

Palestine in the Indonesian Digital Public Sphere: Muslim Youth Activism and Political Expression on Social Media

Aisyah Mahbubah*

Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia

aisyahmahbubah@gmail.com

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*Corresponding Author

Abstract

The war in Palestine has generated significant political and humanitarian engagement among Indonesian citizens, particularly Muslim youth who use social media to express solidarity, disseminate information, organize campaigns, and mobilize humanitarian support. This article examines the role of Indonesian Muslim youth in shaping public discourse on Palestine through digital platforms. Using qualitative socio-legal and digital society analysis, the study explores online activism, political expression, information dissemination, and forms of collective mobilization. The article argues that social media has transformed Palestine solidarity from an issue primarily addressed by political and religious organizations into a decentralized form of youth-driven civic participation. However, digital activism also creates challenges involving misinformation, content moderation, polarization, and restrictions on political expression. The study proposes a framework for understanding Palestine-related digital activism as a form of contemporary civic engagement while emphasizing the importance of media literacy and responsible information practices. Particular attention is given to how young Indonesians negotiate religious identity, humanitarian concerns, and political solidarity within digital spaces. The article concludes that Palestine-related digital activism has become an important component of Indonesian public discourse and provides insight into the changing relationship between youth, religion, humanitarianism, and digital politics.

[Perang di Palestina telah memicu keterlibatan politik dan kemanusiaan yang signifikan di kalangan warga Indonesia, khususnya pemuda Muslim yang menggunakan media sosial untuk mengekspresikan solidaritas, menyebarkan informasi, mengorganisir kampanye, dan memobilisasi dukungan kemanusiaan. Artikel ini mengkaji peran pemuda Muslim Indonesia dalam membentuk wacana publik tentang Palestina melalui platform digital. Dengan menggunakan analisis sosial-hukum dan masyarakat digital kualitatif, studi ini mengeksplorasi aktivisme daring, ekspresi politik, penyebaran

informasi, dan bentuk-bentuk mobilisasi kolektif. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa media sosial telah mengubah solidaritas Palestina dari isu yang terutama ditangani oleh organisasi politik dan keagamaan menjadi bentuk partisipasi sipil yang terdesentralisasi dan digerakkan oleh kaum muda. Namun, aktivisme digital juga menciptakan tantangan yang melibatkan misinformasi, moderasi konten, polarisasi, dan pembatasan ekspresi politik. Studi ini mengusulkan kerangka kerja untuk memahami aktivisme digital terkait Palestina sebagai bentuk keterlibatan sipil kontemporer sambil menekankan pentingnya literasi media dan praktik informasi yang bertanggung jawab. Perhatian khusus diberikan pada bagaimana kaum muda Indonesia menegosiasikan identitas keagamaan, keprihatinan kemanusiaan, dan solidaritas politik dalam ruang digital. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa aktivisme digital terkait Palestina telah menjadi komponen penting dalam wacana publik Indonesia dan memberikan wawasan tentang perubahan hubungan antara kaum muda, agama, kemanusiaan, dan politik digital.]

Keywords: Palestine, Indonesian youth, digital activism, social media, political expression

Introduction

The question of Palestine occupies a distinctive position within Indonesian public discourse because humanitarian concern, religious solidarity, anti-colonial political consciousness, and Indonesia's longstanding foreign-policy orientation converge around the issue. The development of social media has transformed the manner in which this solidarity is articulated. Young Indonesians no longer depend exclusively on religious organizations, student associations, political parties, or conventional news media to communicate their positions. Instagram, TikTok, X, YouTube, and other platforms allow individuals to publish commentary, circulate visual material, participate in hashtag campaigns, organize donations, promote boycotts, and connect domestic audiences with transnational networks of solidarity. Recent studies specifically examining Indonesia indicate that Palestine-related social media activism has become an important mechanism through which young users participate in public discourse and construct political awareness (Amara 2024; Kusuma et al. 2025; Nur Hadi 2025).

This transformation is significant because digital activism changes not only the speed of political communication but also the structure of participation. Conventional political participation generally requires organizational membership, financial resources, institutional access, or physical presence. Digital platforms reduce some of these barriers by enabling relatively low-cost participation through sharing, commenting, hashtagging, content creation, crowdfunding, and online discussion. Research on Indonesian youth demonstrates that social media can facilitate political learning and participation, although the relationship between

digital exposure and substantive political engagement is neither automatic nor uniform (Ida, Saud, and Mashud 2020; Saud et al. 2021). The digital environment therefore should not be treated as inherently democratic. Its political significance depends on how users transform technological affordances into meaningful forms of participation, how platforms distribute visibility, and how online engagement interacts with offline institutions and social networks.

