

Digital Social Media Movement A Comparative in Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines.docx

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Abstract

The development of social media over the past two decades has transformed patterns of political mobilization in many countries, including those in Southeast Asia. This article analyzes how social media shapes public opinion, mobilizes demonstrations in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. This study employs a qualitative approach, drawing on a literature review of academic journals, research reports, and relevant media sources. The analysis focuses on how digital interactions, hashtag campaigns, and the rapid dissemination of information on social media platforms contribute to collective awareness and encourage public political participation. The findings indicate that social media functions not only as a tool for information dissemination but also as a space for constructing collective identities that can trigger real-world mobilization. In Indonesia, movements such as #ReformasiDikorupsi demonstrate how digital discourse can accelerate student-led protest mobilization. In Malaysia, the use of social media in various social movements illustrates the capacity of digital platforms to expand networks of public participation. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, the #BabaeAko campaign shows how the viral spread of hashtags can shape public opinion while simultaneously encouraging street demonstrations. Therefore, social media plays a significant role in bridging the transformation from digital discourse to collective action in public space.

Keywords: Indonesia; Malaysia; Philippines; Political Activism; Social Media; Social Media Movement.

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of democracy in Southeast Asia over the past two decades have shown that the younger generation, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, has become an important actor in the electoral process. Demographic changes accompanied by the penetration of digital technology have shifted patterns of political participation from conventional forms to new, more fluid, interactive, and social media-based spaces of expression (Alodat et al., 2023). In the general elections in Indonesia (2024), Malaysia (2022), and the Philippines

(2022), the younger generation is not merely a “statistic,” but a political subject with the potential to shape the direction of democracy.

In Southeast Asia, elections as a democratic mechanism exhibit unique characteristics shaped by each country’s political history, institutional structure, and political culture (Ma, 2025). However, the quality of public participation and deliberative practice is under serious structural pressure. It occurs because countries in Southeast Asia are experiencing a tendency towards institutional weakening (Morgenbesser, 2020; Pepinsky, 2017) and a decline in the younger generation’s trust in formal democratic institutions (Foa et al., 2016). In this context, the space for political participation no longer grows solely within formal channels such as parties and parliaments but has shifted significantly to the digital space. This transformation can be understood as connective action, as proposed by Theocharis et al. (2015), namely, political mobilization that occurs through social media-based personal networks without reliance on formal organizations. In this context, ⁴⁰social media has become an arena to produce fragmented political discourse and is rife with identity mobilization in Indonesia (Lim, 2013). Meanwhile, in the Philippines and Malaysia, it has been shown that the digital space ³⁰plays a significant role in shaping political opinion and spreading disinformation in electoral contests (Curato, 2016). It has even expanded the base of young voters and encouraged the intensification of digital-based political engagement (Saidin & Azrun, 2025).

However, this shift toward digital participation does not necessarily indicate stronger engagement in formal politics. High voter turnout does not always translate into formal political participation or joining political parties. This disinterest stems from negative perceptions of political institutions, polarization, and elite pragmatism, which are perceived as far removed from the aspirations of the younger generation (Puspitasari, 2024). It suggests that young people in Indonesia are shifting their political activities to digital platforms, specifically social media, as their primary means of accessing and discussing ²issues such as the environment and equality. They engage in this activity for a variety of reasons, including expressing their stance, criticizing policies, and campaigning for issues such as the environment and equality.

A similar pattern can also be observed in other Southeast Asian countries. Some young voters still choose not to vote due to political fatigue, distrust of ²⁸candidates, and the dominance of political dynasties, which are considered difficult to counter. According to Basinillo et al. (2024) one of the main reasons young people don’t vote is political and candidate factors, particularly low confidence in the quality and integrity of the available candidates. It has reinforced the argument that skepticism toward political figures and a perceived unresponsive

system can drive young people to abstain. This situation presents a paradox: high digital engagement but ⁵³ low levels of trust in political institutions.

