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From TikTok Comments to an AI-Assisted Political Earworm: Reconstructing "My Little Bolu Ketan"

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Abstract
This study reconstructs the circulation of "My Little Bolu Ketan," also known through the wordplay "MBG–Mas Bahlil Ganteng," as a TikTok-centred case of comment-to-song production, AI-assisted popular culture, creator amplification, and politically ambiguous humour. Using exploratory qualitative digital-trace reconstruction with a netnographic orientation, the study examines an audit corpus comprising the creator profile and exact TikTok sound object, embedded source-post metadata, twelve TikTok-origin comment fragments, a high-reach reaction trace, a public-figure response, and seven contemporaneous records published between 25 and 30 May 2026. The analysis identifies hyperbolic praise, culinary and phonetic wordplay, "kanda–dinda" role-play, affective ambivalence, and intertextual reference as the main discursive resources transformed into the audio. The sound's visibility expanded through creator reaction, while its political meaning remained unstable across affection, ridicule, satire, and image promotion. The study also finds that same-day reports produced sharply different sound-reuse counts, demonstrating the need to preserve platform metrics as dated, source-specific snapshots. The paper contributes a transparent method for studying unstable TikTok phenomena and shows how participatory culture, AI-assisted media production, affective circulation, and vernacular political communication intersect in algorithmic societies.

Keywords:
AI-assisted music; algorithmic visibility; meme audio; participatory culture; TikTok

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INTRODUCTION

Short-video platforms have turned sound into a portable communication resource. A phrase that begins as a joke, comment, or spoken fragment can be detached from its original setting, attached to a reusable sound object, and circulated through videos that bear little visual relationship to one another. This circulation is not simply a matter of exposure. Users recognise the sound, perform their familiarity with it, and place it into new personal, comic, or public contexts.

The Indonesian audio "My Little Bolu Ketan" offers a revealing case. The track incorporates the acronym "MBG," recoded as "Mas Bahlil Ganteng," and assembles humorous comments associated with public discussion of Bahlil Lahadalia. Contemporary records trace the TikTok upload to @vokaliz_netizen on 29 April 2026, with the caption "kanda suka Dinda punya gaya" (Berita Hari Ini, 2026). An embedded version of the post links to the TikTok sound object "Kanda My little Bolu Ketan" and displays hashtags referring to Bahlil, a minister, public officials, and the For You Page (Alvirtyantoro, 2026).

The case is distinctive because audience language is not merely quoted or reposted; it is

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musicalised. Twelve comments attributed to the source TikTok post were curated into a song containing praise, absurd wordplay, romantic role-play, and references to earlier public speech. Contemporary coverage consistently described the track as produced with AI or digital vocal processing, although the exact generative system and degree of human editing were not independently verified (Berita Hari Ini, 2026; Priwiratu, 2026; Subekti, 2026). The term AI-assisted is therefore used throughout this paper as a cautious provenance label rather than a forensic claim of fully automated authorship.

The trend also reveals how visibility shifts from source content to reaction content. A reaction by Sania Leonardo, associated with @panggilakubambang, was reported on 30 May to have reached 55.6 million views and 4.2 million likes, while the creator's source post was reported in the same record at 17.8 million views and 1.1 million likes (Lentera Today, 2026). The response became part of the trend's recognisable form: laughing at the song, warning others not to memorise it, and publicly performing the experience of an unwanted earworm.

At the same time, the audio's political meaning was unsettled. Hyperbolic compliments could be read as sincere affection, teasing, satire, or ridicule. Bahlil's public response treated the trend as creative expression, accepted criticism as a risk of public office, and sought to meet the creator (Hutabarat, 2026). This movement from bottom-up humour to public-figure acknowledgement demonstrates how institutional actors can absorb meme visibility without controlling its original ambiguity.

This study asks: (1) What discursive patterns in the source comments made them suitable for transformation into a meme audio? (2) What observable digital traces explain the audio's expansion from source post to mass-recognisable reaction object? and (3) How did affective and political ambiguity shape the trend's circulation and institutional uptake?

Literature Review

TikTok Sound Infrastructure and Algorithmic Visibility

TikTok does not operate only as a feed of finished videos. Its interface links posts through reusable sounds, hashtags, creator interactions, and recommendation systems. TikTok states that content recommendations depend on user interactions, content information, and user information, with the relative importance of these factors changing over time (TikTok, n.d.-a). Sound therefore functions as both cultural material and platform metadata: it provides a recognisable hook while connecting otherwise unrelated videos.

