

From Hashtags to Political Action: Digital Youth Movements and Democratic Participation in Contemporary Indonesia

Riko Saputra*^{ID}

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Sleman, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

rikosaputra@students.uny.ac.id

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65815/81vcsr80>

Submitted: 21-01-2026

Revised: 11-03-2026, 28-05-2026

Accepted: 30-06-2026

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

Indonesian youth increasingly engage with politics through digital platforms, where hashtags, online campaigns, petitions, and viral content can rapidly transform individual opinions into collective political action. This article examines the relationship between digital youth movements and democratic participation in contemporary Indonesia. Using qualitative digital ethnography and social movement analysis, the study investigates how young citizens identify political issues, construct collective narratives, mobilize supporters, and translate online engagement into offline action. The article argues that digital activism has expanded the repertoire of political participation beyond traditional party membership and formal organizations. Nevertheless, online visibility does not necessarily produce sustained political engagement, and digital movements may disappear rapidly after an issue loses public attention. The study proposes a continuum model connecting digital expression, network formation, collective mobilization, and institutional political participation. The article concludes that Indonesian youth movements demonstrate a transformation of democratic participation in which communication technologies function not merely as tools for political messaging but as infrastructures for collective political organization.

[Pemuda Indonesia semakin terlibat dalam politik melalui platform digital, di mana tagar, kampanye daring, petisi, dan konten viral dapat dengan cepat mengubah opini individu menjadi aksi politik kolektif. Artikel ini mengkaji hubungan antara gerakan pemuda digital dan partisipasi demokratis di Indonesia kontemporer. Dengan menggunakan etnografi digital kualitatif dan analisis gerakan sosial, studi ini menyelidiki bagaimana warga muda mengidentifikasi isu-isu politik, membangun narasi kolektif, memobilisasi pendukung, dan menerjemahkan keterlibatan daring ke dalam aksi luring. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa aktivisme digital telah memperluas repertoar partisipasi politik di luar keanggotaan partai tradisional dan organisasi formal. Namun demikian, visibilitas daring tidak selalu menghasilkan keterlibatan

politik yang berkelanjutan, dan gerakan digital dapat menghilang dengan cepat setelah suatu isu kehilangan perhatian publik. Studi ini mengusulkan model kontinum yang menghubungkan ekspresi digital, pembentukan jaringan, mobilisasi kolektif, dan partisipasi politik kelembagaan. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa gerakan pemuda Indonesia menunjukkan transformasi partisipasi demokratis di mana teknologi komunikasi berfungsi bukan hanya sebagai alat untuk penyampaian pesan politik tetapi sebagai infrastruktur untuk organisasi politik kolektif.]

Keywords: Youth movements, digital activism, democracy, political participation, Indonesia

Introduction

Young people have historically occupied an important position in Indonesian political transformation, but the forms through which youth participate have changed considerably with the expansion of digital communication. Political engagement is no longer limited to membership in parties, student organizations, formal civic associations, or street demonstrations. Young citizens can now participate by creating political content, using hashtags, signing online petitions, joining digital communities, distributing information, and coordinating collective action. Research on Indonesian youth demonstrates that social media has become increasingly relevant to political learning, political efficacy, and participation, particularly because young citizens use digital platforms not only to receive information but also to discuss and circulate political meanings (Saud et al. 2020; Ida, Saud, and Mashud 2020). This transformation indicates that digital participation should not be regarded simply as an additional communication channel. It represents a change in the organizational environment within which political participation takes place.

The relationship between youth and digital politics became particularly visible during several major protest movements. The campaigns associated with *#ReformasiDikorupsi* in 2019 and *#TolakOmnibusLaw* in 2020 demonstrated that social media could connect students, young activists, civil-society organizations, workers, and ordinary users around contentious political issues. Social-network research on these movements shows that young people occupied central positions in constructing online political networks while simultaneously contributing to offline demonstrations (Wahyuningroem et al. 2024). The importance of these cases lies not simply in their size but in their hybrid character. Digital communication did not replace street politics; instead, online communication helped establish narratives, coordinate participation, distribute information, and maintain visibility before, during, and after physical protest.

Previous scholarship has examined several components of this transformation. Paskarina (2020) identifies digital activism in Indonesia as involving support mobilization, the creation of alternative public spaces, government criticism, counter-disinformation practices, and identity construction. Research on the Omnibus Law discourse further demonstrates that hashtags can structure online networks and organize public attention around particular political narratives (Ayudha 2022). Other studies have examined online petitions as mechanisms of citizen participation, demonstrating that digital petitions can provide accessible channels for expressing political preferences but are more effective when connected with subsequent advocacy (Addiputra et al. 2020). These findings collectively indicate that digital participation involves more than the simple act of posting political opinions.