Previous studies provide several important foundations for understanding this phenomenon. Research on Indonesian digital activism has demonstrated that social media can amplify political mobilization, provide spaces for youth expression, and facilitate collective identity formation. Suwana's study of the Save KPK movement, for example, shows that Indonesian youth activism can be motivated by political concerns, perceived injustice, and opportunities created by digital media (Suwana 2020). Research on youth political participation similarly demonstrates that online political activity may function as an entry point toward broader forms of civic engagement (Ida, Saud, and Mashud 2020; Kahne and Bowyer 2018). More recent Indonesian studies have extended this discussion to environmental activism, student movements, and contemporary protest networks (Ahmad and Setyawati 2024; Mustofa, Utama, and Andalus 2023). These studies collectively establish that Indonesian youth are not passive consumers of digital political information but increasingly participate in the production and circulation of political narratives.

The Palestine case, however, presents an analytically distinctive context. Unlike many domestic policy issues, Palestine combines a transnational conflict with religious, humanitarian, historical, and anti-colonial meanings. Indonesian youth may therefore participate in Palestine-related activism not because they are directly affected by domestic policy but because they perceive a moral, religious, or humanitarian connection with a distant population. Recent scholarship on Indonesian Palestine solidarity has documented the significance of hashtags, TikTok activism, student movements, and broader social media campaigns in constructing this connection (Amara 2024; Nur Hadi 2025; Putri, Puspitasari, and Hardiansyah 2025). Other studies show that pro-Palestinian digital activism can involve highly confrontational practices, demonstrating that solidarity may coexist with antagonistic communication and problematic online behavior (Amrullah, Bate, and Briandana 2024).

Despite these contributions, an analytical gap remains. Much of the emerging literature focuses on describing platforms, hashtags, campaigns, or specific activist communities. Less attention has been given to the broader political meaning of Palestine-related youth activism as a form of digital public-sphere participation. The central question is therefore not simply how Indonesian Muslim youth use social media to support Palestine, but how such practices reshape political expression, collective identity, public discourse, and civic participation. This article addresses that question by situating Palestine-related activism within theories of the digital public sphere, connective action, affective publics, and digital religious identity. It argues that the Palestine issue demonstrates how contemporary political

participation increasingly occurs through flexible networks in which personal identity, emotional expression, humanitarian narratives, and political claims become interconnected.

Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

A. Digital Public Sphere and Political Expression

The concept of the public sphere provides an important starting point for understanding digital political expression. Classical public-sphere theory emphasizes the importance of communicative spaces in which citizens discuss matters of common concern and develop public opinion. Digital platforms do not simply reproduce the traditional public sphere; they create a more fragmented and networked communicative environment in which citizens, organizations, influencers, journalists, and anonymous users interact simultaneously. Studies of networked publics demonstrate that social media can facilitate political communication by connecting individuals through weak ties and allowing political messages to travel beyond conventional institutional boundaries (Vatikiotis and Yurk 2016; Becker and Copeland 2016). In this environment, political expression becomes increasingly decentralized. Users do not merely receive political information but also interpret, remix, frame, and redistribute it. The Palestine issue illustrates this transformation because a local Indonesian user can participate in a global political conversation by producing a short video, sharing a news report, using a hashtag, or connecting a humanitarian appeal with domestic audiences.

The digital public sphere nevertheless contains structural inequalities. Visibility is not distributed equally among users because algorithms, platform policies, follower networks, engagement metrics, and content moderation influence which narratives become prominent. The capacity to speak therefore does not necessarily correspond to the capacity to be heard. Research on youth activism under restrictive environments demonstrates that digital networks can simultaneously facilitate political expression and expose activists to surveillance, harassment, censorship, and other forms of vulnerability (Lee 2018). This tension is particularly important for Palestine-related activism because political content may circulate through highly emotional and contentious environments. The digital public sphere should consequently be conceptualized as a contested communicative arena rather than a neutral technological space. Its democratic potential depends on the ability of users to access information, participate without intimidation, contest dominant narratives, and maintain meaningful opportunities for political expression.