⁹ Over the past two decades, social media-based political activism ^{has} emerged as an alternative political arena, playing a strategic role in contemporary Southeast Asian democracy. Digital spaces allow young people to express their political aspirations more freely and directly, especially when formal institutions are perceived as unresponsive (Nugroho, 2025). In Indonesia, the influence of old elites rooted in authoritarian regimes has led social media to become a primary channel for civil society to criticize and demand accountability (Masduki & Wendratama, 2025). These elites have adapted to Indonesian politics, particularly after the fall of Suharto. This situation has confirmed the continuation of authoritarianism in Indonesia with a new face (Loxton, 2016; Taufik et al., 2024) and has narrowed conventional political deliberation, forcing civil society and youth to shift their focus to digital spaces. This phenomenon demonstrates that online activism in Indonesia cannot be separated from a political structure still overshadowed by the legacy of post-New Order authoritarianism.

At the same time, digital activism in Malaysia and the Philippines follows a similar pattern, with ⁴³ social media serving as a space for resistance against ^{the} dominance of traditional political elites. In Malaysia, the digital space has strengthened since the Bersih movement and peaked in GE15, particularly after the Undi18 policy expanded the youth voter base (Saidin & Azrun, 2024). This dynamic ⁴⁶ aligns with the findings of Taufik et.al. (2023), who highlight ^{that} the autocratic tendencies in Indonesia during the Jokowi era were also influenced by the maneuvers of the old elite and a weakening commitment to liberal democratic principles (Loxton, 2016). In Malaysia, the democratic situation is no simpler. Weiss (2024) argues that Malaysia's electoral-authoritarian regime neither underwent a true transition in 2018 nor experienced a genuine decline in 2020, but merely "wobbled" within its illiberal niche, with liberalization occurring more in civil society than in the electoral arena (Weiss, 2024). The structural pressures of this legacy of authoritarianism have pushed Malaysia's younger generation to seek spaces for political expression outside formal channels, and social media has become the primary arena for this expression (Bünté & Weiss, 2023).

A similar situation is evident in the Philippines, where dynastic pressures and populist politics have generated intense digital activism. Marcos Jr.'s 2022 campaign inherited Duterte's social media strategy, relying on disinformation, polarization, and fanaticism to build an online propaganda machine that spread false narratives and manipulated public opinion. This situation has produced a massive counter-narrative from youth groups, activists, and citizen journalists who use digital platforms as spaces of resistance (Arugay & Baquisal, 2023). Thus, digital

political activism in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines not only reflects the political creativity of the younger generation but also represents a structural response to democratic decline and oligarchic influence in the region (Bunte & Weiss, 2023; Kasuya & Tan, 2024). Beyond electoral participation, the three countries also show similar trends in online social movements. Social media has become a platform for criticizing regimes, advocating public issues, and facilitating mobilization. In Indonesia, the #ReformasiDikorupsi (2019) movement and opposition to the Job Creation Law are closely linked to youth contributions through digital platforms. In Malaysia, youth groups are active in movements like Bersih, demanding clean elections and reform (Ali et al., 2025a). Meanwhile, in the Philippines, digital campaigns for and against specific candidates have become a phenomenon that massively shapes public opinion. These movements demonstrate that youth political space is not only constructed through voting booths, but also through digital creativity, a crucial instrument in contemporary democratization (Ong & Cabañes, 2018).

Thus, this article analyzes youth activism and movements in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines influenced by social media. This research seeks to understand how digital platforms, particularly those predominantly used by Gen Z and Millennials, shape young people's political and social participation in these three countries. More than just a communication tool, social media has transformed into a space for struggle, identity negotiation, and collective mobilization that is no longer limited by geographical boundaries or formal institutions. This research also seeks to identify distinctive patterns in how young people in each country respond to social and political issues through social media, recognizing that the different cultural contexts, political systems, and digital ecosystems ¹² in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines also shape the character of their digital activism.