The literature also demonstrates that digital activism can generate collective identities among young citizens who do not necessarily belong to conventional organizations. The *No Viral No Action* movement concerning Jakarta's air pollution illustrates how digital communication can connect individual concerns into a broader collective identity through interactive participation on social-media platforms (Ahmad and Setyawati 2024). Similar dynamics appeared when Indonesian K-Pop fandoms became involved in the *#TolakOmnibusLaw* movement, demonstrating that political participation can emerge from cultural communities that were not originally established as political organizations (Mulyana and Wahyuningroem 2025). Digital youth movements consequently challenge traditional assumptions about who constitutes a political actor and where political organization occurs.

At the same time, digital activism should not automatically be equated with democratic empowerment. Online visibility may generate attention without producing substantive political change. The ability to create viral content does not necessarily translate into sustained organization, policy influence, or institutional participation. Research on Indonesian youth political participation indicates that social-media engagement can strengthen political awareness while also producing superficial or episodic forms of participation (Saud et al. 2020; Mustofa, Utama, and Andalus 2023). This distinction is important because a movement can become highly visible during a particular controversy and then disappear when public attention shifts to another issue.

Another challenge concerns the information environment within which digital movements operate. Political hashtags may facilitate mobilization, but they can also circulate misinformation, emotionally charged narratives, and antagonistic representations of political opponents. Research on digital activism in Indonesia identifies misinformation and counter-mobilization as significant obstacles to effective online political participation (Paskarina 2020; Yasa and Rahayu 2023). Digital movements therefore face a paradox: the same communication infrastructure that makes mobilization faster also makes political narratives vulnerable to manipulation and distortion.

The democratic significance of youth digital movements consequently requires a broader analytical framework. It is insufficient to ask whether young people use social media for politics. A more important question is how digital expression becomes organized participation and under what conditions online activity produces sustained collective action. This article addresses that problem by examining the movement from political expression to network formation, collective mobilization, and institutional engagement. It argues that hashtags function as connective infrastructures because they allow dispersed individuals to recognize themselves as participants in a common political issue without requiring centralized organizational membership.

The contribution of this article is threefold. First, it conceptualizes youth digital activism as a process of political organization rather than merely online expression. Second, it explains how online communication and offline action interact within Indonesia's contemporary democratic environment. Third, it develops a continuum model connecting digital expression, network formation, collective mobilization, and institutional participation. This framework is intended to avoid two opposite assumptions: that digital activism automatically produces democratic empowerment and that online participation is merely symbolic or superficial. Indonesian youth movements demonstrate a more complicated reality in which digital communication can produce meaningful political participation but only when connected with organizational capacity, political knowledge, and opportunities for offline or institutional action.

Methodologically, the article employs qualitative analysis of Indonesian academic literature concerning digital activism, youth participation, social-media mobilization, political communication, online petitions, collective identity, and contemporary protest movements. The literature was selected according to its relevance to Indonesia and its focus on digital forms of political participation. Sources published in 2026 are excluded. The analysis compares studies of national political protests, environmental activism, public-health activism, electoral participation, online petitions, and youth-based movements. Rather than reproducing individual case studies, the article synthesizes their findings to identify recurring mechanisms through which digital communication becomes political action.

Hashtags and the Construction of Youth Political Issues

The political significance of hashtags begins with their capacity to transform scattered expressions into recognizable public issues. A political concern expressed by an individual user may have limited visibility, but when similar expressions are connected through a common hashtag, they become searchable, repeatable, and collectively identifiable. This process changes the communicative status of political expression. The hashtag does not simply categorize information; it provides a symbolic boundary within which users can recognize a common concern.

Ayudha's analysis of the Omnibus Law discourse demonstrates that hashtags played an important role in organizing social and textual networks during a major Indonesian political controversy (Ayudha 2022). The political issue consequently became visible not only through formal media coverage but also through user-generated digital communication.

This function is particularly important for young citizens because digital platforms reduce the organizational requirements for entering political discussion. A young person does not need to belong to a political party or established civic organization to participate in a hashtag campaign. Participation can begin with a post, repost, comment, image, video, or hashtag. Saud et al. (2020) show that social media has become an important environment for political participation among Indonesian youth because it provides opportunities for accessing political information and interacting with political issues. Digital platforms therefore lower the threshold between political awareness and political expression.