B. Connective Action and Digital Mobilization

The concept of connective action helps explain why Palestine-related activism can expand rapidly without a centralized organizational structure. Bennett and Segerberg distinguish connective action from traditional collective action by emphasizing personalized communication, flexible participation, and digitally

enabled networks (Bennett and Segerberg 2012). In a connective-action environment, individuals can participate by expressing personal identities and sharing individualized messages that become connected through common hashtags, symbols, narratives, or political frames. The significance of this framework for Indonesian Palestine activism is substantial because participation does not require users to become members of a formal Palestine-support organization. A user can contribute through a post, donation, boycott, video, infographic, or public statement while remaining institutionally independent.

Indonesian research supports this interpretation. Studies of social media solidarity show that Twitter and other platforms can facilitate networked forms of participation in which users, opinion leaders, organizations, and ordinary citizens interact around a common issue (Kristianto, Ramadhan, and Marsetyo 2021). Studies of youth activism similarly demonstrate that digital platforms can generate collective identities through inclusive and interactive forms of participation (Ahmad and Setyawati 2024). The implication is that Palestine solidarity does not necessarily depend on organizational centralization. Its strength may instead derive from the capacity of platforms to connect heterogeneous users through a common moral and political narrative. Yet connective action can also produce fragmentation because participants may share a symbolic cause while holding very different political interpretations of that cause.

C. Affective Publics and Religious Identity

Palestine-related digital activism cannot be fully explained through rational political participation because affect plays a central role in the circulation of political messages. Papacharissi's concept of affective publics highlights how networked communication can organize publics around emotions, stories, sentiments, and shared experiences (Papacharissi 2016). Social media allows users to communicate political claims through images of suffering, personal testimony, religious messages, historical narratives, and emotionally charged video content. Such communication can create a sense of proximity between Indonesian audiences and events occurring thousands of kilometers away. Emotional communication does not necessarily diminish political significance; it can instead become a mechanism through which political consciousness is generated and solidarity is sustained.

Religious identity further intensifies this process among Indonesian Muslim youth. Research on Muslim youth and social media shows that digital platforms increasingly function as spaces for the construction, negotiation, and performance of religious identity (Hannan 2024; Zahri, Lubis, and Ahrom 2021). Religious identity is therefore not merely a private attribute carried into digital politics. It can become a communicative resource through which users interpret international events and determine their moral responsibilities. Palestine can consequently be framed simultaneously as a humanitarian crisis, an issue of Muslim solidarity, an anti-colonial struggle, and a matter of international justice. This multiplicity of

meanings helps explain the broad appeal of Palestine-related activism while also creating the possibility of polarization when religious and political identities become rigidly intertwined.

D. Hashtag Activism and Political Framing

Hashtags are particularly important because they convert dispersed individual expressions into recognizable political conversations. Hashtag activism allows users to locate related content, participate in symbolic campaigns, and signal political affiliation without necessarily joining formal organizations. Research has demonstrated that hashtags can facilitate network formation, message framing, and the co-creation of political narratives (Ofori-Parku and Moscato 2018; Malik et al. 2018). Hashtags therefore perform both communicative and organizational functions. They identify an issue, create symbolic boundaries, facilitate discoverability, and provide a simple mechanism through which users can join a wider campaign.

In the Palestine context, hashtags such as #FreePalestine and #SavePalestine have contributed to the creation of a transnational discursive space in which Indonesian users participate alongside international audiences. Recent Indonesian studies show that hashtag campaigns have been used to spread information, build solidarity, challenge dominant narratives, and mobilize political engagement (Amara 2024; Kusuma et al. 2025). However, hashtag visibility should not automatically be equated with political effectiveness. High engagement may represent temporary attention rather than sustained political participation. The analytical challenge is therefore to distinguish symbolic visibility from substantive mobilization and to examine whether digital expression generates fundraising, public deliberation, offline protest, consumer action, institutional pressure, or other measurable forms of civic engagement.

Methods

This article employs a qualitative socio-legal and digital society approach. The research is normative and analytical rather than survey-based, with the objective of interpreting the political and social implications of Palestine-related digital activism among Indonesian Muslim youth. The analysis combines scholarly literature on digital activism, youth political participation, social media, Muslim digital identity, networked publics, and Palestine solidarity with relevant legal and policy principles concerning freedom of expression, association, and access to information. The literature was selected on the basis of thematic relevance, scholarly publication status, identifiable authorship, and publication no later than 2025. Recent studies focusing specifically on Indonesian Palestine activism were treated as empirical contextual sources rather than as substitutes for broader digital-activism scholarship. This approach allows the article to connect Indonesia-specific evidence with established theoretical debates concerning digital political participation and networked collective action.