LITERATUR REVIEW

The current development of digital dynamics shows that ¹⁵ social media no longer functions solely as a means of sharing information. Instead, social media ²¹ has now evolved into a series of web-based applications built on the technological and ideological principles of Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This allows people to create and exchange content while forming human networks that increase connectivity and facilitate valuable social interactions (Hwang & Kim, 2015). Nowadays, people use social media voluntarily to share their information through actions such as clicking, posting, or voting, but this has drawn criticism

for being considered passive and not showing real commitment, especially when the line between direct and indirect activism is increasingly difficult to distinguish (Earl & Schussman, 2002; Meek, 2012; van Laer & van Aelst, 2010). Currently, social media has been seen as a new form of modern social movements (Meek, 2012), so social media needs to be understood through several approaches, such as techno ambivalence, which emphasizes that claims regarding the novelty and transformative potential of media must be critically examined (Kidd & McIntosh, 2016). In addition, the understanding of social media shows techno-optimism, namely the belief that technology can encourage problem-solving through its role as a transformative force in a network society. Examples include the Arab Spring, Indignados, and Occupy, where online mobilization on social media platforms is connected to mass action in public spaces (Kidd & McIntosh, 2016; Castells, 2012).

The transformative potential of social media demonstrates how it can serve as an instrument of community activism in the era of globalization, including through digital social movements. Digital social movements are collective activities that use digital technology and social media to advance social or political change. In this context, social movements no longer rely on structured organizations but instead operate through networked, spontaneous, and fluid means via hashtags, viral campaigns, and widespread user participation. Digital-based social movements possess several key characteristics: high connectivity, low-cost participation, open information, and rapid narrative dissemination.

Three important components of digital movements are relevant in this study: First, Digital Movement. Digital movements include collective actions in cyberspace, such as hashtag campaigns (#ReformasiDikorupsi in Indonesia, #Undi18 in Malaysia, and #BabaeAko in the Philippines), as well as anti-disinformation campaigns in the Philippines. This form of movement allows individuals to participate without being physically present, yet still shapes socio-political discourse (Ramadhani et al., 2024). Second, Buzzers and Political Digital Infrastructure. In several Southeast Asian countries, digital movements are often characterized by the presence of political buzzers, bots, or organized accounts that aim to influence public opinion. The buzzer phenomenon is important because it affects the quality of the digital public space, especially for young people who are the main consumers of online information.

Third, in Primordial Movements and Identity, the digital space also shows the emergence of identity-based (primordial) movements, such as issues of religion, ethnicity, and certain social groups, which are exploited through digital campaigns. This pattern emphasizes that digital movements are not always oriented towards democratic progress but can also strengthen sectarianism or populism (Rahman Matondang et al., 2023). Digital social

movements in this study are understood as a multidimensional phenomenon: a space for political expression, a tool for mass mobilization, an instrument for narrative contestation, and an arena for power struggles between state and non-state actors.

Over time, ¹ the use of social media for political purposes has increased political interest, motivation, and participation, particularly among younger age groups. This indicates that social media functions as a leveler, changing patterns of intergenerational political participation through intensified exposure to digital politics (Holt et al., 2013). Furthermore, social media has transformed citizens' political perceptions by expanding deliberative spaces, enabling more active involvement in public policy processes, as seen in four local government areas in Queensland, Australia, where citizens began to articulate their political stances through more open online discussions (Fredericks & Foth, 2013). Furthermore, digital media ²⁷ plays a role in shaping citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy of political institutions and candidates through the dissemination of political framing developed by users and political actors, which impacts changes in the public's political orientation. Overall, the literature confirms that social media serves as a political arena that can shape perceptions, attitudes, and participation through exposure to ⁴⁸ information, digital interactions, and decentralized deliberative processes (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the problem with social media in politics lies in the shift in actors producing messages. While classical propaganda was dominated by the state and media institutions, now ordinary users, influencers, and platform algorithms are at the center of the production and distribution of political narrative (Jakubowski & Zinichenko, 2024). Meanwhile, technology companies like TikTok have significant control over regulating content visibility, allowing political interests to be helped or hindered not by state policy but by the platform's algorithmic design and commercial logic. Thus, ⁷ social media is not simply a communication channel but a political actor that can structurally alter public perceptions of war, political legitimacy, and national identity. This justification emphasizes that the problem with media in politics is no longer simply about message manipulation, but rather a transformation in information architecture that allows propaganda to develop faster, more subtly, and more difficult to counter within the digital ecosystem.

