

DIGITAL ACTIVISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA MOVEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

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This article examines the role of social media in digital activism and its significance in mobilizing and raising awareness of social and political issues. It analyzes 26 relevant studies published between 2020-2024, obtained from the Scopus and Springer databases and screening using the PRISMA approach in accordance with the criteria of the systematic literature review method. This review applies the Theory-Context-Method (TCM) framework to identify the most frequently used theoretical perspectives, major issues domains, and methodological trends. The findings show that Social Movement Theory, Framing Theory. Theories of Representation, Emotion and Hyperreality are among the most frequently employed frameworks to explain digital activism, while Twitter remains the main platform analyzed in this field. An emerging trend toward mixed method designs, such as the combining social Network Analysis and Discourse Analysis, reflects a growing convergence between qualitative and computational approaches. This study also highlights the transformative potential of digital activism in democratizing communication and amplifying marginalized voices. However, several challenges remain, including the spread of misinformation, the misuse of activist movements for conspiratorial social and policy change. Ultimately, this research offers a cross method and cross social media platform synthesis that underscores the shift toward integration between qualitative and computational approaches, while identifying persistent gaps between Global North and Global South perspective to guide future research toward more inclusive and impact oriented directions.

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1. Introduction

Communication plays an important role in shaping social, political and economic dynamics in a society. Interaction and information exchange are key components in forming

public opinion, which can serve as a catalyst for social change. Historically, public sphere is a place individuals can discuss and convey ideas without pressure from authority, as seen in the coffeehouse phenomenon in the past (Curran *et al*, 2000). However, with the development of technology, the concept of public sphere has now been transformed into a digital form through the presence of new media and social media (Jones, 2002).

With the advancement of digital technologies, this concept has evolved into what scholars refer to as the “digital Public sphere” (Alfian, 2023; Jones, 2002). Cyberspace enables broader social interactions, involving various aspects of life, including politics and economics (Camp *et al*, 2000). In this context, social media functions as a means of communication that makes it possible for individuals to participate in social and political discussions without geographical restrictions (Budiyo, 2016). The existence of social media has shared opportunities for people to actively participate in public debates, so increasing inclusiveness and transparency in democracy (Smith *et al*, 2021).

In Indonesia, the use of social media continues to increase, with the number of users reaching 139 million people or about 49,9% of the national population in early 2024 (Riyanto, 2024). In detail can be seen in the picture:

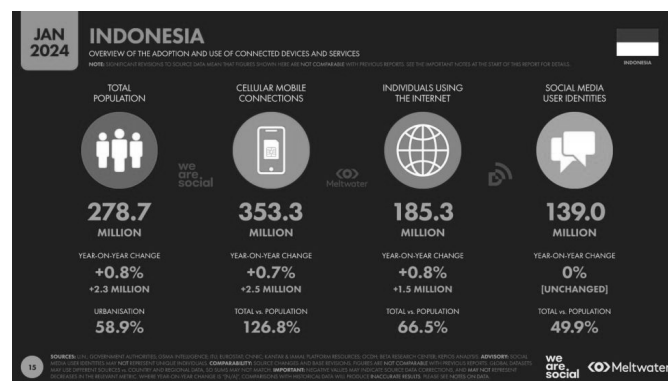


Figure 1. The number of internet and social media users based on We Are Social

This phenomenon shows that social media has become the main means of information for the public, replacing the role of conventional mass media in political communication. Kavanagh (1999) categorize this shift into the “Third era of political communication” and explain that digital media plays a role in distributing information more quickly and widely.

In the context of politics and activism, social media facilitates information dissemination and mass mobilization. This aligns with its function of allowing individuals to connect directly with political systems without spatial or temporal limits. Shirky (2010) and Kruse (2017) highlight that social media supports democracy by enabling the rapid circulation of information and fostering collective awareness. This awareness becomes the basis for people to raise issues as public agenda discussed within digital spaces.

Digital activism is rapidly expanded as more people engaged with social and political issues. It represents campaigns that utilize digital technology to achieve social and political goals through debates, solidarity actions, and problem solving efforts via digital communication (Ismahani *et al.*, 2023; Joyce, 2010; Park & &, 2019). A clear example of effective online mobilization is the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the United States, which began as a hashtag and evolved into a national movement for racial justice. In Indonesia, similar movements such as #SahkanRUUPKS and #TolakRUUCiptaKerja have successfully attracted public attention and encouraged civic protest.

