

Papuan Separatist Propaganda Abroad Poses A Digital Threat to Indonesian Government

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the forms and strategies of political propaganda conducted by Papuan separatist networks abroad to internationalize Papua issue. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach and case study design, the research draws on digital materials, media reports, and organizational documents related to separatist campaigns. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's model of qualitative analysis and refers to Jowett and O'Donnell's propaganda model of disinformation, framing, and agenda-building. These frameworks guided the identification of propaganda content, including deceptive narratives, manipulation of human rights discourses, and digital dissemination techniques. The findings reveal that separatist groups systematically frame the Papua issue through racial identity, historical injustice, and state violence, targeting foreign governments, NGOs, and international forums. This study contributes to propaganda theory and offers empirical insights into how separatist actors build legitimacy in global discourse, and provides practical implications for Indonesian government and policy practitioners in designing strategic counterpropaganda and digital diplomacy frameworks.

KEYWORDS: Digital Propaganda; Social Media, Papuan Separatist, Free Papua Movement.

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid spread of digital information has made the public increasingly vulnerable to misleading narratives—ranging from propaganda, deception, disinformation, to misinformation. In moments of high political tension, these narratives circulate far more quickly than factual corrections, creating a landscape where perception often outweighs verification. As scholars such as Svintsytskyi et al. (2023) remind us, propaganda forms only one category of fabricated information, yet it remains among the most potent because it deliberately manipulates messages to provoke specific behaviors, shape collective perception, and influence political judgment. Jowett and O'Donnell (2015) similarly emphasize that propaganda is a purposeful act of communication designed to shape cognition and direct behavior toward desired goals.

In the case of Papua, propaganda has long been intertwined with the political struggle of separatist networks. Since the early activities of the Free Papua Movement (OPM) in the 1960s (Gault-Williams 1987; Lukito et al., 2022), narratives about Papua have consistently been framed as struggles against injustice, marginalization, and racial discrimination. Although Papua's sociopolitical complexity cannot be reduced to these frames, separatist actors—particularly those based abroad—have strategically curated these narratives to resonate with global audiences. Students, diaspora activists, and advocacy groups abroad often act as intermediaries who translate local grievances into universal moral language, especially through digital platforms (Lukito et al. 2022; Saud & Ashfaq 2023).

Several organizations have become central in shaping these narratives internationally. The United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), for example, presents itself as the political representative of Papuans living outside Indonesia and has established a diplomatic presence in countries such as Vanuatu (Blades 2020; Kingsbury 2021; Wardhani & Dugis 2020). Meanwhile, the Free West Papua Campaign (FWP), founded in the United Kingdom by Benny Wenda, mobilizes support through digital advocacy, petitioning, and coordinated protests across Europe and the Pacific. The West Papua National Committee (KNPB), though based in Papua, has its messages amplified by these international networks, forming a cyclical flow of symbolic resistance (Hernawan 2018; Saud & Ashfaq 2023).

These actors consistently foreground allegations of human rights violations, discriminatory policies, and the negative impacts of Indonesian governance in Papua (Hernawan 2018). Their messaging strategy is deliberate: human rights frames appeal strongly to liberal institutions, NGOs, and international forums such as the UN General Assembly, where countries like Vanuatu have repeatedly raised Papua as a human rights concern (Hernawan 2018; Reuters 2019). Racial identity is similarly mobilized, with

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Papuans portrayed as part of the Melanesian race—often without acknowledging that Melanesian communities are also found in Maluku, Southeast Maluku, and East Nusa Tenggara (Wardhani & Dugis 2020; Kingsbury 2021). By selectively highlighting identity and historical injustice, separatist narratives gain emotional traction in global discourse.

Despite the prominence of these messages, Indonesia's counter-narrative efforts remain limited. The absence of a comprehensive counterpropaganda strategy has allowed separatist narratives to circulate with little structured response. This gap becomes significant considering that public trust—internationally and domestically—is increasingly shaped by digital discourse rather than official state communication. As Lukito et al. (2022) note, propaganda can polarize audiences and erode state credibility when left unaddressed. Moreover, issues such as the legitimacy of the 1969 Act of Free Choice, ongoing claims of human rights violations, and narratives of marginalization continue to be powerful political tools that require more than administrative rebuttals.