The opacity of recommendation systems requires analytical restraint. Algorithms shape what becomes perceptible, but users and researchers cannot infer causal ranking rules from a small public corpus (Bucher, 2018). In this paper, algorithmic visibility refers only to observable traces of recommendation-driven circulation: recurring sound reuse, high-reach reactions, FYP language, and public accounts of repeated exposure. It does not mean that the study has reverse-engineered TikTok's algorithm.

Zulli and Zulli (2022) describe TikTok participation as technological mimesis: platform tools and conventions encourage users to reproduce recognisable forms while changing the performer, setting, caption, or visual narrative. A sound can thus remain stable while its meaning is continually rewritten.

Participatory Culture and Comment-to-Media Transformation

Memes are groups of related digital items whose recognisability depends on imitation and transformation rather than exact duplication (Shifman, 2014). Jenkins et al. (2013) similarly

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understand spreadability as the movement of media through users' meaningful acts of circulation and repurposing. These frameworks usually begin with an existing media object. "My Little Bolu Ketan" adds an earlier stage: comments are selected from audience discourse and converted into the object that later becomes spreadable.

This process creates a recursive participation chain. Public speech generates comments; comments are curated into lyrics; the lyrics become a sound; creators react to and reuse the sound; and those reactions generate more commentary. Authorship is distributed across comment writers, the curator, the AI-assisted production process, reacting creators, and institutional respondents. The resulting cultural object is therefore collaborative even when a single account publishes the source post.

Affect, AI-Assisted Culture, and Political Polysemy

Viral audio is frequently organised around affective ambivalence. A sound can be amusing and irritating, catchy and embarrassing, or overexposed and still pleasurable. Papacharissi's (2015) affective publics framework explains how networked participation can cohere around shared intensity rather than stable agreement. Public performances of laughter, annoyance, and involuntary memorisation make saturation itself socially visible.

TikTok defines AI-generated content as audio, images, or video generated or modified by artificial intelligence and encourages or requires labels in specified circumstances (TikTok, n.d.-b). In vernacular production, however, exact provenance is often uncertain. Claims about tools such as Suno may circulate without project files or creator disclosure. Methodologically, the appropriate response is to distinguish a reported AI production discourse from independently verified technical authorship.

Political memes are also polysemic. Hyperbolic praise may function as sincere support, parody, ridicule, or strategic ambiguity. Wiggins (2019) emphasises the intertextual and discursive character of memes, while Nissenbaum and Shifman (2017) show that cultural meaning is contested across communities. An institution can reframe a joke as appreciation, but this does not erase oppositional or ironic readings embedded in the same text.

METHOD

Research Design

The study uses exploratory qualitative digital-trace reconstruction with a netnographic orientation. Digital-trace reconstruction is appropriate when a platform object is publicly visible but unstable: posts may be deleted, links may be blocked from web indexing, search results are personalised, and engagement counters change. Rather than pretending that these limitations do not exist, the method reconstructs a documented sequence from direct platform links, embedded metadata, contemporaneous transcriptions, dated metric snapshots, and public responses.

The observation window begins with the reported source upload on 29 April 2026 and ends with institutional uptake in early June 2026. A final link and reference audit was conducted on 18 July 2026. The study is a bounded case reconstruction; it does not estimate the prevalence of interpretations among all TikTok users.

Corpus and Evidence Hierarchy

The corpus was organised into five evidence blocks. The hierarchy gives priority to direct platform objects, followed by embedded or same-creator traces, contemporaneous

transcriptions, and dated journalistic snapshots. Media articles were not treated as interchangeable proof: each retained its publication date and specific claim.