Ismail Fahmi , one of the researchers through Drone Emprit Publications has systematically observed the phenomenon of #PeringatanDarurat focusing sentiment analysis and the in which public reacted to the ongoing issue on ‘X’ and other online news platform with hashtag #kawalputusanMK. The results found were discussions related to the issue of the Constitutional Court’s decision to change the threshold for PILKADA nomination requirements on twitter (X) as many as 16,753 mentions with social media sentiment: positive 71%, negative 2%, and neutral 27%. Similarly, Priageng (2024) related to the dynamics of digital activism in Indonesia shows that social media is very effective in building public awareness of political issues, especially in the younger generation so that digital activism is important in upholding democracy and increasing political awareness in Indonesia society.

Reflecting on this phenomenon, it is important to deepen understanding of how social media contributes to shaping social and political movements. Many studies have addressed the role of social media in digital activism. Several studies and literature reviews have examined the dynamics of digital activism in various context. Dumitrascu (2020) and Castillo *et al* (2023) highlighted the interrelation between online and offline activism and observed a shift from collective to connective participation influenced by platform. In Latin America, Kachouie *et al* (2021) reviewed community based digital activism as a form of media decolonization, while Chakma (2024) linked digital activism to democratic participation and algorithmic bias within social media ecosystems. However, most pervious studies have focused on one or two specific social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, and remain limited to particular national or regional context. Few studies have systematically integrated diverse analytical methods or conducted in depth cross context comparisons

In contrast, this study offers f a systematic cross-context and cross-method approach to the current issue of digital activism research. It integrates theoretical frameworks, digital social movements context, and research methodologies from studies published between 2020 and 2024 to provide a more holistic understanding of the role of social media in digital activism. Specifically, This study addresses four research questions: (1) What research theoretical frameworks are used in digital activism research? ; (2) What contexts and issues are discussed? ; (3) What research methods are applied? ; and (4) What is the role of social media platforms play in digital activism scholarship?.

2. Method

This systematic review was conducted based on PRISMA or Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses guidelines. Article were selected based on the following criteria: (i) the published research focuses on the topic of Digital Activism by analysing social media, (ii) the study shows the influence of social media on activism or social movements, (iii) the research is published in English, (iv) the study was conducted during 2020-2024. The inclusion criteria for inclusion carried out by researchers in systematic reviews using the five PICO elements (see [table 1](#))

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria (PICO)

Description	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population	Journals with subjects of social media users who actively use hashtags or tweets or posts containing several hashtags.	Journals not with subjects of social media users who actively use hashtags or tweets or posts containing several hashtags.
Intervention	Discusses the issue of social change on social media.	Doesn’t discuss the issue of change on social media
Comparison	No Comparison.	No Comparison.

Outcomes	Explains the theories, methods, contexts and roles of social media in digital activism.	There is no discussion of the theories, methods, contexts and roles of social media in digital activism.
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The literature search was conducted from two electronic databases, Scopus and Springer. The search terms or keywords used were as follows: namely “social media” AND “activism” AND “social movements”.

The electronic databases (Scopus and Springer) search initially produced 580 result across the two databases and was obtained by activating the “articles only” and publication year “2020-2024” filters. After collecting data from both electronic databases, duplication removal was carried out and resulted in one duplicate article document. Furthermore, it was filtered again manually by the author to determine relevance based on the title and abstract so that the final result was retained as many as 26 article documents. The overall process of study identification, screening, and inclusion is illustrated in [Figure 2](#).