The reduction of organizational barriers also changes the relationship between individual identity and collective identity. Traditional movements often require participants to identify with an organization before they can participate. Digital movements can reverse this sequence. Individuals first encounter an issue, express agreement through digital content, and only subsequently discover that thousands of others share the same concern. The collective identity is constructed through interaction rather than predetermined organizational membership. Research on the *No Viral No Action* campaign illustrates this mechanism, showing that digital participation contributed to collective identity formation among young people concerned about Jakarta's air pollution (Ahmad and Setyawati 2024).

Hashtags also enable political issues to become emotionally recognizable. Political movements rarely mobilize citizens through technical information alone. They require symbols capable of condensing complex grievances into accessible expressions. A hashtag can perform this function by attaching a concise phrase to a larger political narrative. The effectiveness of digital activism therefore depends partly on the ability of participants to construct narratives that connect individual experiences with broader political problems. Paskarina (2020) emphasizes that digital activism in Indonesia includes identity construction as well as mobilization and criticism. Identity is important because individuals are more likely to participate when an issue becomes connected to a sense of collective belonging.

The narrative function of digital activism becomes especially visible when youth movements appropriate cultural symbols. Indonesian K-Pop fandoms participating in *#TolakOmnibusLaw* demonstrate how political mobilization can emerge from communities organized around popular culture. Mulyana and Wahyuningroem (2025) show that K-Pop fans were able to use their existing digital networks to express political opposition and participate in a broader movement. The case demonstrates that political mobilization does not necessarily begin with explicitly political identities. Cultural communities can become political when

members perceive a public issue as sufficiently important to justify collective action.

Such developments expand the repertoire of democratic participation. Young citizens can enter political communication through cultural, social, or personal networks rather than through formal political institutions. This is significant in contexts where young people may feel distant from conventional politics. Research on Indonesian youth political participation suggests that social media can create opportunities for young people to engage with political issues even when their participation in formal institutions is limited (Mustofa, Utama, and Andalus 2023). Digital activism therefore has the potential to bridge the gap between political interest and political participation.

However, the accessibility of digital participation also creates uncertainty about the depth of engagement. Posting a hashtag may demonstrate political awareness, but it does not necessarily indicate a sustained commitment to the movement. Digital participation can vary from passive exposure to active content production, interpersonal discussion, fundraising, protest organization, and institutional advocacy. Addiputra et al. (2020), for example, find that online petitions can facilitate citizen participation but are more effective when accompanied by further advocacy. This suggests that digital expression becomes politically consequential only when it is connected to subsequent forms of action.

The relationship between visibility and political influence is therefore not automatic. A hashtag may trend because thousands of users repeat it, but trending status does not by itself indicate that decision-makers have changed their position. The political value of a digital campaign depends on whether attention can be converted into pressure, negotiation, public deliberation, or institutional response. Aulia and Kusumasari's (2022) examination of the *Tunda Pilkada* digital advocacy campaign illustrates the importance of examining not merely online visibility but also the actors, processes, and effectiveness of digital advocacy. The distinction between attention and influence is essential for assessing democratic outcomes.

Digital narratives can also challenge dominant representations of political issues. Social media allows young activists to present interpretations that differ from official government statements or mainstream media frames. During contentious political events, alternative narratives can document protest experiences, disseminate testimonies, and provide counterarguments. This function can expand the democratic public sphere by increasing the diversity of voices available to citizens. Research on digital activism in Indonesia has repeatedly identified the creation of alternative public spaces as one of the important functions of digital political communication (Paskarina 2020).

Nevertheless, alternative communication environments are not inherently more democratic. The absence of editorial gatekeepers may increase access to political expression but also lowers barriers to inaccurate information. Yasa and Rahayu's (2023) analysis of KawalCOVID19 demonstrates the importance of verification in digital activism. The initiative attempted to counter misinformation

through data collection, verification, educational content, and public communication. Its experience illustrates that credible digital activism requires organizational practices for determining what information should be disseminated.

The construction of political issues also depends upon platform characteristics. Different platforms privilege different forms of political expression, from short text and hashtags to visual narratives, videos, and interactive content. Young activists therefore adapt their communication to the technical and cultural norms of each platform. Research on Generation Z and social-media participation in Indonesia indicates that young users respond strongly to interactive, visual, and contextually relevant political content (Ramadhani et al. 2025). Digital youth movements must therefore operate simultaneously as political and communicative projects.