Against this backdrop, this study asks a central question: How do Papuan separatist networks abroad construct and disseminate propaganda to internationalize the Papua issue? Through a qualitative descriptive and case study approach, this research analyzes the structure, narrative strategies, and media channels used by key separatist organizations. The theoretical framework—drawing on Jowett and O'Donnell's propaganda model, as well as concepts of disinformation, framing, and agenda-building—provides a lens to understand how deceptive narratives and symbolic messages are crafted and amplified.

This study contributes conceptually by viewing separatist propaganda not only as oppositional communication but also as a form of “stateless diplomacy,” where non-state actors actively seek legitimacy within global institutions. Practically, the findings offer insights for policymakers and communication practitioners in designing strategic counterpropaganda and digital diplomacy frameworks that are ethically grounded, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the evolving dynamics of digital activism.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Propaganda has long been recognized as a powerful instrument in political communication, used to influence public attitudes and mobilize collective behavior. Yet its potency lies not only in the messages conveyed, but in the careful orchestration of symbols, emotions, and selective truths. Jowett and O'Donnell (2015) describe propaganda as intentional communication designed to shape perception and direct action—an approach that distinguishes it from ordinary persuasion. Svintsytskyi et al. (2023) add nuance by positioning propaganda within a broader spectrum of fake information, alongside satire, fabricated stories, and manipulated visuals. In today's digital environments, this spectrum becomes even more complex, as information moves rapidly across borders and blurs the line between narrative and reality.

When propaganda is used by separatist groups, it takes on an even more strategic role. It is no longer just about shifting public opinion; it becomes a means of redefining political legitimacy. Several scholars note that propaganda linked to separatist movements can polarize societies, weaken trust in state institutions, and internationalize domestic disputes (Lukito et al. 2022). Papua is a clear example of this dynamic. Over the decades, the issue has evolved from a localized political struggle into a transnational discourse shaped by digital activism, historical grievances, and identity politics.

A defining feature of Papuan separatist propaganda is its reliance on morally resonant themes. Human rights violations, for instance, form one of the most recurring frames. These narratives depict Papua as a site of chronic state violence and structural oppression (Hernawan 2018). Because human rights discourse carries significant weight in global forums, it easily travels into international debates—including sessions of the UN General Assembly, where Papua has been raised repeatedly by sympathetic states (Reuters 2019). Another enduring narrative concerns the alleged illegitimacy of the 1969 Act of Free Choice, which separatist networks consistently portray as fraudulent or coercive (Lukito et al. 2022). Together, these themes help position Papua as a prolonged, unresolved case of political injustice.

Identity is another powerful tool in separatist communication. Wardhani and Dugis (2020) observe that the claim to Melanesian identity is often emphasized to distinguish Papuans from other Indonesian groups. This framing is politically effective, especially among Melanesian countries in the Pacific. However, as Kingsbury (2021) notes, Melanesian heritage also exists in other Indonesian provinces such as Maluku and East Nusa Tenggara—a complexity that separatist advocates rarely acknowledge because it weakens the narrative of exclusive Papuan distinctiveness. Even so, identity-based narratives remain influential because they tap into broader discourses of indigeneity and postcolonial resistance.

Beyond identity and historical grievances, separatist messaging also highlights issues of inequality, discrimination, and marginalization. Akhmad and Dir (2022), for example, illustrate how the Papua conflict is framed differently by the Indonesian government and the international community, with human rights becoming a crucial point of contestation. Jaehn (2022) shows how minority groups often use performances of identity and victimhood to gain recognition—a pattern mirrored in Papuan separatist advocacy. These narratives resonate globally because they align with the concerns of NGOs, human rights observers, and political movements that are sensitive to indigenous struggles.

The theoretical foundations of this study build on these insights. Jowett and O'Donnell's (2015) propaganda model provides the structural lens, while concepts such as disinformation, framing, and agenda-building help explain how messages are constructed and amplified. More recent scholarship suggests that modern propaganda increasingly resembles symbolic

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diplomacy—an effort by non-state actors to pursue political objectives by shaping meanings and mobilizing transnational networks (Communist et al. 2019; Rogers et al. 2021). In this sense, propaganda becomes a tool not only for communication, but for seeking recognition and legitimacy in the global arena.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a case study design to examine how Papuan separatist networks conduct propaganda campaigns abroad. The unit of analysis focuses on the communication strategies, content, and symbolic actions of key separatist organizations—namely the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), Free West Papua (FWP), and the West Papua National Committee (KNPB)—in various international settings.