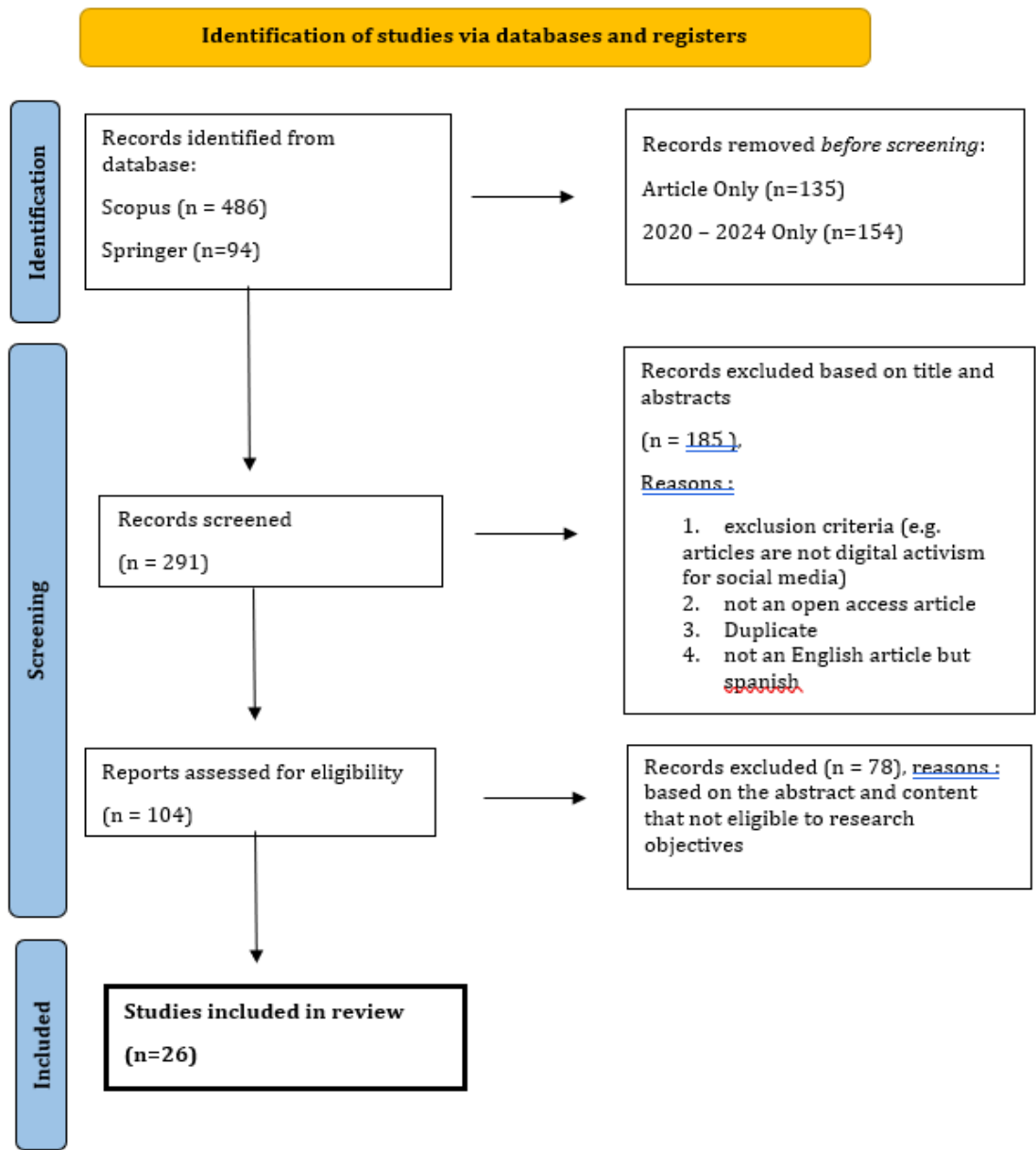


Figure 2. PRIMSA Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process

After conducting the inclusion and exclusion process based on the previous criteria, this study collected the literature that had been obtained, namely 26 articles and evaluated based on questions. At this stage, quality assessment is not carried out to reduce documents, the author only wants to see the quality of each journal that has been selected. The quality of selected studies was evaluated based on six assessment questions adapted from Jiang *et al* (2024) as listed in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Quality Assesment Questions

QA1	Are the aim and objectives clearly stated?
QA2	Are the methods for data collection adequately depicted?

QA3	Do the explanations and conclusion hinge on the data?
QA4	Is there a tangible and substansial contribution to knowledge?
QA5	Are the aims and objectives fulfilled?
QA6	Are there any gaps in the research?

From each article, answers will be given with a value of 3 namely “significantly explained”, value 2 “not significantly explained” and value 1 “not explained at all”. The results of this evaluation for all included article are summarized in [Table 3](#).

Table 3. Quality Assessment Results

	Are the aim and objectives clearly stated?	Are the methods for data collection adequately depicted?	Do the explanations and conclusion hinge on the data?	Is there a tangible and substansial contribution to knowledge?	Are the aims and objectives fulfilled?	Are there any gaps in the research?
Mixed Method						
Di Ronco, A., et al (2021)	3	3	3	3	3	3
Battisti, F., et al (2023)	3	3	3	3	3	3
Huang, J., et al (2023)	3	3	3	3	3	3
González-Malabet, M. A., et al. (2023)	3	3	3	2	2	3
Field, A., Park, C. Y., et al (2022)	3	3	3	3	3	3
Jenzen, O., et al (2020)	3	3	3	3	3	3
Li, Y., Bernard, et al (2021).	3	3	3	3	3	3
Liminga, A., et al (2024)	3	3	3	3	3	3
Lindqvist, L., et al (2023)	3	3	3	3	3	3
Nartey, M., & Yu, Y. (2023)	3	3	3	3	3	3
Merrill, S., et al. (2022)	3	3	3	3	3	3