The importance of platform culture becomes even clearer when political content intersects with entertainment and popular culture. Memes, fan identities, visual symbols, and short videos can make political issues more accessible to users who would not ordinarily consume formal political information. This may broaden the constituency of a movement. Yet simplification can also remove important contextual information. A complex policy dispute can become reduced to a slogan or emotionally provocative image. The challenge for digital youth movements is consequently to combine accessibility with political substance.

The first stage of the proposed continuum can therefore be understood as digital political expression. At this stage, young citizens identify an issue, communicate an opinion, and encounter others who share or contest that position. Hashtags, memes, petitions, and short-form content provide the communicative infrastructure. The democratic significance of this stage lies in its capacity to make political concerns visible and connect dispersed citizens. However, expression becomes politically consequential only when it develops into social networks and coordinated forms of action.

From Digital Networks to Collective Political Action

Once a political issue becomes visible through digital communication, the next challenge is transforming dispersed attention into collective capacity. Digital networks facilitate this transition because they allow participants to identify potential supporters, exchange information, distribute tasks, and coordinate activities without requiring a centralized organization. Research on *#ReformasiDikorupsi* and *#TolakOmnibusLaw* demonstrates that online youth participation contributed to the development of offline protest movements, indicating a reciprocal relationship between digital and physical mobilization (Wahyuningroem et al. 2024). The digital network therefore functions as an organizational infrastructure rather than simply a publicity mechanism.

This organizational function differs from traditional hierarchical mobilization. Conventional movements often depend on formal leadership, membership lists,

physical meetings, and established communication channels. Digital movements can operate through more distributed arrangements in which individuals contribute according to their abilities and interests. Kristianto, Ramadhan, and Marsetyo (2021) demonstrate how social media can facilitate connective action by allowing individuals to participate through personalized forms of contribution. The concept is useful for understanding youth movements because participants do not necessarily need to accept a unified organizational identity before contributing to a campaign.

Connective action is particularly suitable for movements involving young people because digital participation can be integrated into everyday social practices. A participant can share a political message while maintaining other social or professional identities. This flexibility allows movements to reach individuals who may be unwilling to join formal organizations. The political network consequently becomes less dependent on organizational loyalty. Sumardiono's (2022) study of BTS ARMY Indonesia demonstrates how fandom networks can be converted into channels for collective digital action, particularly when participants perceive the campaign as legitimate and trustworthy.

Trust is therefore a crucial component of digital mobilization. Online networks can spread information quickly, but participants need reasons to believe that the information and campaign objectives are credible. Transparency becomes important when movements involve fundraising, petitions, public events, or advocacy. Sumardiono (2022) emphasizes transparency as a factor that supports the credibility of digital activism. Without transparency, movements may lose public trust or become vulnerable to accusations of manipulation.

Digital networks also facilitate rapid division of labor. One participant may design visual content, another may monitor political developments, another may coordinate offline events, while another communicates with journalists or civil-society organizations. This specialization can increase the capacity of decentralized movements. The organizational structure becomes flexible because participants can contribute according to their expertise. Research on KawalCOVID19 demonstrates how digital activism can combine data collection, verification, education, dissemination, and advocacy through collaborative practices (Yasa and Rahayu 2023).

The connection between online and offline action is particularly important because political influence often requires activities that cannot be completed digitally. Demonstrations, public discussions, community meetings, fundraising, legal advocacy, and institutional lobbying require physical coordination. The Indonesian experience of *#ReformasiDikorupsi* and *#TolakOmnibusLaw* demonstrates that digital mobilization can amplify physical protest rather than replace it (Wahyuningroem et al. 2024). This finding challenges the assumption that digital activism represents a separate sphere of politics. In practice, online and offline activities frequently constitute one integrated movement.

Online petitions illustrate the same principle. Petitions reduce the cost of expressing political preferences and can rapidly demonstrate the existence of public concern. However, Addiputra et al. (2020) show that petitions become more meaningful when accompanied by advocacy. A petition without follow-up can function primarily as a symbolic expression. A petition connected to public campaigns, negotiations, media engagement, or institutional pressure can become part of a broader mobilization strategy. Digital participation therefore gains democratic significance when it creates pathways toward consequential action.

Digital networks can also provide young activists with opportunities for political learning. Participation requires users to understand political issues, identify reliable information, and communicate arguments to others. Through these processes, activism can become an informal form of political education. Research on social-media use among Indonesian youth suggests that digital platforms can contribute to political learning and political efficacy (Ida, Saud, and Mashud 2020). The activist is therefore not only mobilized by political information but may become more politically capable through participation.

