in public's understanding and acceptance of the ideas that challenge the established cultural norms.



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1. Introduction

The discussion over childfree decisions in the context of culture and youth is becoming relevant following the shift in youth's view towards the concept of family and gender roles, as stated by Elizabeth and Clinton (2020). Stephani (2024) contends that in Indonesia alone, the decision is controversial due to the conflicting viewpoints on traditional sociocultural norms, which claim that having children is the main goal of marriage and one of women's social functions in society. This phenomenon is highlighted by the younger generation, which has more flexible perspectives on gender roles, freedom of choice, and the right to control their life (Volsche, 2018). It indicates a cultural shift among youngsters who appear

to become more open to new ideas that oppose existing social norms.

Among these generations, the standing on childfree is often affected by education, broader information access, and exposure to global progressive culture (Elizabeth & Clinton, 2020; Ruegger & Deziengel, 2021; Hintz & Brown, 2019). The research shows that the higher someone's education level is, the bigger the possibility they consider the decision, as discussed by Stahnke et al. (2019). This ensures because the educated individual tends to be career-oriented, has diverse aspirations, and rejects social pressure to adhere to traditional gender norms. Moreover, social media, which consists of Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter (X),

has become a main space for youngsters to express their views and gain support from communities with the same ideology. According to Leliana et al. (2023), Gita Savitri, one of the women influencers supporting a childfree lifestyle, uses the platforms to share her experience and encourage dialogues on this unusual life choice.

Digital culture is also vital in constructing public opinion, especially among youngsters. Social media enables them to get involved in an open discussion on diverse life choices, including childfree, without being bound by social norms which are more rigid in the physical space, as mentioned by Rismarini and Adira (2024), Bhambhani and Inbanathan (2020). These media bring about a safe space for them to show their identity, perform social networking, and find people with similar preferences across the globe (Erkaya & Ustunel, 2023). In the context of Indonesia, social norms seem to be strongly conservative, and social media offer brand-new modes for young generations to challenge the traditional and normative perspectives on family and gender roles (Stephani, 2024; Muslim et al., 2023a; Muslim et al., 2023b).

Culturally speaking, the reluctance to have children among youngsters also pertains to changing generational values and priorities (Harrington, 2019). Despite the previous generation, this younger one is more focused on self-growth, education, financial stability, and career aspirations before considering having children (Iverson et al., 2020). According to Fidanci et al. (2024), the aspects encompassing higher life spending, economic instability, and the awareness of global issues, such as climate change and overpopulation, also importantly play a role in deciding to be child-free. In some cases, this choice is understood to enhance the quality of life and reduce pressure on raising children amidst unstable socio-economic conditions.

Further, the childfree narratives among youngsters have portrayed a changing view on the concept of family. Young individuals no longer perceive the family as the only institution determining happiness and success (Venkatesan & Murali, 2019; Albertini & Brini, 2020). On the other hand, they explore alternative forms of conventional nuclear families and communities following modern life aspirations, as discussed by Erkaya and Ustunel (2023). It also displays the increasing amount of encouragement towards child adoption and childfree decisions that contribute socially to society without adhering to traditional norms.

In Indonesia, the debate about childfree is also influenced by the cultural expectation that places women as the focal point of child's upbringing and family care, referred to as State Ibuism ideology (Suryakusumah, 2011). Albertini and Brini (2020) contend that this pressure often comes from the big family and society, which perceive women's roles in the domestic sphere. When a woman decides to be childfree, this decision is

considered a direct challenge to the cultural identity of State Ibuism, which is responsible for social reproduction and family survival, as Suryakusumah (2011) mentioned. Thus, the young generation who chooses a child-free lifestyle often must face social criticism and stigma, especially in more conservative communities.

However, youngsters who support childfree decisions argue that this choice is a form of their individual freedom and identity affirmation, not merely embracing their traditional roles as wives or mothers, as stated by Ariibah and Zakiyyah (2023). According to Iverson et al. (2020), for most young women, becoming child-free is one of the ways to prioritize mental health, career, and personal aspirations without being restricted by rigid social expectations. This picture shows that the young generation in Indonesia has started to redefine women's roles in society by various and inclusive modes, including the choice to not have children as a valid decision equivalent to traditional roles (Laili et al., 2023; Kurniadi et al., 2024).

Ultimately, the childfree phenomenon among the younger generation shows a fundamental shift in cultural values that define women's roles and the concept of family. Through social media and exposure to global values, Indonesian youngsters are getting more confident in expressing their life choices and challenging traditional social norms. Even though there are some protests from older and conservative groups, the younger generation promotes the vast cultural change in viewpoints toward life choices, gender, and family.