Lavorgna, A., et al. (2022)	3	3	3	3	3	3
Graham, T., & FitzGerald, C. (2024).	3	3	3	3	3	3
Fernández-Zubieta, A., et al. (2023).	3	3	3	3	3	3
De Maio, M., & Rodriguez, N. S. (2022).	3	3	3	3	3	2
Karataş, D. (2023)	3	3	3	3	3	3
Quantitative						
Foster, M. D., et al (2022)	3	3	3	3	3	3
Estrella-Ramón, A., et al (2024)	3	3	3	3	3	3
Terren, L. & Soler-i-Martí, R. (2021)	3	3	3	3	3	1
Van Haperen, S., et, al (2023).	3	3	3	3	3	3
Qualitative						
Pradhana, G. A., et al (2021)	2	3	3	3	3	2
Frieiro, P., et al. (2024)	3	3	3	3	3	3
Mkono, et al (2024)	3	3	3	3	3	2
Ruth Tsuria (2020)	3	3	3	3	3	2
Giacomozzi, A. I., et al (2024).	3	3	3	3	3	3
Parmar, B. (2023)	3	3	3	3	3	3

**** Note: 3 = significantly explained; 2=partially explained; 1= not explained**

Then, to continue the data analysis, the author performed data extraction. Data extraction was manually conducted using Microsoft Excel containing study characteristics, including author, year, journal title, research context, unit of analysis/social media platform, theoretical framework, research approach (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method) and main findings. The extracted data were then categorized into Theory, Context, and Method (TCM) components (see [table 4.](#)). A thematic-narrative synthesis was subsequently applied to identify recurring patterns and methodological tendencies across studies, which are further elaborated in the [Results and Discussions](#) section.

Table 4. Data Extraction (TCM Summary)

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2021	Hyperreality Created Around The #BlackLivesMatter Movement on Social Media	Ghozian Aulia Pradhana & Syaifa Tania	Qualitative	Baudrillard's Theory of Simulacra

Findings: The #BlackLivesMatter movement succeeded in raising public awareness of racial issues, but in social media many used the hashtag without talking about the real issue so that in the content analysis there were indications that digital activism was only a symbol of participation not followed by a real movement (hyperreality phenomenon).

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2024	The Mad Pride movement on social media	Paula Frieiro, et al	Qualitative	Social Constructivism (Foucault), Mad Studies

Findings: Social media proved to be a significant tool for providing support, increasing visibility and facilitating activism on mental health issues.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2024	Hose Racing and The Growth of Hashtag Activism	Mucha Mkono, et al	Qualitative	Thematic Analysis, Social Movement Theory

Findings: The research notes that social media has enabled rapid and widespread communication, creating what is referred to as "clicktivism" - a form of activism centered on the use of hashtags to disseminate messages and garner support.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2020	Get out of Church! The Case	Ruth Tsuria	Qualitative	Uses and Gratifications (U&G), Social

	of #EmptyThePews			Network Analysis (SNA)
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Findings: Research shows that social movements on social media as seen with the #EmptyThePews hashtag are more complex and often focus more on the process of community and identity creation rather than encouraging physical action.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2024	Constructing emotional meanings about Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil	Andreila Isabel Glacomozzi, et al	Qualitative	Social Representation Theory

Findings: Twitter has proven to function as a powerful platform for social mobilization as well as a medium known for its emotive language.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2023	Dissent Art in the Digital Age	Bhawna Parmar	Qualitative	Social Movement Theory, Cultural Transformation

Findings: Instagram and other social media platforms play a key role in enabling activists to communicate their protests widely. Social media provides a space for artists to reach a global audience, expanding the impact of their work in the context of the anti-CAA and NRC movements.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2022	#MeToo as an 'angry mob' or in search of meaning?	Mindi D Foster, et al	Quantitative	Linguistic Analysis

Findings: This research confirms that the characterization of #MeToo as a movement dominated by anger or revenge is not supported by linguistic evidence, but rather focuses on meaning-making and self-empowerment among individuals involved in meaning-making and

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linguistic analysis.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2024	Hashtag activism on Twitter	Antonio Estrella Ramon, et al	Quantitative	Connective Action Theory

Findings: This research shows that variations in message characteristics strongly influence how people engage in activism on social media, and provides guidance for designing more effective communication strategies to increase engagement on digital platforms such as power influencers with large followings, content type, publication timing and content format.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2021	‘Glocal’ and Transversal Engagement in Youth Social Movements	Ludovic Terren, et al	Quantitative	Social Mobilization Theory, Collective Identity Theory

Findings: Fridays For Future-Barcelona focuses more on strengthening networks and connections within local and regional contexts rather than organizing broad transnational actions. This shows a shift in the use of social media from simply voicing global demands to building stronger connections within local communities.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2023	The Swarm vs the Grassroots	Sander Van Haperen, et al	Quantitative	Grassroots Mobilization Theory, Swarm Theory