³¹ RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a comparative case study approach to analyze how digital social movements in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines represent the Southeast Asian region. This study aims to identify similarities and differences in digital activism patterns, particularly

in the use of social media to shape public opinion, mobilize the masses, and construct collective identities. The primary method used is a literature review, drawing on secondary data in the form of relevant academic literature and tracing media reports to understand the phenomenon in depth (Creswell, 2014; Subahan et al., 2021). Data analysis was conducted using qualitative thematic analysis, grouping data by key themes such as social media usage patterns, forms of digital mobilization (e.g., hashtag activism), and the relationship between digital space and real-world collective action. Academic literature and tracing media reports also align with the orientation of this article by examining the process of tracing the development of issues from digital space to real-world mobilization, thus enabling an understanding of the causal relationship between digital interactions and social movements (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2012). Thus, the method used in this research aims to describe how social media and connective action can provide a large space for social movements in contemporary political participation.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

SOCIAL MEDIA USER: GEN Z AND MILENIAL

According to the Pew Research Centre, Generation Z (Gen Z) is defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012 (aged 13–28 years as of 2025), while Millennials are those born between 1981 and 1996 (aged 29–44 years as of 2025) (Dimock, 2019). This distinction reflects a fundamental difference in the context of technological socialisation. Millennials grew up with the internet as early adopters, gradually adapting to the digital ecosystem. At the same time, Gen Z were born as digital natives, familiar with technology and social media from an early age. The finding that almost half of Indonesian Gen Z (44.9%) have had social media accounts for 5–10 years indicates that most of them have been using social media even before entering adolescence (Evita et al., 2023b).

In terms of user numbers, all three countries show significant social media penetration. Indonesia had 139.0 million active social media users as of January 2024, equivalent to 49.9% of the total population of 278.7 million (DataReportal, 2024). Malaysia recorded 25.1 million social media users as of January 2025, equivalent to 70.2% of the population, of whom 87.0% were adults (DataReportal, 2025a). The Philippines had 90.8 million social media users as of January 2025, equivalent to 78% of its population, with an average daily usage time of 3 hours and 22 minutes, placing the Philippines in fourth place globally (DataReportal, 2025b). The large number of users in these three countries provides an important background for understanding how Gen Z and Millennials behave differently within the theme.

Table 1. Percentage index of social media usage in three countries

Country	Instagram	X	Tiktok
Philippines	58%	40,7%	35,17%
Indonesia	83%	0,56%	35,17%
Malaysia	74,3%	47,5%	59,9%

Source: (Databoks, 2026; Commission Factory, 2023; Datambar, 2026)

The table above shows differences in media preferences among young people. In Indonesia, the majority of Gen Z (83%) most frequently access Instagram, while the majority of Millennials (74.09%) most frequently access Facebook, according to a survey of 8,720 respondents from 38 provinces (Databoks, 2026). Moreover, TikTok is growing rapidly among Gen Z Indonesia because it provides short video content that suits their consumption patterns and has also proven to be useful as a platform for informal education and digital activism (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2021). In Malaysia, WhatsApp and Facebook still dominate the overall adult user base. Still, TikTok leads in downloads and in-app spending, with active users spending an average of 42 hours and 44 minutes per month, surpassing the global average of 34 hours and 56 minutes (DataReportal, 2025a). In the Philippines, TikTok had 62.3 million users aged 18 and above as of early 2025, equivalent to 80.1% of the adult population and 64% of all internet users (DataReportal, 2025b).

The differences in usage motivations between these two generations are also striking. Research shows that Gen Z and Millennials' decisions about which platform to choose are not solely based on technical features, but primarily on the social norms prevailing on the platform and the goals users seek to achieve. When a posting scenario aligns with a platform's social norms, users readily choose that platform without considering other features (Taber et al., 2023). The difference lies in the norms they follow: Millennials tend to follow relational communication norms, such as sharing family moments on Facebook, while Gen Z follows norms of visual self-expression and community on Instagram and TikTok. Consequently, Millennials are more active in terms of content posting frequency. At the same time, Gen Z engages in more passive consumption, such as scrolling, even though they spend equally long periods on the platform (Taber et al., 2023).