The primary data consist of digital materials and public documents, including separatist websites (e.g., www.ulmwp.org), social media content (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube), and transcripts or summaries of public interventions during international forums such as the UN General Assembly, the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). These data were collected through digital observation and document analysis between January and April 2024.

This four-month period was selected based on preliminary monitoring results from media reports that indicated heightened online activity and international advocacy by Papuan separatist groups in the aftermath of December 1, 2023—recognized by the movement as “Papuan Independence Day.” Content amplification typically peaks during the weeks surrounding this symbolic date, and narratives often continue to circulate intensively in early months of the following year, particularly in digital platforms and diplomatic channels. While a longer data collection period (e.g., one year) could yield broader patterns, this focused duration was considered adequate to capture the peak intensity of symbolic and strategic propaganda narratives during that cycle.

Selection focused on content that explicitly framed the Papua issue using political, racial, or human rights narratives, especially those disseminated around symbolic dates such as December 1. In this context, the inclusion of January–April 2024 data allows the study to capture the propagation phase of December-based campaigns, which often extend their momentum into the first quarter of the following year.

Papuan separatist movements often treat December 1 as a launchpad for broader international campaigns, which then ripple into early-year diplomatic lobbying—e.g., UNHRC sessions in March, and MSG/PIF preparatory meetings. This makes Q1 a crucial period for capturing transnational symbolic mobilization.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes three concurrent steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data were first filtered and categorized based on recurring themes such as state violence, racial identity, colonial framing, and international solidarity. Visual and textual materials were organized thematically and traced across platforms to identify patterns of amplification. The analysis was informed by Jowett and O'Donnell's (2015) propaganda framework to identify the intent, structure, and media of message construction, and by Castells' (2013) concept of network society to understand how digital connectivity enables symbolic resistance across borders.

Findings were presented through descriptive narrative supported by selected examples of propaganda practices, such as the ceremonial hoisting of the Morning Star flag at Indonesian consular offices abroad, and screenshots or metadata from social media campaigns. The primary social media platforms used in these campaigns included Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and Instagram. Notable accounts identified were “Free West Papua Campaign” and “ULMWP Roadmap for West Papua” on Facebook, @FreeWestPapua on X, and the official YouTube channel of ULMWP. Facebook appeared to be the most widely used platform, likely due to its combination of large user base, public page structure, and the ease of sharing visual materials such as protest posters and flag-raising videos.

To understand the strategic dissemination of propaganda content, Figure 1 presents the proportional use of social media platforms by separatist networks. This breakdown reflects platform preference based on observed activity levels and content dissemination patterns during the research period.

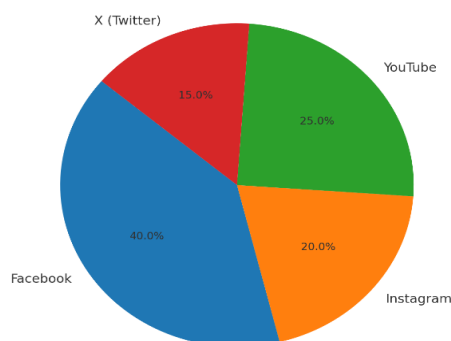


Figure 1: Social Media Platform Usage Trends by Papuan Separatist Networks Jan–Apr 2024

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Facebook dominates the digital outreach strategy, likely due to its high user base, public sharing features, and visual storytelling capacity. YouTube and Instagram are used for visual amplification, while X (formerly Twitter) functions more as a real-time advocacy and campaign tool, especially during symbolic events or international forums.

The targeted audience of these messages consists primarily of international human rights activists, regional solidarity movements in Melanesian countries, student activist networks, and Western liberal publics who are sensitive to racial and indigenous rights issues.