Findings: The findings confirm that while social media provides a platform for rapid mobilization, the challenges of building strong relationships and forming mutually supportive social networks may make coordination more difficult for grassroots movements compared to the more reactive swarm model.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
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2021	Representations of environmental protest: NOTAP	Anna Di Ronco, et al	Mix Methods	Green-Cultural Criminology, Socio-Spatial Digital Criminology
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Findings: Twitter is considered capable of amplifying protest content and drawing wider attention to issues such as the negative impacts of the TAP project. Social media is also an important platform for activists to conduct political discussions, the networks formed within social media strengthen solidarity and expand international environmental organizations, but activists still consider the risks involved in posting content on social media.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2023	Between Empathy and Solidarity	Fabiana Battisti, et al	Mix Methods	Framing Theory, Acts of Citizenship

Findings: Social media can serve as an effective tool for organizing solidarity movements, increasing public participation, and challenging dominant narratives around migration issues.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2023	Comparing #BlackLivesMatter and #StopAsianHate	Jialing Huang, et al	Mix Methods	Social Movement Theory, Moral Foundation Theory

Findings: Social media discourse related to the #StopAsianHate (SAH) movement had lower word diversity, more negative emotional sentiments, and stronger moral sentiments compared to the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) movement. Engagement in SAH showed a dominance of emotions such as anger and disgust, while BLM had a more positive spectrum of emotions.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2023	Hybrid Role of Feminism on Twitter: SISMA Mujer	Maria A, et al	Mix Methods	Critical Discourse Analysis

Findings: Social media is considered a key platform for the feminist movement to raise and mobilize support for gender issues, through campaign posts on twitter successfully attracting

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public attention.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2022	Prominence of Positivity in #BlackLivesMatter	Anjalie Field, et al	Mix Methods	Emotion Theory, NLP Model

Findings: Social media became a space to express positive vibes and solidarity among the protesters, which may have mobilized more people to participate in real actions

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2020	The Symbol of Social Media in Protest: Gezi Park	Olu Jenzen, et al	Mix Methods	—

Findings: Twitter emerged as a 'digital public square' that provided a platform for protests. Activists perceive Twitter as a tool to express protests and replace the role of mainstream news media that do not adequately report on protests.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2021	Beyond Clicktivism: Sleeping Giants Movement	Yevgeniya Li, et al	Mix Methods	—

Findings: Social media plays a crucial role in strengthening and accelerating activism by creating new opportunities for coordination, mobilization, and interaction that are not possible through traditional methods.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2024	Mapping Discursive Landscape of Data Activism	Agnes Liminga, et al	Mix Methods	Critical Discourse Analysis

Findings: Social media serves not only as a space to hold discussions, but also as an arena where actors with different interests compete to influence the narrative around issues related to data and social justice.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2023	Connective Action in #MeToo Sweden	Lisa Lindqvist, et al	Mix Methods	Social Network Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis

Findings: The use of hashtags shows that active Twitter users utilize the platform's affordances such as @-mentions to call politicians and industry executives to account, reinforcing the reading of the issue as structural rather than individual. The narrative framework generated through the co-articulation of hashtags may encourage more significant collective action and enrich the social discourse on gender equality and gender-based violence in Sweden.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2023	#FixTheCountry on Ghanaian Twitter	Mark Nartey, et al	Mix Methods	Framing Paradigm, Discourse Analysis

Findings: Social media serves as an important tool for activists in the fight for social justice and community mobilization, making it clear that digital platforms can be an empowering force in the context of modern activism.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2022	Retweet Solidarity: Antifascists USA & UK	Samuel Merrill, et al	Mix Methods	Digital Solidarity Theory, Action Connections

Findings: Digital connections between antifascist groups in the US and UK via Twitter are quite limited, with many of the retweeting practices reflecting superficial forms of solidarity. From the analysis of 329 retweets, it was found that groups from the UK tended to connect more frequently and more deeply with and support groups in the US than vice versa.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
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2022	#NoMask Discourses on Twitter	Anita Lavorgn, et al	Mix Methods	Misinformation Theory, SNA
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Findings: Research shows that there is no unified #NoMask community, but that various independent actors spread similar political narratives, particularly about “freedom.” The hashtag is used by diverse online subcultures, including anti-government, anti-vaccine and QAnon, potentially reinforcing extreme ideologies. While discussion is limited, social media algorithms extend the reach of these narratives, exposing more people to misinformation.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2024	#SaveTheChildren and Conspiracy	Katherine M.FitzGerald, et al	Mix Methods	Symbolic Interaction Theory, Misinformation Theory

Findings: This research shows that the hashtag #SaveTheChildren is used more often for conspiratorial content than social activism. Social media algorithms reinforce QAnon's narrative, with conspiratorial content receiving twice as high engagement. This hashtag hijacking phenomenon stifles legitimate social movements and accelerates disinformation, especially ahead of the 2024 elections.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2023	Digital Activism Masked: Fridays for Future	Ana Fernandez Zubieta	Mix Methods	Social Media Activism, Framing

Findings: The results showed that tweets from the Fridays for Future (FFF) movement contained more opinion than calls to action, and there was no increase in calls for mobilization even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many tweets also offered solutions to climate problems, but were not often framed specifically to encourage action.