Unique local cultural factors also shape the characteristics of social media usage in each country. In Indonesia, Gen Z uses TikTok not only for entertainment but also for education and

digital **activism**, a phenomenon not commonly seen among Millennials, who prefer text-based platforms and social networks (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2021). In Malaysia, the primary reasons for social media use are communicating with family and friends (54.6%), followed by entertainment (52.7%), and news seeking (42.6%). This pattern crosses generations but differs across platforms for Gen Z and Millennials (DataReportal, 2025a). In the Philippines, the cultural value of bayanihan (cooperation) encourages all generations to stay digitally connected at a very high level, and the Philippines ranks first in the world in following online influencers, with 44.9% of citizens aged 16 and above following them (DataReportal, 2025b).

Overall, **the differences in social media usage between Gen Z and Millennials in the** three countries can be explained by three main factors. First, the context of technological socialization: Millennials are loyal to platforms they first encountered, such as Facebook, while Gen Z has been accustomed to visual and algorithm-based platforms since early childhood (Dimock, 2019; Evita et al., 2023). Second, usage orientation based on social norms: the platform choices of these two generations are determined more by the social norms prevailing on the platform than simply its technical features, so that Millennials gravitate towards relational communication platforms, while Gen Z gravitate towards self-expression and community platforms (Taber et al., 2023). Third, the influence of local culture: Southeast Asian collectivist values amplify the intensity of social media use across all generations, but in different ways and on different platforms in each country (DataReportal, 2024; DataReportal, 2025a; DataReportal, 2025b). Understanding these three factors is key to digital communication research seeking to explain the behavior of young audiences in the Southeast Asian context, both contextually and generationally.

DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL **SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

The development of the Digital Social Movement globally cannot be separated from the multidimensional context that has gripped many countries, characterised by economic pressure, the delegitimisation of political institutions, and declining public trust in government and the market. In this situation, a wave of mobilisation has emerged that no longer relies entirely on hierarchical organisational structures, but rather relies on digital communication networks that are relatively autonomous from state and corporate control (Castells, 2012). Through social media and internet public spaces, individuals share experiences of injustice,

build solidarity across identities, and form horizontal networks capable of overcoming fear as an instrument of power domination.

One of the key features of contemporary public engagement with the internet is its use by diverse activists and groups in social and political protest. The internet not only facilitates mobilisation and participation in traditional forms of action, such as nationwide street demonstrations, but also gives them a more transnational character through rapid, widespread communication. The Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico is a prominent example (Ronfeldt & Arquilla, 2001). Beginning as a local uprising fighting for the rights and autonomy of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas, the movement gained global momentum through an online international network of support. The internet played a significant role in the diffusion of solidarity and protest across national borders. Another example is the anti-WTO mobilisation in the Battle of Seattle (Juris, 2005; Smith, 2001), in which internet networks enabled diverse activists and social movement organisations to establish loose but effective coordination of action, both in physical and cyberspace.

Digital activism has gained widespread attention with the emergence of various social media-based movements such as the Arab Spring, Los Indignados in Spain, Occupy Wall Street, and the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong. Social media not only serves as an alternative channel outside formal institutions, allowing groups without access to power to voice their aspirations and dissatisfaction, but also positions individuals as key nodes in networks. There are two main trends in the development of digital social movements (Juris, 2005). First, the internet facilitates and strengthens traditional offline collective action by enabling organisation, mobilisation, and transnationalization. Second, the internet creates new forms of digital-based collective action, such as online petitions, hashtag campaigns, email bombing, virtual sit-ins, and even hacking of government or corporate websites (van Laer & van Aelst, 2010). Thus, the internet does not replace conventional action, but rather expands and complements the repertoire of collective action in contemporary social movements.

Compared to the early internet era in the 1990s, the social media era has demonstrated a more organic, participatory nature of mobilisation. While in the 1990s the internet functioned primarily as a tool for supporting coordination through websites, forums, and mailing lists, in the social media era, it has evolved into a space for narrative production, the consolidation of collective identities, and an arena for real-time political contestation (Juris, 2005; van Laer & van Aelst, 2010). Information production is no longer centralised in formal organisations but is dispersed among individual users who act as both producers and consumers. Movement structures have become more fluid, hashtag-based, and capable of rapid growth through digital

viral mechanisms. However, this organic nature also presents challenges, including fragmentation, disinformation, and vulnerability to state digital surveillance.