Data extraction was conducted manually through structured keyword monitoring and hashtag tracking between January and April 2024. The process followed several stages: (1) identifying official and affiliated accounts of ULMWP, FWP, and KNPB; (2) collecting and capturing posts that contained political slogans, visual protests, and symbolic messaging; (3) categorizing posts based on recurring themes such as human rights, racial injustice, and state violence; and (4) organizing metadata such as post dates, captions, and share patterns to map narrative diffusion.

While the study does not quantify reach or virality, it highlights the strategic messaging patterns and institutional targets of the propaganda.

Table 1. Types of Data Used in the Study

Data type	Source	Collection method	Use in analysis
Social media content	Facebook (<i>Komite Nasional Papua Barat, Free West Papua Campaign, ULMWP Roadmap for West Papua</i>), X/Twitter (@FreeWestPapua), YouTube (<i>ULMWP Official Channel</i>), Instagram (@freewestpapuacampaign, @ulmwp_official)	Manual collection, observation	Thematic coding, message structure analysis
Official separatist sites	www.ulmwp.org	Website monitoring	Actor positioning, political narrative tracing
International forum records	UNGA, MSG, PIF meetings (cited in news and reports)	Document analysis	Timeline mapping, issue amplification
Media coverage	Online news outlets (SBS, Lowy Institute)	Document review	Event documentation, framing comparison

Table 1 summarizes the types of data utilized in this study, along with their sources, methods of collection, and respective functions in the analytical process. The data primarily consist of digital content and public documentation produced or circulated by Papuan separatist groups through various platforms.

The first category includes social media content from Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube channels affiliated with Free West Papua and ULMWP. The specific accounts analyzed were *Free West Papua Campaign* and *ULMWP Roadmap for West Papua* on Facebook, @FreeWestPapua on X (formerly Twitter), the YouTube channel “ULMWP Official,” and Instagram accounts such as @freewestpapuacampaign and @ulmwp_official. These accounts were selected because they represent the official digital communication channels of the separatist networks, frequently updated with political statements, protest visuals, and mobilization calls directed toward international audiences.

Data were extracted manually between January and April 2024 using a multi-step process: (1) identifying verified or consistently used separatist accounts through web searches and cross-referencing with campaign websites; (2) collecting content using specific keywords (e.g., “Free West Papua,” “Papuan genocide,” “ULMWP diplomacy”) and campaign hashtags (e.g., #FreeWestPapua, #PapuanLivesMatter); (3) capturing and organizing posts that included symbolic content, such as Morning Star flags, protest visuals, and references to December 1 or UN forums; and (4) categorizing these data into thematic clusters based on recurring narratives and media strategies. These posts were manually collected through keyword monitoring and observation of official campaign hashtags. They were used to identify recurring propaganda themes, narrative frames, and symbolic references.

The second category refers to content extracted from separatist websites, particularly www.ulmwp.org, which serves as a central hub for statements, press materials, and international appeals. This website was selected because it is the official digital platform of the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), recognized and frequently cited by both separatist networks and international sympathizers. It consolidates ULMWP’s public diplomacy content—including declarations, diplomatic correspondence, event announcements, and UN-related advocacy—making it a primary source for tracking the movement’s official narrative and framing strategy.

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Data collection from the website was conducted manually through regular visits to each section of the site (e.g., News, Statements, Campaigns) during the research period (January–April 2024). Relevant materials were downloaded or archived using web capture tools and categorized based on their publication date, thematic focus (e.g., human rights, decolonization, Melanesian identity), and rhetorical structure. Priority was given to content released around symbolic moments, such as December 1 or UN sessions, to capture temporal spikes in propaganda activity. These were analyzed to understand how separatist actors structure political messaging and coordinate international outreach.

The third category consists of publicly available documents and reports referencing Papuan separatist activity in international forums such as the UN General Assembly, the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), and the Pacific Island Forum (PIF). Documents included official speeches delivered at the UNGA (e.g., statements by Vanuatu in 2018, 2019, and 2020), MSG communiqués, human rights statements from the PIF, and position papers circulated by ULMWP. These documents were accessed from official websites such as un.org, msgsec.info, pacificislandsforum.org, as well as separatist platforms like ulmwp.org.