The analytical process proceeded through thematic interpretation rather than statistical measurement. The literature was organized around four interconnected dimensions: the transformation of political expression, the construction of religious and collective identity, digital mobilization and solidarity, and the limitations of platform-mediated activism. Particular attention was given to the relationship between online and offline participation because digital activism should not be conceptualized as an isolated activity. Existing studies indicate that social media can amplify protests, humanitarian campaigns, and collective identities, but its effects depend on organizational networks, political motivations, media literacy, and opportunities for offline action (Suwana 2020; Ida, Saud, and Mashud 2020; Kahne and Bowyer 2018). The resulting analysis therefore treats social media as an infrastructure of political participation rather than as an independent cause of political behavior.

Results and Discussion

A. Palestine Solidarity as a Form of Digital Civic Participation

The analysis indicates that Palestine-related activism has become a significant form of civic participation among Indonesian youth because it enables individuals to intervene in public discourse without requiring formal political authority. Young users participate by creating explanatory content, reposting information, translating international developments, distributing humanitarian appeals, and expressing political judgments. These activities constitute more than passive media consumption because users actively select frames, identify responsible actors, and communicate normative positions. Indonesian research on Palestine-related social media confirms that young users employ Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and other platforms to mobilize support and shape political discourse (Amara 2024; Kusuma et al. 2025). This demonstrates the emergence of a participatory political culture in which the boundary between audience and activist becomes increasingly fluid.

The civic significance of this participation becomes clearer when Palestine activism is compared with other forms of Indonesian digital mobilization. Studies of the Save KPK movement and subsequent youth campaigns show that social media can lower participation costs and allow politically concerned individuals to enter public debates without belonging to established organizations (Suwana 2020). Research on Generation Z similarly indicates that social media can expand opportunities for political participation, although the quality of participation varies according to political interest, knowledge, and perceived barriers (Ida, Saud, and Mashud 2020). Palestine activism thus represents part of a broader transformation in Indonesian political culture. Young citizens increasingly use digital platforms not only to discuss domestic issues but also to connect national political identity with transnational humanitarian concerns.

B. Religious Identity, Humanitarianism, and the Construction of Solidarity

The Palestine issue has particular mobilizing capacity because it allows religious identity and humanitarian concern to reinforce one another. Indonesian Muslim youth may interpret images and narratives concerning Palestinian suffering through both universal human-rights principles and Islamic concepts of solidarity. This creates a multidimensional political identity that cannot be reduced to religious activism alone. Studies of Indonesian Muslim youth demonstrate that social media has become an important environment for negotiating religious identity, while contemporary digital religious practices frequently combine personal expression, communal belonging, and political interpretation (Hannan 2024; Zahri, Lubis, and Ahrom 2021). Palestine therefore becomes a symbolic issue through which young Muslims can express religious belonging while simultaneously participating in broader humanitarian discourse.

This intersection also explains why Palestine solidarity can travel across different social communities. Recent research has shown that Indonesian Palestine activism involves student organizations, humanitarian networks, digital communities, and even popular-culture fandoms (Putri, Puspitasari, and Hardiansyah 2025; Andriansyah 2025). The emergence of K-pop-related solidarity networks is particularly important because it demonstrates that political participation is no longer necessarily organized according to conventional ideological categories. Popular culture communities can be transformed into political networks when their members encounter an issue capable of generating shared moral concern. This phenomenon challenges the assumption that political activism among young people must originate from formal political organizations. Instead, digital environments allow political identities to emerge through unexpected combinations of religion, humanitarianism, popular culture, and transnational solidarity.

C. From Hashtag Visibility to Mobilization and Collective Action

The most important analytical distinction is between visibility and mobilization. A Palestine-related post may generate thousands of views, likes, or shares without producing meaningful political consequences. Digital activism becomes more politically significant when communication is connected to actions such as fundraising, humanitarian assistance, consumer boycotts, public demonstrations, educational activities, or institutional advocacy. The connective-action literature helps explain why social media can facilitate such transitions by allowing individuals to participate according to their own capacities while remaining connected through common frames and symbols (Bennett and Segerberg 2012). Indonesian research on social-media solidarity similarly demonstrates that online networks can connect individual expressions with broader collective activities (Kristianto, Ramadhan, and Marsetyo 2021).