These changes demonstrate that ³³the transformation of social movements in the digital era involves not only accelerated mobilisation but also fundamental changes in organisational patterns, forms of activity, communication media, and the resulting political impact (Howard & Hussain, 2018; van Laer & van Aelst, 2010). Thus, the differences between conventional and digital social movements can be mapped comparatively, as summarised in the following table.

Table 2. Indicators of social movements and digital social movements

Indicator	Social Movement	Digital Social Movement
Activities	Street demonstrations, collective action	Hashtag activism, online petitions, social media campaigns, online actions (virtual sit-ins, email bombing)
Characters	Hierarchical, based on formal organization	Horizontal, decentralized, networked movement
Platform	Physical public spaces, trade unions, mass organizations, print and television media	Social media (Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram), online forums, messaging apps (Telegram)
Impact	Changes in national policy, domestic political pressure	Transnational diffusion of issues, rapid mobilization, formation of global public opinion

³⁷Source: (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Juris, 2005; ³⁷Castells, 2012; van Laer & van Aelst, 2010)

As seen in ³⁹the table 2, social movements organized digitally and based on individual participation tend to reach more people, grow faster, and respond more flexibly to dynamic political issues than those based on formal organizations with fixed membership structures (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). These changes in action patterns indicate that the internet is not just a mobilization tool, but also contributes to shaping new configurations and dynamics of contemporary social movements (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2012). This transformation is reflected in the shift from a model of participation based on formal organizations and membership to a more individual, networked, and flexible pattern of engagement in responding to evolving political issues (Loader ³⁹et al., 2014). ³⁹In this context, social media not only accelerates ³⁸the dissemination of information but also changes the way shared identities are constructed, shifting from ones previously tied to hierarchical structures to ones based on connectivity and increasingly dispersed individual participation. ³⁸In Southeast Asia, particularly in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, there are interesting variations in how indicators of activity, character, platform, and impact manifest across countries.

In Malaysia, the shift from conventional social movements to digital-based ones has been frequently discussed in the literature on internet activism and social protest (Ali et al., 2025b). Movements such as political reform and the Bersih 2.0 rally leveraged digital platforms

not only to disseminate their agendas but also to expand the space for public mobilization by combining street actions and digital campaigns (Postill, 2014). Movement activities were no longer limited to physical demonstrations but also included social media campaigns that combined rapid information dissemination, online videos, and action coordination through digital platforms. One empirical example of digital indicators is the environmental movement in Malaysia. Social media served as a key driver of mobilization: over 40 Facebook groups and pages were formed, approximately 1 million views were recorded for 20 citizen-produced YouTube videos, and massive dissemination of information through personal social media accounts to oppose specific development projects occurred (Leong et al., 2019).

In Indonesia, digital activism is also very evident in changing patterns of social action. Movements such as #ReformasiDikorupsi and #TolakOmnibusLaw demonstrate the integration of street protests and massive hashtag campaigns, building solidarity and a shared identity among the younger generation (Lim, 2013). ²⁶ Social media plays a strategic role in mobilizing support and accelerating the spread of issues, but it also presents challenges such as message fragmentation and political polarization. Platforms like Twitter have become a primary arena for action coordination, reflecting the movement's more fluid nature and less reliance on formal leadership than conventional mobilization.

In the Philippines, the #BabaeAko women's rights movement in 2018 demonstrated a similar pattern: a social media hashtag campaign evolved into a significant street action. Studies of protest participation in the Philippines indicate that social media shapes digital political identities and bridges ³⁴ online and offline mobilization (David et al., 2019; Ong et al., 2018). This approach reflects the horizontal, participatory nature of social movements and demonstrates how domestic issues can gain broader resonance through digital networks (Leong et al., 2019). These findings demonstrate that social movement patterns have shifted from hierarchical structures to more networked and flexible forms, with platforms like Facebook and YouTube serving as primary mobilization spaces. In terms of impact, the combination of offline and online actions not only increases pressure on government policies but also broadens the debate into a broader public sphere, albeit accompanied by polarization in online discourse.