2. Materials and Methods

This research employed a digital humanities method to analyze the netizen's responses to the child-free decision published by Gita Savitri on Instagram (Risam & Gairola, 2019). This article explores how Gita Savitri's life choice challenges conventional gender norms in Indonesia, triggering various reactions from netizens. Instagram has become a crucial platform for young generations to express their viewpoints about sensitive issues like childlessness, in which the existing social norms and cultural expectations are questioned. This study began with data collection comprising caption texts uploaded by Gita Savitri from 2020-2024. These captions were then selected to find the childfree-related content tailored to varying netizens' reactions in the comment sections. This process was crucial as Instagram is not only a space for influencers to exchange perspectives but also a place to publicly discuss controversial lifestyle choices, notably for young generations who are getting more vocal in exploring their identities outside of traditional norms and values.

AntConc application, a linguistic software, was used to analyze the most apparent keywords in @Gitasav's captions and comment sections. AntConc helped to identify the language patterns that show the emergence

of the most frequent words in caption texts. Furthermore, Voyant Tools was also utilized to explain the netizens' sentiments revealed in the comment column on Gita Savitri's Instagram account. Then, the Reception theory by Stuart Hall (1997) was employed to explore how audiences do not always passively accept information yet proceed and interpret information following their ideology. Moreover, Gender Performativity by Judith Butler (1990) was also used to explicate the childfree decision that questions the traditional gender construction in Indonesian society, which still embraces patriarchal norms.

Ultimately, the article highlights how social media functions as a space for youngsters to question traditional values and norms and to discuss child-free issues. In this digital era, young generations can express diverse views compared to previous generations, creating lively dialogues on life choices, gender roles, and individual habits. Even though the child-free decision is perceived as controversial, importantly among more conservative netizens, there is a significant shift in the ways that youngsters conceive gender roles and family in the future (Simon et al., 2019).

3. Results

This section provides the analysis results on derived data from Gita Savitri's Instagram captions published from 2020 to 2024. AntConc was employed to analyze the keywords, and Voyant Tools was used to analyze

sentiments. This research explores and elaborates how Gita Savitri's childfree decisions influence netizens' sentiments and reveals the trending word use on gender- and childfree-related topics. Through AntConc, the study identifies the patterns of word use, such as "Perempuan", "Woman", and "Women", which frequently appeared on Gita's postings on Instagram. This pattern describes public perception among young generations and the growing discourse about Gita's decision not to have children. Meanwhile, Voyant Tools was utilized to evaluate netizens' positive, neutral, and negative sentiments taken from comment sections of childfree-related postings, which highlight how childfree the public perceives decisions.

3.1. The Most Frequently Appearing Words through Keyword Analysis

This research analyzes the keywords obtained from content uploaded by Gita Savitri on her Instagram account from 2020 to 2024, focusing on the usage of gender- and child-free-related topics. The results gave information about the keywords that were explored using the AntConc application, which displays the narratives written by Gita Savitri in her captioned texts. This study employed quantitative data from Instagram content, which measured the frequency of using some keywords, such as "Perempuan", "Woman", and "Women". It paid attention to the 5-year trends of the word use (Table 1).

Table 1. The Total of Frequently Appearing Words through Keyword Analysis on AntConc

Year	Perempuan	Woman	Woman	Total	Token	Type
2020-2024	39	31	5	75	21,207	9,732
2020	8	1	0	9	6,576	2,686
2021	9	14	2	25	2,570	1,960
2022	20	14	3	37	6,121	2,664
2023	2	2	0	4	2,446	1,227
2024	0	0	0	0	1,494	3,801

Table 1 shows the total of tokens and types from the keywords pertaining to gender topics on Gita's Instagram that have faced fluctuating phases during the 5 years. Generally, there have been 75 data on the usage of gender-relevant words from 2020 to 2024, with 21,207 tokens and 9,732 types. In 2020, the total number of tokens utilized was 6,576, and 4,570 tokens followed the data in 2021. The tokens increased by 6,121 in 2022 and faced a decrease of 2,446 in 2023. There was a further decrease of 1,494 tokens in 2024.

In the year of 2022 was the year of the highest usage of gender- and child-free-related words, encompassing 37 data. Meanwhile, in 2023, the use of the words went down to 4 data. No data was captured in 2024 due to the focus shift of the contents made by Gita Savitri. In the context of the data use of "Perempuan", "Woman", and "Women", these words appeared with 9 data in 2020,

and they rose significantly in 2021 and 2022, respectively 25 and 37 data. The words dramatically fell to 4 data in 2023, which indicated that the topic was no longer the period's focus. Overall, the word "Perempuan" was used 39 times, the word "Women" was utilized 31 times, and the word "Woman" was used 5 times by Gita Savitri through her caption texts during the period of the research.