Table 1. Audit corpus and evidence status

Block	Evidence material and TikTok connection	Validation status	Analytical use
D1	Creator profile, embedded source-post metadata, and exact sound page; direct profile and sound object with embedded caption, hashtags, and attribution **Open data:** Creator profile; TikTok sound page	Highest available platform trace; direct post ID was not publicly retrievable	Source identity, caption, sound infrastructure, and upload context
D2	Twelve comment fragments coded K1–K12 and explicitly attributed to the original @vokaliz_netizen TikTok post **Open data:** Contemporaneous comment transcription	Recovered through a contemporaneous transcription dated 29 May 2026	Discursive coding of the comment-to-song raw material
D3	High-reach reaction by Sania Leonardo / @panggilakubambang; same reaction publicly mirrored on Instagram **Open data:** Sania Leonardo TikTok profile; Public reaction mirror	Caption and dated metric snapshot triangulated across platform and media records	Creator amplification and affective performance
D4	Bahlil response circulated through Raffi Ahmad's account after wider circulation of the TikTok-origin song **Open data:** Bahlil response report; Contemporaneous circulation report	Public transcript and reposted video traces	Institutional uptake and political reframing
D5	Four dated metric snapshots covering the original post, sound reuse, and reaction reach, 25–30 May 2026 **Open data:** Medcom snapshot; IDN Times snapshot; Lentera Today snapshot	Source-specific; contradictory values preserved rather than averaged	Scale, temporal visibility, and metric instability

Source: Authors' audit corpus (2026).

Note. Validation refers to traceability rather than representativeness of the entire platform. Direct platform traces are linked below, while all retrieval sources are listed in the reference list. Direct data links: @vokaliz_netizen creator profile; exact TikTok sound object; @panggilakubambang reaction profile; and same-reaction mirror dated 22 May 2026.

Data Collection and Coding

For D1, the study recorded the creator handle, caption, visible hashtags, sound title, and direct sound URL. For D2, ordinary users were anonymised as K1–K12. The comments were

coded using an overlapping deductive–inductive scheme: hyperbolic praise or affection, culinary or phonetic wordplay, relational role-play, affective ambivalence or repair, and intertextual reference. Overlapping coding was permitted because a single fragment could perform several functions.

For D3–D5, the study recorded the publication or capture date, reported views, likes, comments, or sound uses, the identity of the source, and the meaning attached to the metric. Metrics were not combined into a single total. A thematic claim was retained only when it was supported by either a direct platform trace or at least two independent records. Formal intercoder reliability was not calculated; instead, an explicit evidence-to-claim matrix was used to improve auditability.

Qualitative content analysis was used to connect textual patterns with the broader circulation sequence (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2012). The analysis proceeded from comment form, to musicalisation, to creator amplification, affective response, and institutional uptake.

Validity, Ethics, and Limits of Access

Two validity rules were applied. First, AI authorship was described as reported or AI-assisted because the production files and exact software were unavailable. Second, engagement values were treated as dated snapshots. When sources conflicted, the disagreement was retained as data rather than resolved by selecting the larger number.

The study uses public material and minimisizes identification of ordinary users. Usernames attached to source comments are omitted, while public creators and officials are named because their public roles are analytically necessary. Only brief excerpts needed for analysis are reproduced, consistent with contextual integrity and harm minimization in internet research (Association of Internet Researchers, 2020).

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The twelve TikTok-origin fragments did not form a coherent political argument before musicalisation. Their coherence came from recurring rhetorical devices. Six fragments used exaggerated praise or affectionate naming; six staged a “kanda–dinda” or related intimate role; four relied on culinary or phonetic wordplay; four expressed ambivalence, reversal, or repair; and one explicitly referenced a previous public statement. Because coding overlapped, the counts describe rhetorical functions rather than mutually exclusive categories.

The fragments ranged from the acronym “MBG = Mas Bahlil Ganteng” to the pun “buah apa ... buahlil,” the diminutive “my little bolu ketan,” the ambivalent claim that “benci dan cinta itu beda tipis,” and a reference to “matikan kompor.” Taken together, they turned a political figure into an intimate and absurd character. The humour did not depend on a single punchline; it accumulated through repetition, culinary metaphors, English–Indonesian mixing, celebrity comparison, and exaggerated relational language.

Table 2. Overlapping coding of the twelve TikTok-origin comment fragments

Code	Frequency and brief evidence	Communicative function
Hyperbolic praise / affection	6/12: acronymic praise, attractiveness, glow-up, celebrity comparison, and “harta–takhta” devotion	Makes exaggeration readable as either affection or parody

Relational role-play	6/12: kanda–dinda, "koko," apology, and imagined domestic or romantic interaction	Reduces distance between public figure and commenter through playful intimacy
Culinary / phonetic wordplay	4/12: "Buahlil," bolu ketan, cilok–pentol–kecap, and cooking imagery	Creates memorability through sound similarity and semantic absurdity
Ambivalence / repair	4/12: insult plus praise, apology for misjudgement, hate–love reversal, and refusal to cook	Allows users to criticise and affiliate at the same time
Intertextual public reference	1/12: the "matikan kompor" phrase	Connects the meme to earlier public discourse while preserving comic deniability

Source: Authors' coding of K1–K12, reconstructed from the contemporaneous transcription of the original TikTok post (Berita Hari Ini, 2026). Categories overlap.