Screening was conducted by focusing on texts that mentioned Papua, West Papua, Indonesia, or human rights violations, and those delivered between 2018 and 2024 to capture a recent and relevant diplomatic timeline. Each document was classified based on the issuer: state actor (e.g., Vanuatu, Solomon Islands) or stateless actor (e.g., ULMWP, Free West Papua Campaign). Stateless actors typically issued unofficial position papers, petitions, or open letters, while state actors provided formal statements at multilateral events. These records helped map key diplomatic moments and patterns of issue amplification across multilateral venues.

The study examined news coverage from international and regional media outlets to contextualize key events and verify information. These news sources provided temporal markers and additional perspectives that were triangulated with primary materials. The combination of these data sources allowed the researcher to trace propaganda strategies both thematically and chronologically, while situating them within broader digital and diplomatic ecosystems.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the propaganda ecosystem constructed by Papuan separatist groups is not merely top-down or diaspora-driven, but instead forms an intertwined network between domestic activists and international actors. Through republication, narrative alignment, and symbolic reinforcement, content produced at the grassroots level—such as by and the West Papua National Committee (KNPB)—is reframed and projected onto global stages. This dynamic exemplifies a bottom-up symbolic framing strategy, where local experiences of marginalization are translated into universal human rights claims to garner broader legitimacy. Understanding this interconnectedness is crucial for unpacking how separatist propaganda operates across digital, geographical, and institutional boundaries.

The findings also show that the main actors behind the international propaganda campaigns related to Papua are the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka/OPM) and its global affiliates, particularly the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), Free West Papua (FWP), and the West Papua National Committee (KNPB). These actors strategically utilize both offline demonstrations and digital platforms to disseminate messages that delegitimize the Indonesian government and promote international sympathy for Papuan separatism.

Through content analysis of separatist websites (e.g., www.ulmwp.org), social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube), and visual documentation of protest events, this study identifies three dominant themes in the propaganda narratives. The website www.ulmwp.org was selected as it serves as the central and official platform of the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP). It publishes key statements, campaign updates, diplomatic appeals, and event documentation, making it a primary source to trace official framing and symbolic messaging strategies used by the movement.

Social media content was drawn from accounts actively managed by separatist actors, including the *Free West Papua Campaign* and *ULMWP Roadmap for West Papua* on Facebook, @FreeWestPapua on X (formerly Twitter), the “ULMWP Official” YouTube channel, and Instagram accounts such as @freewestpauacampaign and @ulmwp_official. These accounts were chosen for their high engagement, regular updates, and consistent alignment with separatist narratives. Data collection was conducted manually during January–April 2024 using a structured keyword-based approach (e.g., “Papuan genocide,” “Free West Papua,” “ULMWP UN speech”) and by tracking prominent hashtags such as #FreeWestPapua and #PapuanLivesMatter. Posts were archived, thematically coded, and grouped based on visual symbols, discourse framing, and narrative intent.

First, the issue of human rights violations allegedly committed by Indonesian security forces in Papua is consistently highlighted to construct a narrative of state brutality. Second, Indonesian government policies and their implementation in Papua are framed as unjust, colonial, and discriminatory. Third, the everyday suffering and marginalization experienced by indigenous Papuans (Orang Asli Papua, OAP) are presented as structural outcomes of inequality and state neglect. These three issues—human rights violations, discriminatory state policy, and marginalization of OAP—are persistently emphasized in separatist propaganda because they represent universally resonant frames. Human rights discourse appeals to liberal international norms, while framing Indonesian policies as colonial invokes anti-imperialist solidarity, and highlighting OAP marginalization taps into

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global concerns around racial and indigenous justice. These narratives are emotionally charged, morally framed, and easily translatable into international advocacy language, which makes them effective in mobilizing sympathy and support.

To further illustrate the recurring themes identified in the propaganda narratives disseminated by Papuan separatist networks, Figure 2 below categorizes the dominant frames based on qualitative coding of their digital content. These include human rights violations, political injustice, and marginalization of indigenous Papuans.