It can be interpreted that the year 2022 was the peak of the discussion on gender- and child-free-related topics on Gita Savitri's Instagram postings. This year's highest total of gender-related word use portrayed the greatest intensity of gender roles and childfree views on the Instagram captions due to Gita Savitri's statement with her husband, Paul Partohap, on their childfree decision through their YouTube account. Nonetheless, the dramatic fall happened in 2023, and no data was

found in 2024, which pointed out that Gita's shift in communication strategies or topic of interest was possible. Ultimately, it can be concluded that childfree and gender role topics attracted public interest, especially among youngsters in Indonesia in 2022. The differing total of keyword usage in diverse years explicated how the discourse was growing intensely and was changing among young netizens, notably Gita Savitri's Instagram followers toward the perception of gender roles and life choices like childfree decisions. The results have concluded that there was a significantly high interest in gender- and child-free-related topics on her Instagram account during the analysis periods.

3.2. Netizens' Sentiment Analysis through Comment Sections

The result of this research points out that phrases and words, such as "Punya Anak" (Having Children), "Aku" (I), and "Kita" (We), play a significant role in shaping public sentiments. The analysis is portrayed using Voyant Tools, which takes the sentiment analysis over the selected phrases and words (Figures 1, 2, and 3).

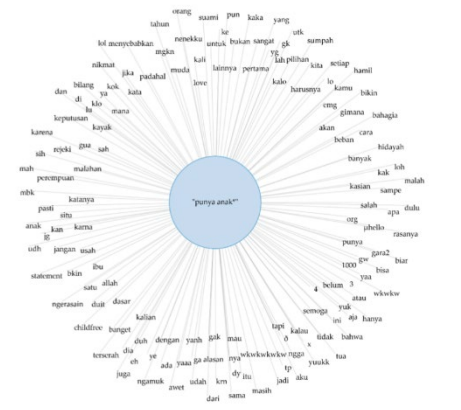


Figure 1. Netizens' Sentiment Analysis on Voyant Tools Taking Keyword "Punya Anak" (Having Children)

Figure 1 captures 94 sentences of netizens' comments about "Punya Anak" (Having Children). The analysis showed that 20 sentences (21,3%) imply positive attitudes, yet the negative-meaning sentences comprised 37 data (39,4%), and the neutral attitudes took 37 sentences (39,4%). This study's positive comments (21,3%) described encouragement, good hopes, and positive perspectives on having children. Positive data claimed that having offspring is the source of happiness, satisfaction, and sustenance. It indicated that many people have perceived the values and benefits of having children and have promoted such views.

Nevertheless, the negative comments (39,4%) were aimed at presenting criticisms about disagreement and bad attitudes toward having offspring. Some data contained mockery towards the decision not to have children, or the netizens presumed that having children

was a burden. This highlighted the friction or disagreement towards child-free decisions and negative thoughts about having children. The neutral comments (39,4%) consisted of sentences that pictured weak emotion, such as descriptively giving neutral information. The neutral data appreciated personal decisions not only for being childfree but also for having children without strong emotional evaluation. This entailed diverse understandings and acceptances from the public.

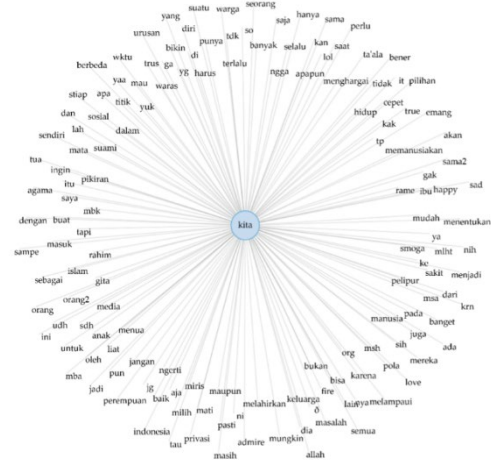


Figure 2. Netizens' Sentiment Analysis on Voyant Tools Taking Keyword "Kita" (We)

The sentiment analysis (see Figure 2) taking the keyword "Kita" (We) was obtained from 130 comments classified as positive and tolerant sentences with the highest percentage of 45%, followed by neutral sentences of 30%, and negative sentences stood at 25%. Netizens mostly commented using positive and tolerant sentences emphasizing the importance of appreciating personal decisions and freedom in choosing lifestyles, including child-free decisions. Many comments support the idea that whether a couple wants to have children or not is a personal right, and others should respect it. Further, some positive comments also indicated empathy and support toward parents with difficulty having children. This pointed out understanding and respect in varying personal situations. Neutral sentences (30%) in netizens' comments attempted to clarify, although they did not directly discuss childfree. The comments acted as more general attitudes or related to other issues without discussing childfree (20%).