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2022	#DefendDACA & DREAMers	Mariana De Maio, et al	Mix Methods	Connective Action Theory, Digital Activism

Findings: The analysis of tweets using the hashtag #DefendDACA shows several important things : Call to Action (49.5%),Information Dissemination (33%), Consequences (10.8%) and

Positive Tone (93.3%).

Year	Title	Author(s)	Method	Theory
2021	Twitter in Occupy Gezi Identity Building	Duyggu Karatas	Mix Methods	Melucci's Collective Identity Theory

Findings: This research shows that Twitter plays an important role in building the collective identity of Occupy Gezi activists. The platform was used to identify friends and foes, build networks, and express a shared identity, despite government pressure. Twitter also helped activists stay connected and share a culture of resistance. However, social media also fuels fragmentation and individuation, which can weaken long-term solidarity.

3. Results and Discussion

This section reports the results of the systematic review following PRISMA guidelines and transparent reporting standards, including the presentation of the article selection process (Figure 2), quality assessment result/outcomes (table 3) and the thematic synthesis of 26 selected studies (table 4).

3.1. Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical review identified several dominant frameworks used in recent studies of digital activism. These theories guide the interpretation of how online movements form, spread, and sustain collective engagement across social media platforms. The key frameworks and their analytical roles are summarized below.

3.1.1. Social Movement Theory and Connective Action Theory

Among the various frameworks identified, Social Movement Theory and Connective Action Theory are the most widely applied in digital activism studies. These theories provide the foundation for explaining how collective mobilization, identity formation, and solidarity are redefine in the digital era. Through these perspectives, activism is understood not only as organized political engagement but as a networked process driven by social media affordance and user interactivity.

Research by Mkono *et al* (2023) and Huang *et al* (2023) applies Social Movement Theory to analyze how online spaces enable activists to construct collective identity and mobilize participation around shared causes such as environmental sustainability or racial justice. In these studies, hashtags function as instruments of symbolic gathering allowing individuals to express support, coordinate protest, and share emotional narratives that foster belonging. Similarly, Terren *et al* (2021) describe how digital platforms transform contemporary movements such as Fridays for Future, where activism increasingly operates through local networked communities rather than centralized transnational coordination.

Complementing this approach, Connective Action Theory highlights how personalized content and emotional engagement sustain participation without centralized coordination. Studies such as De Maio *et al* (2022) and Ramon *et al* (2024) demonstrate that individuals join movements by sharing personal stories, memes, or emotional messages, creating what is termed “connective logic”. This shift emphasizes affective participation such as self expression, identity signaling and algorithmic amplification become central to digital collective action. These frameworks illustrate the transition from collective to connective activism, revealing that digital movements thrive not merely through ideological alignment but through emotional resonance visibility, and interactivity across online networks.

3.1.2. Framing Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis

Framing theory and critical discourse analysis (CDA) are important foundations for understanding how meanings, ideologies and moral positions are constructed in online activism. While Social Movement Theory focuses on how people mobilize, these approaches explain how issues are interpreted, framed and communicated to shape public perception and emotional engagements.

Studies such as Battisti *et al* (2023) and Nertey *et al* (2023) highlight how framing practices in campaigns such as #FixTheCountry and migration activism in Europe strategically construct narratives of injustice, sympathy and moral urgency. Through deliberate framing, activists employ emotional language, visual symbols, and moral appeals to increase resonance and participation.

Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), studies such as Liminga *et al* (2024) and Maria *et al* (2023) reveals how activist and ordinary users employ discourse to negotiate power, contest marginalization, and reformulate public debates within digital spaces. These frameworks together illuminate the discursive politics of digital activism shaping meaning and emotional expression into tools for mobilization. However, few studies discuss how platform algorithms can influence which frameworks gain momentum, leaving open questions about visibility, virality and political economy of digital narratives.

3.1.3. Theories of Representation, Emotion and Hyperreality

Beyond mobilization and framing, a growing body of literature employs representation based and affective theories to interpret how digital activism shapes public consciousness and emotional experience. These frameworks emphasize that online activism operates not only through rational argument but also through symbolic imagery, affective circulation, and mediated emotion.