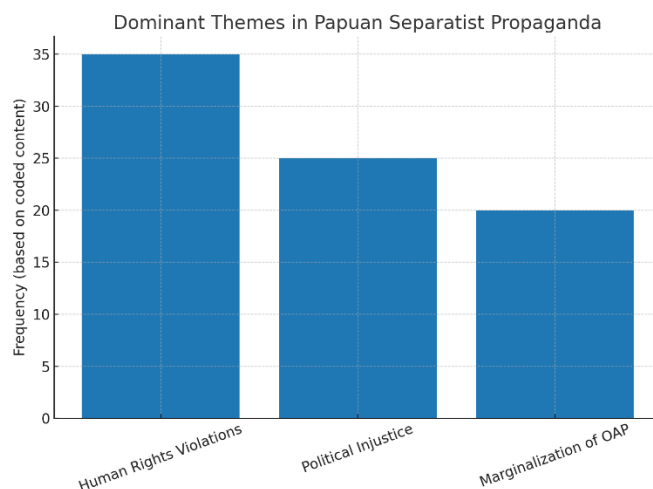


Figure 2: Dominant Propaganda Themes Based on Qualitative Coding Jan–Apr 2024

As shown in the figure above, human rights violations emerged as the most frequently emphasized theme, serving as a powerful rhetorical device to engage global liberal audiences. This was followed by political injustice and narratives of systemic marginalization of Orang Asli Papua (OAP), which were often framed in emotionally compelling and morally charged terms.

Beyond these core issues, other propaganda narratives include the legitimacy of the 1969 Act of Free Choice (referred to by separatists as a fraudulent referendum), the militarization of Papua, and environmental degradation caused by extractive industries such as Freeport. These additional themes, while less consistently foregrounded, often re-emerge during symbolic moments—such as the commemoration of December 1 (claimed as Papuan Independence Day), UN Human Rights Council sessions, or incidents of violence involving security forces.

The target audiences of these messages include international human rights organizations, Melanesian cultural allies (e.g., Vanuatu, Solomon Islands), student activist groups in the Pacific and Europe, Western liberal publics, and digital communities engaged in indigenous and postcolonial advocacy. These narratives are amplified in alignment with international political calendars, such as the UNGA or MSG annual meetings, allowing propaganda to piggyback on global forums where state legitimacy and human rights are under scrutiny.

These messages are designed to evoke emotional responses from global audiences and to build international legitimacy for the separatist movement. The human rights narrative appeals directly to international norms and moral obligations, portraying the Indonesian state as repressive and violent—particularly toward peaceful protesters and indigenous civilians. Criticism of government policies—such as special autonomy or transmigration—is framed as evidence of continued colonial control, which resonates with postcolonial solidarity movements. Meanwhile, depictions of marginalization and inequality faced by Orang Asli Papua (OAP) are aligned with global discourses on racial injustice and indigenous resistance. Together, these frames are not only emotionally compelling but also strategically designed to fit the agenda of international NGOs, UN mechanisms, and activist networks across the Pacific and the Global North.

In addition to content originally produced by diaspora-based organizations such as ULMWP and FWP, this study also observed that content created by domestic groups—particularly the West Papua National Committee (KNPB)—is frequently republished or amplified by international separatist networks. Protest footage, local demonstrations, and grassroots narratives posted on KNPB's social media accounts are often re-shared by diaspora platforms such as *Free West Papua Campaign* and *ULMWP Roadmap*. This republication strategy blurs the boundary between domestic activism and international advocacy, effectively integrating local symbolic resistance into global propaganda flows.

Besides digital propaganda carried out through website and social media as explained above, propaganda activities are also carried out through direct (offline) action which commonly in the forms of orations and demonstrations, particularly in front of Indonesian Representative Offices abroad such as Indonesian embassies (KBRI) or consulate general (KJRI). Symbolic acts such as the hoisting of the Morning Star flag serve as powerful visual protest tools. Documented examples include:

- a) January 6, 2017: Trespassing and flag-raising at the Indonesian Consulate General in Melbourne. This incident involved several Papuan sympathizers who breached the outer perimeter of the consulate and raised the Morning Star flag as a

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symbolic act of defiance. The action appeared to be well-organized and timed to coincide with the post-New Year diplomatic lull, during which security presence was minimal. The Indonesian Consulate had not anticipated such a direct provocation, leading to a temporary lapse in perimeter control. The lack of preventive security measures at the time exposed the vulnerability of Indonesian diplomatic premises abroad to low-scale but high-symbolism separatist actions.