However, political learning is not guaranteed. Digital networks can expose participants to politically homogeneous information environments. Activists may repeatedly encounter information confirming their existing beliefs while ignoring opposing perspectives. This creates the possibility that mobilization increases political participation while simultaneously reducing deliberative openness. The democratic quality of a movement therefore depends partly on whether participants remain willing to encounter disagreement. Digital activism should ideally produce stronger political engagement without transforming political opponents into enemies.

The emotional dimension of digital mobilization must also be considered. Hashtags can create solidarity because they allow participants to express shared anger, hope, fear, or frustration. Emotional connection can accelerate mobilization because political participation often depends on the perception that an issue is urgent. The danger arises when emotional intensity replaces substantive argument. A movement may gain attention through outrage while providing limited information about policy alternatives. The challenge is therefore to transform political emotion into sustained civic engagement rather than allowing it to become temporary digital spectacle.

Young people also use digital platforms to connect local issues with broader publics. An environmental problem, university policy dispute, or local governance controversy can acquire national attention when activists successfully construct a compelling digital narrative. Ahmad and Setyawati's (2024) study of Jakarta's air-pollution movement shows how youth activists can use digital platforms to connect personal experiences with broader environmental concerns. Digital networks consequently enable political issues to travel across geographic and institutional boundaries.

The same network capacity allows movements to interact with journalists, public officials, civil-society organizations, academics, and other activist communities. A youth movement that begins as a social-media campaign can develop into a broader advocacy coalition. Such interaction can increase institutional access and policy influence. At the same time, institutional engagement can create internal tensions because some participants may prefer radical independence while others prioritize negotiation. The decentralized character of digital movements therefore creates both flexibility and strategic disagreement.

The proposed second stage of the continuum is consequently collective mobilization. At this point, digital networks move beyond expression and begin coordinating people, information, resources, and actions. The defining characteristic is not simply the number of online participants but the existence of a connection between communication and collective capacity. Digital networks become politically significant when they help participants organize offline activities, influence public debate, support advocacy, or establish continuing relationships among citizens.

Sustainability, Institutional Participation, and the Democratic Limits of Digital Movements

The effectiveness of a digital movement cannot be determined solely by the intensity of its initial mobilization. Many online movements experience rapid growth during moments of political controversy and then decline once public attention shifts. This temporal instability creates a central problem for digital activism: how can a movement convert temporary visibility into durable political participation? Research on Indonesian youth engagement indicates that digital participation may be episodic, with young people moving rapidly between issues according to changes in the political information environment (Saud et al. 2020). Sustainability therefore requires mechanisms that extend participation beyond moments of virality.

One reason for declining engagement is the abundance of competing information. Social-media users encounter political issues alongside entertainment, personal communication, commercial content, and other forms of public controversy. Attention is consequently scarce. A movement must continually provide reasons for participants to remain engaged. This creates pressure to produce increasingly attractive or emotionally compelling content. While such strategies can maintain visibility, they can also encourage superficial political communication. The democratic challenge is to maintain attention without reducing political issues to entertainment.

The problem of sustainability is visible in the distinction between symbolic and substantive participation. A user who shares a hashtag participates symbolically, while a user who attends a protest, contributes resources, joins an advocacy group, or communicates with public officials engages more substantively.

Neither form should be dismissed, because symbolic participation can create the visibility necessary for collective mobilization. However, a movement that remains exclusively symbolic may have limited capacity to influence political institutions. Addiputra et al. (2020) reach a similar conclusion concerning online petitions: digital expression becomes more effective when connected with follow-up advocacy.

Institutional engagement represents another stage in the participation continuum. Democratic politics ultimately involves institutions because policies are made, implemented, and contested through governments, legislatures, courts, electoral bodies, and other public institutions. Digital movements can pressure institutions from outside, but they may also engage them directly through consultations, advocacy, public hearings, policy proposals, or electoral participation. The challenge is to maintain civic autonomy while developing sufficient institutional capacity to influence decision-making.

Youth participation in elections provides an important example. Social media can influence political awareness and campaign exposure among young voters, but electoral participation involves a broader range of activities, including voting, discussing candidates, evaluating policies, and monitoring government performance. Research on Generation Z and the 2024 election indicates that social media contributed to political awareness and participation among young citizens (Suryawijaya, Fauzy, and Maulidina 2024). Digital political engagement should therefore be understood as part of a broader participatory ecosystem rather than as a substitute for electoral citizenship.

Urban youth research further complicates the assumption that young people are either politically active or apathetic. Sugiyono et al. (2024) demonstrate that youth political engagement in Indonesia involves a combination of optimism and realism. Young people can be interested in political issues while simultaneously expressing skepticism toward political institutions. This ambivalence is important because digital movements often emerge precisely from dissatisfaction with formal institutions. A movement can therefore strengthen democratic participation while remaining critical of existing political structures.