Pradhana *et al* (2021) apply Baudrillard’s Simulacra Theory to explain how online movements such as #BlackLivesMatter construct hyperreal narratives, explain viral images, slogans. And emotional repetitions create the illusion of collective unity, even when detached from on ground realities. Similarly, Giacomozzi *et al* (2024) employ Social Representation Theory to analyze how user’s posts on Twitter built a shared sense of political legitimacy and opposition during Bolsonaro’s presidency, illustrating how collective meaning emerges through emotional and discursive interactions.

Complementary approaches such as Emotion Theory (Field *et al*, 2022) and Disinformation Theory (Fitzgerald *et al*, 2024) explore how emotions and

misinformation intertwine to shape the digital public sphere, sometimes reinforcing solidarity, but at the other times distorting activism's original aims. These frameworks collectively highlight that digital activism is both political and performative, driven as much by emotion and representation as by ideology and organization. In this sense, online activism blurs the line between authentic engagement and performative visibility, reflecting a complex interplay between sincerity, virality and self presentation.

Overall, these theoretical frameworks demonstrate that digital activism research has evolved beyond describing online mobilization. It now interrogates the symbolic, emotional and algorithmic dimensions of participation that define the contemporary networked public sphere. The diversification of these theories, ranging from mobilization based to discourse and representation based approaches can provide a solid foundation for analyzing how digital activism operates in Indonesia's socio-political ecosystem.

3.2. Context of Research

The majority of the research analyzed in this study focuses on digital activism on social media, particularly on Twitter (X), Facebook, and Instagram. Some of the specific contexts analyzed include:

- 3.2.1. Social and Political Movements:** Studies on #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, #StopAsianHate, and Fridays for Future demonstrates that social media plays a crucial role in raising awareness, coordinating participation and sustaining long-term social movements (Fernández-Zubieta et al., 2023; Lindqvist & Lindgren, 2023; van Haperen et al., 2023).
- 3.2.2. Protests and Mass Mobilization:** Studies on Occupy Gezi, #FixTheCountry, and #EmptyThePews show how social media is used to build collective identity in activism (Karataş, 2023; Nartey & Yu, 2023; Tsuria, 2020). These findings show that online platforms not only amplify protest narratives but also provide symbolic spaces where resistance and belonging are co-created.
- 3.2.3. Mental Health and Social Well-being:** A study on the Mad Pride Movement shows that social media can serve as a space for community empowerment and the dissemination of mental health information (Frieiro et al., 2024). This indicates a shift in activism from traditional protest to care oriented and community based engagement.
- 3.2.4. Misinformation and Hijacked Activism:** Studies on #SaveTheChildren and #NoMask demonstrate how certain groups hijack social movements to spread misinformation (Fitzgerald & Graham, 2024; Lavorgna et al., 2022). These cases reveal the vulnerability of digital activism to manipulation and the blurring boundaries between activism, misinformation, and populist agendas.
- 3.2.5. Environmental movements,** such as studies on protests against the Trans Adriatic Pipeline project and Fridays For Future, highlight how environmental activists use social media to raise awareness about ecological issues (Di Ronco & Allen-Robertson, 2021; Estrella-Ramón et al., 2024). These studies emphasize that environmental digital activism blends ecological advocacy with digital storytelling and visual mobilization.
- 3.2.6. Feminist and gender activism:** Studies of SISMA Mujer in Colombia and the #MeToo movement in Sweden demonstrate how feminism uses social media to disseminate gender issues and advocate for women's rights (González-Malabet et al., 2023; Lindqvist & Lindgren, 2023). This demonstrates the power of digital

platforms to sustain intersectional feminist discourse across cultural and political boundaries.

From these findings, it is evident that digital activism is not limited to a single geographical region or a specific issue, but occurs globally across various social and political contexts. These diverse context collectively demonstrate that digital platforms enable activism that is simultaneously localized and transnational an insight that provides a valuable reference point for analysing Indonesian digital activism, a context shaped by moral, cultural, and community oriented narratives that influence online participation differently from western models.

3.3 Applied Methodology

The Studies analyzed in this review employ a variety of research methods that can be grouped into three main categories: qualitative, quantitative, and and mixed methods. Each methodological approach contributes to a different dimension of understanding digital activism, from the construction of meaning to patterns of behavior on social media.

3.3.1. Qualitative Methods

Many studies use qualitative approaches such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), content analysis and thematic analysis to explore the process of meaning formation and communication practices on social media. For example, research on the Mad Pride Movement used thematic analysis to explore how mental health issues are represented and discussed in online communities (Frieiro et al., 2024). Qualitative designs allow for a more in depth interpretation of user narratives, symbolism and discourse in digital activism.