- b) December 1, 2020: A similar action by five Papuan sympathizers at the same location. The activists entered the front courtyard of the Indonesian Consulate General in Melbourne and raised the Morning Star flag to commemorate what they regard as Papua's Independence Day. The incident demonstrated that security vulnerabilities identified in 2017 had not been fully addressed. Moreover, December 1 is a predictable symbolic date that is annually used by Papuan networks to conduct coordinated global actions. KJRI Melbourne has consistently been targeted due to the sizable Papuan diaspora in the city, the active presence of pro-Papua student organizations at local universities, and the relatively permissive civic space in Australia that allows peaceful protest under legal protection. These local factors make Melbourne a strategic site for high-visibility symbolic protest against Indonesian sovereignty over Papua.

Another prominent channel is diplomatic lobbying through regional and international forums. These include:

- a) Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) and Pacific Island Forum (PIF) sessions, where Papua is raised as a regional concern. For example, during the 21st MSG Leaders' Summit held in Port Vila, Vanuatu, in July 2023, the issue of human rights in West Papua was brought up by Vanuatu Prime Minister Ishmael Kalsakau. Similar expressions of concern have been echoed in past MSG meetings, especially by Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. The MSG has historically been a key regional bloc leveraged by Papuan separatist networks due to its cultural and ethnic alignment with Melanesian identity, which ULMWP uses to frame its struggle as part of pan-Melanesian solidarity. ULMWP was granted observer status in the MSG in 2015, which significantly boosted its legitimacy. However, the group's full membership has been opposed by Indonesia and some MSG members, such as Papua New Guinea and Fiji, who support Indonesian territorial integrity. This has led to MSG adopting a cautious and divided stance, often expressing concern about human rights in Papua without endorsing independence.
- b) UN General Assembly and UN Human Rights Council, where delegations from countries such as Vanuatu frequently voice concerns over human rights in Papua:
- 1) On 2 October 2018, the Vanuatu delegation addressed the UN General Assembly regarding Papua.
 - 2) On 24 September 2019 and 25 September 2020, similar statements were made at the same forum by the Vanuatu Foreign Minister and Permanent Representative to the UN, reiterating calls for international investigation into alleged abuses in Papua.

The UNGA is strategically utilized by Papuan sympathizer states because it provides a high-profile, globally televised stage where state actors can deliver political statements under the protection of diplomatic immunity. It is one of the few multilateral forums where even small nations have equal opportunity to voice issues of global or regional concern, regardless of geopolitical weight. Statements delivered during the General Debate are often framed in normative language—justice, decolonization, indigenous rights—that aligns with separatist narratives.

Vanuatu has emerged as the most vocal proponent of the Papuan cause at the UN due to a combination of ideological, cultural, and geopolitical factors. As a Melanesian nation with historical experience of colonization and decolonization, Vanuatu sees the Papua issue as part of a broader anti-colonial solidarity framework. Domestically, support for Papuan independence also garners political legitimacy among certain constituencies. Moreover, Vanuatu has developed sustained diplomatic ties with ULMWP leaders, even allowing them to open a representative office in Port Vila. These factors position Vanuatu as the leading diplomatic mouthpiece of Papuan separatist propaganda within the UN system.

Digital platforms play a central role in the spread of these narratives. Propaganda is distributed through dedicated Facebook pages (*Free West Papua*, *Free West Papua Campaign News*, *West Papua Army*, *ULMWP Roadmap for Free West Papua*), YouTube channels (e.g., *ulmwp*), and the official separatist website www.ulmwp.org. These platforms host campaign posters, political statements, testimonies, and event announcements, allowing messages to circulate widely and persistently.

The findings also suggest that counterpropaganda efforts must take into account the constructed symbolic realities that separatist groups produce. As Cull et al. (2017) note, “counterpropaganda must grapple with the fact that sometimes, reality itself must be reframed to effectively counter disinformation.” Historical examples, such as Israel's campaign to counter anti-Israel propaganda through conferences, petitions, and publications, illustrate how coordinated counter-narratives can shape international perception (Alan & Goldberg 2022).