Political skepticism does not necessarily weaken democracy. When young citizens question government policies, criticize political elites, or demand greater accountability, they can perform a corrective function. Digital activism can provide mechanisms for monitoring government behavior and publicizing policy failures. Paskarina (2020) identifies government criticism and control as important forms of digital activism in Indonesia. The democratic value of such criticism depends on whether it is grounded in credible information and whether it creates opportunities for institutional response.

Digital activism can also become a mechanism for protecting information quality. The experience of KawalCOVID19 demonstrates that activists can respond to misinformation by collecting data, verifying information, producing educational materials, and communicating evidence to the public (Yasa and Rahayu 2023). This

example expands the conventional understanding of activism. Activism is not always about opposing government policy through protest. It can also involve building alternative information infrastructures that allow citizens to make better decisions.

Nevertheless, digital movements themselves are vulnerable to misinformation. When activists operate under conditions of political urgency, they may share unverified information because they believe it supports the movement's goals. The credibility of the movement can then be damaged by inaccurate claims. Digital literacy must therefore be considered part of democratic participation. The ability to verify sources, identify manipulated content, distinguish opinion from evidence, and recognize coordinated disinformation is increasingly necessary for effective activism.

Digital movements also face harassment and counter-mobilization. Activists may encounter hostile comments, coordinated attacks, doxxing, threats, or attempts to discredit the movement. These pressures can discourage participation and create unequal opportunities for political expression. Research on digital activism in Indonesia has identified harassment and counter-mobilization as important challenges confronting activists (Nugroho 2025). Consequently, democratic digital participation requires not only access to platforms but also an environment in which citizens can express political opinions without disproportionate risks.

The issue of digital inequality further complicates the democratic promise of online activism. Access to smartphones and social media has expanded significantly, but differences remain in connectivity, digital literacy, language, socioeconomic resources, and geographic location. A movement that depends heavily on digital participation may therefore privilege citizens who possess greater technological resources. Digital activism should not be assumed to represent society as a whole merely because it generates large numbers of online interactions. Mustofa, Utama, and Andalus (2023) emphasize that the expansion of social-media access does not automatically eliminate challenges to meaningful youth participation.

Platform governance represents another structural constraint. Digital movements operate within privately controlled technological infrastructures whose algorithms determine visibility, recommendation, moderation, and content distribution. A political campaign can suddenly lose reach because of changes in platform rules or algorithmic priorities. Activists therefore possess less control over the infrastructure on which their political communication depends. This creates a tension between the democratic potential of digital participation and the commercial architecture of social-media platforms.

The relationship between virality and democratic sustainability is consequently ambiguous. Viral content can bring an issue into public attention within hours, but attention is inherently unstable. A movement that relies entirely on virality may become dependent on increasingly sensational communication. By contrast, movements that develop organizational memory, leadership,

documentation, and offline networks have greater opportunities for continuity. Research on digital activism during Indonesian political protests suggests that the strongest movements are those in which online communication and offline organization reinforce one another (Wahyuningroem et al. 2024).

Sustainability also depends on whether participants develop political identities that extend beyond individual campaigns. A temporary hashtag may mobilize users around a specific policy, but long-term democratic participation requires broader civic commitments. These may include concern for human rights, environmental protection, anti-corruption, social justice, electoral integrity, or public accountability. Hermanto's (2022) research on Jakarta Feminist demonstrates how digital feminist activism can connect local political concerns with broader networks and longer-term movement identities. Similar processes can occur within youth political movements.

The third stage of the proposed continuum is therefore institutional and sustained political participation. At this stage, digital activism moves beyond episodic expression and mobilization toward continuing civic engagement. Participants may remain active through elections, advocacy organizations, community groups, policy monitoring, public education, or ongoing campaigns. The movement does not necessarily need to become a formal political organization. Its democratic significance instead lies in whether the networks created through digital activism remain capable of generating informed, collective, and accountable political participation.

Conclusion

Digital youth movements have transformed democratic participation in Indonesia by creating new pathways between individual political expression and collective action. Hashtags, online petitions, social-media campaigns, digital communities, and user-generated political content enable young citizens to identify shared concerns and construct collective political narratives without necessarily joining conventional organizations. Indonesian research demonstrates that digital platforms can strengthen political learning, identity formation, mobilization, and public advocacy (Saud et al. 2020; Ayudha 2022; Ahmad and Setyawati 2024). The central finding of this article is therefore that digital youth activism should be understood as a form of political organization rather than merely a form of online communication. Its democratic importance emerges from the ability of digital networks to connect dispersed citizens around shared political concerns.