Nonetheless, the emerging implication from the sentiments was individual responsibility for the future—having children. Differently, these neutral sentiments encompassed comments that emphasized the significance of acceptance over diverse standings and tolerant attitudes on someone's life decision (10%). It covered the admittance that everyone has the right to make decisions based on their beliefs and situations. Finally, the negative comments (25%) described uncertainty and frustration toward personal viewpoints

family discourses where individuals can express their identities without being limited by social stigma.

On this matter, Gita's decisions for a childfree lifestyle are a form of resistance against patriarchy, which traditionally recognizes women as "*Ibu Bangsa*" (The Mother of the Nation) who are responsible for generational continuity. Her decision becomes a significant mark on how modern women in Indonesia bravely challenge static and fixed gender aspirations and are more strongly taking over control of their bodies and lives. It portrays how today's individuals in Indonesia have experienced a shift in conceiving and viewing gender.

However, the netizens' reaction also shows that resistance against this change is still strong. Many comments reflect the inability to accept child-free choice, importantly among people who are still holding more conservative values. This rejection cannot be released from the residual ideology of the New Order regime, which is still strongly narrated in Indonesian social discourses. In the era of the New Order, the concept of State Ibuism (Suryakusumah, 2011) ensued as a form of asserting women's roles as social reproduction and national moral agents. Under this ideology, women are not only perceived as biological mothers but also ideological mothers who are responsible for the state's moral, social, and cultural stability. This concept emphasizes the main roles of women in society, which are that a mother and a wife are mandatory to support husbands and bring up children to maintain generational continuity.

The discourse of State Ibuism continues, resulting in significant influences in the post-authoritarian era, essentially on women's roles. These norms strengthen the idea that having children and social reproduction are individual responsibilities and moral obligations to the nation. Therefore, Gita's child-free decision is viewed as a threat towards moral and social stability, as well as the rejection of gender norms that have been institutionalized through the New Order's policies.

Younger generations, more exposed to global discourses on individual rights and personal freedom, are becoming bolder in questioning conservative values and norms. Social media provides them a space to articulate these ideas openly, enabling them to explicate new worldviews about more flexible and inclusive women's roles and families. The youngsters, especially most of Gita's followers on Instagram, are more open to progressive concepts, such as critically questioning the traditional reproductive norms. Moreover, they tend to support childfree choice as a part of women's rights over their life and body.

Nevertheless, this generation also has to face the social reality, which is still traditionally conservative, where State Ibuism discourse is still considered the dominant measure for most Indonesian people. On the

other hand, the shift of values among youngsters has become an essential indicator that the discourses of gender, reproduction, and women's social roles are continuously changing. Although resistance and challenges still exist, the idea that women have independence to determine whether they want to have children gains more support among young generations who perceive this decision as a form of human rights and freedom.

5. Conclusions

Social media, especially Instagram, play a significant role in opening a discussion space and exchanging thoughts among young generations to challenge and doubt traditional gender norms in Indonesia. Gita Savitri's decision to be child-free is an important symbol of resistance against patriarchy, which positions women as the ones responsible for moral and social reproduction. This life choice motivates public discussion, notably among youngsters, on women's roles in society and family. The emerging reactions toward Gita Savitri reflect the tension between modern and traditional ideology in Indonesia. The residual ideas from the New Order regime, like State Ibuism, strengthen the standing that women have a moral obligation to bring up children for the continuity of generation. This norm positions childfree decisions as a threat towards social, moral, and gender stability, which the nation has institutionalized.

However, more exposed to the global discourse on personal freedom, the young generation is becoming confident in discussing and supporting progressive ways of life, such as child-free choice. Social media offers them a platform to explore more progressive and inclusive viewpoints on women's roles. Although they still encounter resistance from more conservative communities, the shift of values among youngsters is still a signal that the discourses about gender, social reproduction, and women's roles in Indonesia continue developing. Childfree decisions amongst younger generations have become appreciated as individual freedom and human rights, which display a more significant social shift.

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Author Initials:

J.S.W. - Jordy Satria Widodo

M.M. - Muslim Muslim

D.K. - Dyah Kristyowati

D.A. - Diana Amaliasari

P.M.R.R. - Padel Muhamad Rallie Rivaldy

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