MEDIA AND DIGITAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

⁹ Over the past two decades, social media has transformed the way people participate in politics. Contemporary political participation is increasingly shifting from formal institutions to individual, personalized, and digitally networked activities (Theocharis et al., 2021). Digital spaces enable faster and easier political engagement without the structural barriers typically

encountered in formal politics (Ruess et al., 2023). When an issue spreads widely and continues to be reproduced digitally, the resulting social pressure can push individuals toward collective action ⁵⁴ in the public sphere. Social media thus serves as a bridge between digital discourse and real political mobilization (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2012).

In the Philippine context, this phenomenon is evident in the #BabaeAko feminist movement of 2018. This controversy stemmed from Duterte's statement that the Ombudsman candidate should "not be a woman" for integrity reasons (Corrales, 2018). This statement was seen as reproducing gender stereotypes that undermine women's leadership potential. In a Philippine political climate steeped in skepticism toward elites, the statement was read not merely as a personal comment but as a reflection of a deeply rooted patriarchal culture (Gavilan, 2018), while also triggering a broader public discourse on sexism in politics.

Responses to this statement quickly spread digitally. A group of women activists launched the hashtag #BabaeAko "I am a woman" on Twitter and Facebook as a symbolic form of resistance. More than simply criticizing a single statement, this hashtag became a collective identity for women rejecting gender stereotypes in politics. Thousands of users shared personal experiences, critiques of sexism, and messages of solidarity, leading the hashtag to trend and broaden the discourse on misogyny in the Philippines (Alingasa & Ofreneo, 2021). The hashtag's virality significantly shaped public opinion. When thousands of users simultaneously used the same hashtag, criticism of Duterte ceased to be seen as an individual opinion and became a broad, collective view. This perception of mass support lowered individual psychological barriers to engaging in concrete action, making social media a space for legitimizing political demands.

This digital dynamic then fueled mobilization in physical spaces. On Philippine Independence Day 2018, over a thousand women and their supporters took to the streets of Manila to denounce Duterte's misogynistic rhetoric (Reuters, 2018; TRT World, 2018). Social media has become not only a space for expression but also a coordination infrastructure: various organizations used digital platforms to announce demonstration plans and encourage participation in the Freedom March, which was attended by dozens of civil society groups (Mateo, 2018; The Globe Post, 2018). The impact of this campaign went beyond domestic boundaries. International media coverage broadened the visibility of Philippine gender equality issues to the global stage, leading TIME magazine to include #BabaeAko ⁶¹ in its 2018 list of the "25 Most Influential People on the Internet" (GMA News, 2018).

In the Malaysian context, the case of Lynas Corporation Ltd. stands out as a significant turning point in digital mobilization. As an Australian rare-earth mining company, Lynas has

operated its Lynas Advanced Materials Plant refining facility in the Gebeng industrial area of Kuantan, Malaysia, since 2012 (Phua, 2016). Public awareness exploded after the New York Times reported on March 8, 2011, about the construction of the 700 million Malaysian Ringgit plant, triggering widespread concern about radiation risks (Kaur, 2015). These concerns stem from the collective trauma of the Bukit Merah incident in the past and the psychological impact of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in Japan (Leong et al., 2019; Phua, 2016). The lack of clarity regarding the permanent waste management plan for toxic and radioactive residues has given rise to a highly decentralized yet digitally connected grassroots movement (Kaur, 2015). Social media has become a key instrument in managing strategic social interactions and shaping public sentiment. Research shows that more than 40 Facebook groups and dozens of YouTube videos, totaling one million views, serve as the backbone of information dissemination amid traditional media censorship (Leong et al., 2019; Tapsell, 2013).

The peak of physical mobilization driven by digital narratives occurred during several key events. The Green Assembly 2.0 protest in February 2012 successfully gathered 20,000 participants through Facebook coordination (Kaur, 2015). Furthermore, the Green Walk protest in November 2012 demonstrated the power of “connective logic”; led by Wong Tuck, a small group of participants walked 300 km over 14 days, culminating in a crowd of 20,000 upon arrival in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysiakini, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Another digital success was the ambitious petition campaign “Bury Lynas with 1,000,000 signatures,” which, despite allegations of forgery, generated significant political pressure (Aliran, 2013; Kaur, 2015).