Recent Palestine scholarship suggests that this transformation is already occurring. Indonesian youth activism has incorporated hashtag campaigns, humanitarian crowdfunding, student networks, TikTok advocacy, and other forms of digital participation (Andriansyah 2025; Nur Hadi 2025; Kusuma et al. 2025). The significance of these activities lies in their ability to convert emotional attention into practical participation. Nevertheless, this conversion is not automatic. The attention economy rewards content that is emotionally intense, visually compelling, or highly controversial, which may privilege dramatic narratives over complex information. Sustainable civic participation therefore requires mechanisms capable of connecting digital attention with reliable information, organizational capacity, and concrete forms of action.

D. Information Disorder, Polarization, and the Limits of Digital Solidarity

The same digital infrastructures that enable Palestine solidarity also create vulnerabilities. Misinformation can circulate rapidly because users often encounter content through recommendation systems rather than through deliberate verification. Highly emotional images or claims may be shared because they confirm existing political or religious identities, even when their provenance is uncertain. Recent research on Indonesian Palestine activism identifies misinformation, censorship, and difficulties in translating local political interpretations into global digital discourse as important challenges (Amara 2024; Kusuma et al. 2025). These problems demonstrate that political participation without information literacy can unintentionally undermine the quality of public deliberation.

Polarization represents a related problem. Digital platforms reward engagement, and controversial content can attract more attention than nuanced discussion. The emergence of confrontational forms of pro-Palestinian cyber activism illustrates how solidarity may become entangled with harassment or antagonistic communication (Amrullah, Bate, and Briandana 2024). Such practices raise a critical normative question: whether political expression remains democratically constructive when solidarity is communicated through intimidation or dehumanization of perceived opponents. The answer should not be to suppress Palestine-related political expression. Rather, the appropriate response is to strengthen media literacy, ethical digital communication, and platform accountability while preserving the right to political disagreement. Democratic digital activism requires not only the freedom to speak but also the capacity to sustain disagreement without eliminating the dignity and political agency of others.

E. Digital Activism and the Future of Indonesian Political Expression

The Palestine case ultimately demonstrates that Indonesian political expression is becoming increasingly hybrid. Political participation takes place simultaneously through social media posts, religious discussions, student

organizations, humanitarian campaigns, street demonstrations, consumer choices, and institutional advocacy. Recent scholarship on Indonesian youth activism shows that the distinction between online and offline mobilization is increasingly artificial because digital platforms can amplify physical protests while offline organizations can provide legitimacy and resources to digital campaigns (Efendi et al. 2025; Suwana 2020). The Palestine movement should therefore be understood as part of a broader transformation toward hybrid political participation.

This hybrid character also changes how political influence should be evaluated. Counting followers, views, hashtags, or viral posts may demonstrate communicative reach but does not adequately measure democratic impact. A stronger assessment would examine whether digital activism improves political knowledge, creates durable networks, encourages humanitarian participation, influences public institutions, or produces sustained civic engagement. Indonesian youth research indicates that social media can increase political learning and engagement, but participation remains conditional on knowledge, trust, political interest, and perceived barriers (Ida, Saud, and Mashud 2020). Consequently, Palestine-related activism should be evaluated not merely according to how loudly young people express solidarity but according to whether digital participation develops their capacity for informed, peaceful, and sustained civic engagement.

Conclusion

Palestine-related activism among Indonesian Muslim youth illustrates a significant transformation in the country's digital public sphere. Social media has expanded the possibilities of political expression by allowing young people to participate in transnational debates without relying exclusively on formal political or religious institutions. Through hashtags, visual narratives, fundraising, digital advocacy, student networks, and popular-culture communities, Palestine solidarity has become a flexible form of civic participation. The phenomenon is particularly significant because religious identity, humanitarian concern, anti-colonial consciousness, and political expression intersect within the same digital environment. The evidence suggests that this activism should not be dismissed as merely symbolic online behavior. It can facilitate political learning, collective identity, social solidarity, and forms of offline mobilization when digital communication is connected to broader networks of civic action.

At the same time, the democratic potential of Palestine-related digital activism should not be romanticized. Platform algorithms, misinformation, emotional polarization, harassment, censorship, and unequal visibility can undermine the quality of public discourse. The central challenge is therefore to transform digital solidarity into informed and responsible civic participation. Indonesian Muslim youth should be understood as active participants in the production of public discourse, but their participation requires an environment that supports media literacy, pluralism, freedom of expression, and accountability. The Palestine case ultimately demonstrates that the future of Indonesian political participation will

increasingly depend on the ability of citizens to connect digital expression with ethical communication, reliable information, and sustained forms of collective action.

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