This structure explains why the comments were suitable for musicalisation. They contain short, rhythmically distinct phrases, repeated forms of address, internal sound play, and abrupt semantic shifts. The curator did not merely preserve comments; the curator produced coherence by ordering them into a lyrical sequence. This extends participatory-culture theory from user reuse to comment-to-media conversion: audience discourse itself became the raw material of the spreadable object.

From Comment Collage to a Portable AI-Assisted Sound

The embedded source metadata identifies @vokaliz_netizen as the publishing account and "Kanda My little Bolu Ketan" as the linked TikTok sound. The caption and hashtags positioned the post simultaneously as a Bahlil reference, a public-figure joke, and content intended for FYP circulation (Alvirtyantoro, 2026). The sound object then separated the song from the source video: later creators could reuse the audio without reproducing the original screenshots or knowing the entire origin story.

The production was widely framed as AI-generated or AI-assisted. However, the available records do not establish which model generated the vocal, arrangement, or both. Katadata reported that users frequently suspected Suno, while TikTok's own definition encompasses audio that is generated or modified by AI (Subekti, 2026; TikTok, n.d.-b). The defensible finding is therefore sociocultural rather than forensic: AI discourse formed part of how the trend was understood, and generative production lowered the perceived distance between raw comments and a polished song.

The transformation altered the status of the comments. As isolated text, each fragment was ephemeral and context-bound. As a repeated melody, the fragments acquired sequence, vocal identity, and portability. The sound became a cultural shortcut: recognition could occur within seconds even when the visual content changed. This is technological mimesis in a sound-centred form (Zulli & Zulli, 2022).

Creator Amplification and the Problem of Mutable Metrics

The strongest evidence of second-order amplification is the reported contrast between the source post and the Sania Leonardo reaction. On 30 May, Lentera Today reported 17.8 million views and 1.1 million likes for the source post, compared with 55.6 million views and 4.2

million likes for the reaction. On that snapshot, the reaction attracted slightly more than three times the views of the source. The reaction did not replace the original; it made the song socially legible as something audiences should laugh at, resist memorising, and discuss.

This finding supports an intermediary model of virality. Content does not move only from source creator to anonymous audience. High-reach creators interpret the object for others. Their laughter, surprise, or mock resistance supplies a ready-made affective script, enabling audiences to participate even when they have not seen the source post.

The metric records also expose a major methodological problem. Two reports published on 25 May gave radically different sound-reuse counts: more than 88,000 and more than 606,000. The discrepancy is too large to treat as simple same-day growth and may reflect different sound pages, different interface counters, reporting errors, or non-comparable captures. The study therefore does not select a definitive reuse number.

Table 3. Dated platform-metric snapshots retained without reconciliation

Date and record	Reported metric	Source	Interpretive status
25 May 2026 – Original TikTok post	13.6M views	Alvirtyantoro (Medcom)	Early visibility snapshot
25 May 2026 – TikTok sound reuse	>88,000 videos	Alvirtyantoro (Medcom)	Conflicts with same-day IDN count
25 May 2026 – TikTok sound reuse	>606,000 uploads	Priwiratu (IDN Times)	Conflicts with same-day Medcom count
29 May 2026 – Original TikTok post	>1.4M likes; tens of thousands of comments	Berita Hari Ini (Kumparan)	Engagement snapshot; not reconciled with later like count
30 May 2026 – Original post / Sania reaction	17.8M / 55.6M views; 1.1M / 4.2M likes	Lentera Today	Comparable within one contemporaneous report

Source: Contemporaneous platform-metric records compiled by the authors (2026).

Note. M = million. Figures are reported snapshots, not independently retrieved live counters. The table intentionally preserves disagreement and should not be used to calculate a synthetic total.