Finally, it is important to recognize that not all propaganda is inherently negative. When oriented toward public enlightenment, propaganda can serve constructive functions. Zhu and Fu (2022) highlight that in the digital era, propaganda can be used to communicate beneficial policies, promote national ideologies, and transmit messages that strengthen democratic resilience. In the context of Papua, this means that state responses must move beyond denial or defensive diplomacy toward a proactive, ethical, and strategic communication model.

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The Construction of Papuan Separatist Propaganda

The findings of this study reveal how Papuan separatist propaganda abroad is constructed and disseminated through digital platforms and symbolic (direct) actions that emphasize three major narrative frames: human rights violations, political injustice, and racial differentiation. These narratives are deliberately selected to evoke emotional responses, particularly from Western audiences that are more sensitive to discourses of human rights, minority marginalization, and postcolonial identity struggles.

This aligns with the theoretical proposition by Jowett and O'Donnell (2015), who assert that propaganda is not merely a tool of information dissemination but a complex communicative strategy that aims to shape perception and mobilize action through emotionally resonant symbols and selective framing. In the case of Papua, propaganda materials are designed to portray the Indonesian state as repressive and militaristic, while positioning Papuans as oppressed indigenous people struggling for dignity and independence. This dichotomous framing simplifies a complex socio-political issue into a moral binary, which gains strong traction in liberal international networks.

Yet, the realities on the ground are far more nuanced. While human rights concerns are legitimate and must not be dismissed, many acts of violence are reciprocal in nature, emerging from armed conflict between separatist factions and state forces. The separatist claim to Melanesian identity, while culturally grounded, is often framed as exclusive to Papua, overlooking the shared ethnocultural heritage in provinces such as Maluku, Nusa Tenggara Timur, and parts of Southeast Sulawesi. Wardhani and Dugis (2020) note that this selective identity framing is part of a larger symbolic campaign to gain global solidarity, often ignoring internal diversity and the dynamics of development in Eastern Indonesia.

In contrast, Papuan separatist groups operate in a decentralized yet coordinated network across multiple countries. The Free West Papua movement has an active presence in Australia, the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) operates in the United Kingdom and Germany, and the West Papua National Committee (KNPB) leverages online activism from the United States. These movements effectively utilize what Castells (2013) calls the “network society,” where communication power lies not in central institutions but in distributed digital nodes that can amplify messages across borders.

To confront such symbolic campaigns, states must move beyond legalistic rebuttals and develop what Cull (2019) refers to as “dialogic public diplomacy” — a two-way communication approach that listens, engages, and reshapes global perceptions. The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not yet institutionalized such an approach. Its existing responses tend to be top-down, crisis-driven, and detached from the everyday flows of transnational digital activism. This vacuum leaves space for separatist actors to dominate the narrative uncontested in international discourse.

The study therefore emphasizes the importance of applying propaganda analysis frameworks not just to describe separatist activity, but to inform state responses. For example, using Jowett and O'Donnell's five-part model—covering the propagandist, structure, content, audience, and effects—can help policymakers craft more targeted and context-sensitive strategies. Moreover, Indonesia could learn from other states that have faced similar challenges. Israel's response to anti-Israel campaigns, for instance, included coordinated use of civil society coalitions, social media storytelling, and symbolic participation in multilateral forums (Alan & Goldberg 2022).

In sum, addressing separatist propaganda in the digital era requires more than fact-checking or diplomatic protest. It demands a sustained narrative strategy rooted in cultural competence, historical empathy, and public engagement. Propaganda thrives in narrative vacuums—and unless the Indonesian government fills that vacuum with compelling, credible, and participatory counter-narratives, the separatist movement will continue to gain legitimacy in international arenas.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the internationalization of the Papua issue is not a spontaneous or isolated phenomenon, but the result of deliberate communication strategies carried out by Papuan separatist networks abroad. Their messages often emotional, symbolic, and grounded in narratives of human rights, racial identity, and political injustice. Those travel easily across digital platforms and find resonance among global audiences who are sensitive to indigenous and postcolonial struggles. Through these narratives, groups such as ULMWP, FWP, and KNPB have constructed an alternative political storyline about Papua that competes directly with the Indonesian state's official account.

What becomes clear from this research is that separatist actors rely on a decentralized yet highly coordinated communication ecosystem. Facebook pages, YouTube channels, Instagram accounts, and websites like www.ulmwp.org.

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