The analysis also demonstrates that online visibility does not automatically become political influence. Digital movements are most consequential when online expression develops into networks capable of coordinating offline action, advocacy, public education, and institutional engagement. The experiences of *#ReformasiDikorupsi*, *#TolakOmnibusLaw*, online petitions, and other Indonesian digital campaigns demonstrate that online and offline participation frequently

operate as mutually reinforcing processes (Addiputra et al. 2020; Wahyuningroem et al. 2024). At the same time, movements face substantial obstacles involving misinformation, polarization, harassment, digital inequality, platform dependence, and declining public attention. The proposed continuum—digital expression, network formation, collective mobilization, and sustained institutional participation—therefore provides a way to distinguish temporary digital visibility from deeper democratic engagement.

Future research should investigate the long-term trajectories of Indonesian digital youth movements rather than concentrating primarily on moments of virality or protest. Comparative longitudinal studies could examine whether participants in movements such as *#ReformasiDikorupsi*, *#TolakOmnibusLaw*, environmental campaigns, and electoral movements remain politically active after the original issue disappears from public attention. Future research should also combine social-network analysis with interviews and ethnographic approaches to identify how online relationships develop into durable civic organizations. Greater attention should be given to algorithmic governance, digital surveillance, political harassment, and inequalities in access to digital participation. Such research would clarify whether Indonesia's digital youth movements are producing a durable transformation of democratic citizenship or primarily creating episodic moments of political mobilization.

References

- Addiputra, Ahmad Faadhila, Faiz Aulia Rahman, Monique Madelin, Putri Ramadini Mumpuni, and Epin Saepudin. 2020. "Online Petition as a Form of Citizen Participation in the Digital Age." *Jurnal Pendidikan Ilmu Sosial* 29 (2): 181–92. <https://doi.org/10.17509/jpis.v29i2.29801>.
- Ahmad, Yazied Taqiyuddin, and Lugina Setyawati. 2024. "Digital Activism and Collective Identity: 'No Viral No Action' as Connective Action among Youth on Jakarta's Air Pollution Issue." *Jurnal Pendidikan Ilmu Sosial* 33 (1): 15–34.
- Andriansyah, Yuli. 2025. "Youth Activism and Digital Advocacy: Indonesian Young Generation's Solidarity with Palestine." *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 24 (2).
- Aulia, Firda, and Bevaola Kusumasari. 2022. "Tunda Pilkada: Apakah Advokasi Digital Berhasil Memengaruhi Proses Pembuatan Kebijakan?" *Jurnal Komunikasi* 16 (2). <https://doi.org/10.20885/komunikasi.vol16.iss2.art4>.
- Ayudha, Nora Titahning. 2022. "Digital Activism in the Omnibus Law Discourse Network Structure and the Role of Hashtags in Mobilizing Public Opinion." *Jurnal Sosiologi Pendidikan Humanis* 7 (1): 59–74. <https://doi.org/10.17977/um021v7i12022p59-74>.
- Fatimatuzzahro, Fatimatuzzahro, and Zainal Abidin Achmad. 2022. "What If It Was You (#WIIWY) Digital Activism on TikTok to Fight Gender-Based Violence