The disagreement is not merely a limitation; it is a substantive methodological finding. TikTok research that relies on screenshots, sound pages, or public indexing requires a source-and-time audit trail. A large number can demonstrate perceived scale, but it cannot automatically function as a stable population measure. The more defensible conclusion is that the trend achieved eight-figure post visibility and very extensive reuse, while its exact reuse count remains unresolved.

The Earworm as an Affective Performance

The trend's affective script was not simply "people liked the song." Sania's mirrored reaction repeatedly warned viewers not to memorise it, while coverage described users as amused, irritated, and unable to remove the hook from their heads (Subekti, 2026). This form of mock resistance is productive: saying that a sound should not be remembered repeats the

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sound's recognisability and invites others to test the claim.

A psychiatrist interviewed by detikHealth described the phenomenon through involuntary musical imagery or earworm, noting the role of simple melody, short repetitive lyrics, followable rhythm, repeated social-media exposure, and association with humour or a trend (Sagita, 2026). The expert account does not prove a clinical condition among the sampled users. It contextualises why the audio's formal simplicity and repeated exposure could support shared narratives of involuntary recall.

Affective ambivalence broadened the participation threshold. Users did not need to endorse Bahlil, admire the song, or understand its origin to join. They could participate by laughing, cringing, complaining, dancing, or warning others. In Papacharissi's (2015) terms, the public cohered around circulating intensity rather than a single political position.

From Vernacular Satire to Institutional Uptake

The political force of "My Little Bolu Ketan" lies in its deniability. The comment corpus contains overt praise, but the excess of that praise—combined with food metaphors, celebrity comparison, and hate–love reversal—makes a purely sincere reading unstable. The same line can function as compliment, ridicule, or affectionate parody. The "matikan kompor" reference further links the humour to prior public discourse without turning the song into a direct policy argument.

Bahlil's response did not attempt to suppress the meme. He described the phenomenon as creativity, stated that public officials must accept expression and criticism, cautioned against SARA content, and asked to meet the creator (Hutabarat, 2026). This response repositioned the audio from an uncontrolled joke to a form of recognised youth creativity. Institutional uptake therefore converted some of the meme's attention into reputational visibility.

This appropriation did not settle the meme's meaning. Institutional appreciation can coexist with user irony because the sound's polysemy is preserved. The case illustrates a broader communication dynamic: ridicule can generate humanisation and publicity, while official acknowledgement may extend rather than neutralise a meme's circulation. Political actors gain visibility, but they do not gain exclusive interpretive control.

Theoretical and Methodological Contribution

The case extends participatory-culture theory in three ways. First, participation begins before reuse: audience comments are extracted and musicalised. Second, creator amplification is interpretive rather than merely distributive; reaction creators supply affective instructions for how to encounter the sound. Third, institutional uptake shows that political meme circulation can produce simultaneous satire and promotional value.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates a trace hierarchy suitable for unstable TikTok objects. Direct links, embedded metadata, contemporaneous transcriptions, and dated metrics are distinguishable forms of evidence and should not be collapsed. Preserving contradictory metrics improves validity because it prevents false precision. For short-lived trends, a transparent small corpus can be more defensible than a nominally larger sample built from unarchived search results.

CONCLUSION

"My Little Bolu Ketan" emerged through a participatory chain in which TikTok-origin

comments were curated into a reported AI-assisted song, detached as a reusable sound, amplified by reaction creators, and acknowledged by the public figure it referenced. The twelve source fragments were especially reusable because they combined compact phrasing, wordplay, relational role-play, exaggerated praise, and ambivalence. Musicalisation transformed these dispersed utterances into a recognisable and portable cultural object.

The findings show that virality should not be reduced to an invisible algorithm. Observable circulation was produced through sound infrastructure, curator decisions, creator amplification, repeated affective performance, and institutional response. The reaction video's reported reach exceeding that of the source post demonstrates the importance of second-order creators, while the political ambiguity of the lyrics enabled satire, affection, ridicule, and image promotion to coexist.

The study also identifies metric instability as a central research problem. Same-day reports of sound reuse differed by hundreds of thousands, and later engagement figures were not always internally consistent. These values are therefore presented as source-specific snapshots rather than stable totals. The paper does not claim representativeness, causal algorithmic inference, or forensic verification of the AI tool. Future research should capture individual post IDs, screen-record visible metrics at a standardised time, archive a larger comment corpus, and compare interpretations across TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. Creator interviews would also clarify how comment selection, prompting, editing, and AI labelling shape comment-to-song production.

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