This activism continued into 2014, as Lynas’s temporary operating permit expired. Under the rallying cry “622: Close Lynas,” *Himpunan Hijau* (Greens) organized a cross-border campaign that included a 2,800-km bicycle ride across Malaysia and a 300-km walk, ending at the entrance of the Gebeng factory on June 22, 2014 (Kaur, 2015). The movement’s international dimension was reinforced by the involvement of Australian activists, who issued cross-border media statements and consistently updated their Facebook homepage (Tye et al., 2018). Although the sit-in blockade at the factory entrance resulted in the arrest of a dozen activists due to police permit issues, the event demonstrated how digital spaces can incubate sustained, transnational theatrical protests (Postill, 2014).

Meanwhile, in the Indonesian context, one widely discussed campaign was the “pink-green” visual phenomenon, with the narrative “17+8 People’s Demands,” which spread widely on social media. The poster, dominated by pink and green, featured various public demands against government policies deemed unfavorable to the people. Without formal coordination

from any specific organization, the content quickly spread⁴² across platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. Many social media users reposted the same poster, created derivative designs, or added personal commentary that reinforced the message. Within a short time, the visual became a widely recognized symbol of digital resistance. This phenomenon demonstrates how simple visual symbols can become powerful political communication tools when supported by large and participatory digital network (Deutsche Welle, 2025).

In campaigns like this, the use of⁴¹ diction also plays a crucial role in influencing audiences. The narratives used are typically collective and emotional, for example, using words like “people,” “we,” “future,” or “voice of the people.” Phrases such as “the people’s voice must be heard,” “this isn’t just about politics, but about our future,” or “if we don’t act, who will?” are often used to create a sense of emotional closeness between campaign messages and the public. This language strategy simplifies complex policy issues and makes them easier for the public to understand. Furthermore, the use of phrases that emphasize urgency and injustice can also trigger a sense of solidarity and encourage involvement in social movements. Social media’s ability to influence society is also related to its interactive, network-based characteristics. Information is disseminated not only by specific media outlets or figures, but also by ordinary users who expand its reach through re-sharing or reposting. Social media has become an effective political campaign tool because it can disseminate messages quickly and widely at a relatively low cost compared to traditional media (Abdillah, 2014). Through these digital networks, messages originating from a single account can spread to thousands, or even millions, of other users in a short time.

The phenomenon of mobilization via social media was also evident in the rejection of¹⁰ the Draft Criminal Code (RKUHP) several years ago. Discussions about the RKUHP increased dramatically on Twitter after various hashtags for rejection went viral and were amplified by posts from students, activists, and the public. Digital conversation data shows that the number of discussions regarding the rejection of the RKUHP increased from around 31,000 tweets to more than 113,000 conversations after the issue became a trending topic and was followed by demonstrations in various cities. This increase demonstrates that social media can serve as an amplifier, increasing public attention to a political issue and thereby encouraging broader community involvement (Kompas, 2019).

Beyond virality,³⁶ psychological factors also influence people’s behavior on social media. Content that evokes strong emotions, such as anger, injustice, or solidarity, tends to be more easily shared by users. This often causes public dissatisfaction with government policies to spread quickly and become national issues. When many people discuss the same issue, a

sense of urgency arises that it is important and deserves collective attention. In situations like this, public participation no longer relies on formal organizational structures but is formed through interconnected digital networks. From these various phenomena, it is clear that digital campaigns have a significant capacity to influence public opinion and mobilize the community. The combination of powerful visual symbols, emotional diction, and the speed of information dissemination on social media makes campaign messages easily accepted and shared by the public. As a result, social movements that initially emerge in the digital space can develop into collective action in the real world. In other words, social media is now not only a means of communication but also a crucial tool in the dynamics of social and political movements in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The development of digital media, particularly social media, has transformed the way people access information, form public opinion, and participate in socio-political issues. Media is now interactive, enabling users to produce and disseminate information collectively. The use of visual symbols, memes, hashtags, and simple, emotional diction makes messages more understandable and engaging, and they disseminate quickly, especially among the younger generation. This phenomenon demonstrates that mass mobilization no longer relies on formal organizations but can instead be formed through network-based solidarity. Participation in the digital space can develop into concrete action in the offline world. These findings align with the concept of connective action, where individuals play a crucial role in strengthening narratives and driving social movements. Thus, the media has a significant influence on shaping public opinion and political participation patterns in the contemporary era.

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