- Online and Cyberbullying." *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan dan Politik* 35 (4): 450–65. <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.V35I42022.450-465>.
- Hermanto, Rifka Annisa. 2022. "Indonesian Digital Feminist Activism Bridging Global-Local Feminism Discourse: Textual Network Analysis of Jakarta Feminist." *Jurnal Sosioteknologi* 21 (2).
- Ida, Rachmah, Muhammad Saud, and Musta'in Mashud. 2020. "An Empirical Analysis of Social Media Usage, Political Learning and Participation among Youth: A Comparative Study of Indonesia and Pakistan." *Quality & Quantity* 54: 1285–97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-020-00985-9>.
- Kristianto, Kristianto, Abdul Basith Ramadhan, and Fernandito Diky Marsetyo. 2021. "Media Sosial dan Connective Action: Studi Kasus Penggunaan Twitter sebagai Ruang Solidaritas selama Pandemi COVID-19." *Journal of Social Development Studies* 2 (1): 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsds.1037>.
- Mulyana, Tiara Alya, and Sri Lestari Wahyuningroem. 2025. "From Fans to Protest: K-Poppers Fangirl in Digital Movement in Indonesia." *Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies* 11 (1). <https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v11i1.28979>.
- Mulyana, Tiara Alya, and Sri Lestari Wahyuningroem. 2025. "From Fans to Protest: K-Poppers Fangirl in Digital Movement in Indonesia." *Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies* 11 (1). <https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v11i1.28979>.
- Mustofa, Mustabsyrotul Ummah, Rafif Sakti Utama, and Mutia Kartika Andalus. 2023. "E-Democracy in Indonesia: Use of Social Media and Challenges in Encouraging Youth Political Participation." *JWP: Jurnal Wacana Politik* 9 (1).
- Nugroho, Bernardus Herdian. 2025. "Digital Activism and Youth Participation in Indonesia: A Qualitative Study of Social Media's Role in Contemporary Social Movements." *Priviet Social Sciences Journal* 5 (10): 91–105. <https://doi.org/10.55942/pssj.v5i10.603>.
- Nugroho, Bernardus Herdian. 2025. "Digital Activism and Youth Participation in Indonesia: A Qualitative Study of Social Media's Role in Contemporary Social Movements." *Priviet Social Sciences Journal* 5 (10): 91–105. <https://doi.org/10.55942/pssj.v5i10.603>.
- Paskarina, Caroline. 2020. "Digital Activism and Democracy in Indonesia: Learning from the Foregoing Research Issues (2014–2020)." *Indonesian Journal of Political Research* 1: 43–57.
- Ramadhani, Shakeella Putri, Nurul Dewi Kurniawati, Aldina Nurcahyani, Ardiyanti Nur Khasanah, and Neng Vinna Syaharani. 2025. "Media Sosial: Pemantik Partisipasi Politik Generasi Z Menuju Pilkada Jakarta yang Bermakna." *Journal of Indonesian Social Studies Education* 3 (1).
- Saud, Muhammad, Rachmah Ida, Ansar Abbas, Asia Ashfaq, and Araz Ramazan Ahmad. 2020. "The Social Media and Digitalization of Political Participation in Youths: An Indonesian Perspective." *Society* 8 (1): 83–93.

- Suardi, Suardi. 2025. "Youth Political Participation in the Era of Memes and Hashtag Activism: A Media and Communication Analysis." *Cognitionis Civitatis et Politicae* 2 (3). <https://doi.org/10.70177/politicae.v2i3.3092>.
- Sugiyono, P. Bagus, Clara R. P. Ajisukmo, Teresa Metta Rosario, Yeremias Siane Ilang Soge, and Vinsenso Valdis Amor Wijoyo. 2024. "Balancing Optimism and Realism: Indonesia's Urban Youth's Political Engagement in the 2024 General Elections." *Jurnal Sosiologi Pendidikan Humanis* 9 (1): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.17977/um021v9i12024p1-19>.
- Sumardiono, Nawan. 2022. "Aktivisme Digital dalam Konteks Penggalangan Donasi Fandom BTS (ARMY) Indonesia Melalui Twitter." *Jurnal Komunikasi* 16 (2): 113–28. <https://doi.org/10.20885/komunikasi.vol16.iss2.art2>.
- Suryawijaya, Tito, Muhamad Rafi Nur Fauzy, and Nabila Fauziah Maulidina. 2024. "Peran Media Sosial dalam Membentuk Partisipasi Politik Gen Z pada Pemilu 2024." *Jurnal Politica: Dinamika Masalah Politik Dalam Negeri dan Hubungan Internasional* 15 (2). <https://doi.org/10.22212/jp.v15i2.4441>.
- Wahyuningroem, Sri Lestari, Rheinhard Sirait, Uljanatunnisa, and Dudy Heryadi. 2024. "Youth Political Participation and Digital Movement in Indonesia: The Case of #ReformasiDikorupsi and #TolakOmnibusLaw." *F1000Research* 12:543. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.122669.3>.
- Yasa, Agne, and Rahayu. 2023. "Pelajaran dari Aktivisme Digital KawalCOVID19 dalam Melawan Infodemic pada Masa Pandemi COVID-19 di Indonesia." *Jurnal IPTEKKOM* 25 (1): 17–36. <https://doi.org/10.17933/iptekkom.25.1.2023.17-36>.

Acknowledgment

None

Funding Information

None

Conflicting Interest Statement

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

Publishing Ethical and Originality Statement

All authors declared that this work is original and has never been published in any form and in any media, nor is it under consideration for publication in any journal, and all sources cited in this work refer to the basic standards of scientific citation.

Generative AI Statement

N/A