3.3.2. Quantitative Methods

Some studies utilize computational and statistical techniques, including Big Data Analytics, Natural Language Processing (NLP), Social Network Analysis (SNA), and descriptive statistics, to map patterns of engagement and interaction among users. For example, a study on the #BlackLivesMatter movement analyzed 34.7 million tweets to identify the distribution of emotions and engagement patterns expressed throughout the campaign (Field et al., 2022). Quantitative approaches allow researchers to detect large scale behavioral trends and structural dynamics of online networks.

3.3.3. Mixed Methods.

Among the 26 studies analyzed (see [table 4](#)), mixed methods emerged as the most dominant research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of digital activism. For example, *De Maio et al* (2022) combined linguistic and sentiment analysis to explore how messages in the #DefendDACA movement evolved over time, revealing the interplay between narrative frames and emotional expressions. Mixed methods research shows an increasing convergence between computational and interpretive paradigms in the study of online activism.

Collectively, these methodological variations illustrate how digital activism research has evolved towards a multi-layered and interdisciplinary approach, bridging traditional social science inquiry with computational communication research.

3.4 Role of Social Media in Digital Activism

Social media plays a central role in digital activism by providing spaces for individuals and communities to disseminate messages, build communities, and mobilize support in social and political movements. As interactive media, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram enable two-way communication that accelerates information dissemination and enchains public engagement (Lindqvist & Lindgren, 2023).

In digital activism, social media functions as an infrastructure of connective action, enabling individuals to engage in movements without formal organizational affiliation. Platforms provide the communicative means for users to participate through share storytelling on threads, emotional expression, and symbolic markers like hashtags (#MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, and #FridaysForFuture which simultaneously mobilize attention and reinforce collective identity (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; van Haperen et al., 2023).

Beyond mobilization, social media also functions as a mass communication channel that democratizes access to information, allowing individuals and marginalized groups to voice their opinions without having to rely on mainstream media (Mkono et al., 2023). However, in the context of social media, this power is no longer monopolized by traditional media institutions, but also by digital activists who create alternative narratives and challenge the information dominance of powerful actors. For example, research on digital activism shows that campaigns such as #StopAsianHate (Huang & Zhu, 2023) and #DefendDACA (De Maio & Rodriguez, 2022) successfully shape public opinion by featuring perspectives that are underrepresented in conventional media.

From the perspective of framing theory, social media plays an important role in framing an issue in order to attract the attention and emotions of the audience. In digital activism, effective framing can influence how a movement is perceived by the public. For example, in the #MeToo movement (Foster & Rathlin, 2022), framing based on personal experiences conveyed through social media helped create broad emotional resonance, encouraging global solidarity on the issue of sexual harassment. In addition, a study of the Fridays for Future movement (Fernández-Zubieta et al., 2023) shows that social media-based activism often uses urgency and morality-based framing to increase audience engagement and build a sense of collective responsibility towards environmental issues.

However, while social media offers great opportunities for digital activism, there are also challenges that need to be considered in communication studies. One of the main challenges is the phenomenon of hijacking activism, where social movements can be infiltrated or hijacked by groups with specific agendas, as happened in the #SaveTheChildren campaign (Fitzgerald & Graham, 2024) which was misused by conspiracy theorists to spread misinformation. In addition, research also shows that audience fragmentation on social media can lead to opinion polarization, where individuals tend to interact with groups that share similar views (echo chamber effect), thus inhibiting broader and more inclusive discussions (Lavorgna et al., 2022).

Social media has changed or revolutionized the way digital activism develops, from centralized mass communication to decentralized communication networks that are more

flexible and participatory. However, its effectiveness in creating social change depends on the communication strategies used, the ability of activists to manage issue framing, and the response of the public and media to the narratives developed in the digital space.

3.5 Bridging Global Theories and Local Realities: Insights from Indonesian Digital Activism

The results of systematic review show that globally identified patterns of digital activism including connective action, emotional and moral framing, and symbolic and affective representation also emerge with distinctive characteristics in the Indonesian context. Based on the results of data extraction, theories such as Social Movement Theory and Connective Action Theory become the dominant framework for understanding how social media enables political participation that is flexible, emotional and networked. In the local context, similar logic is seen in various digital movements such as #TolakOmnibusLaw, #ReformasiDikorupsi, to #Bubarkan DPR, which show the dynamics of individual connectedness through symbols, morality, and collective emotions without formal organizational structures (Wahyuningroem et al., 2024).

SLR's results also confirm the importance of Framing Theory and Critical Discourses of justice and resistance are shaped through digital language and symbols. The hashtag of #BubarkanDPR phenomenon in Indonesia clarifies patterns found in global research, where moral and emotional framing is used to build public legitimacy and mobilize online participation. The narrative of an "unrepresentative elite" became a form of articulation of discontent constructed through discursive practices on social media, demonstrating the function of digital platforms as spaces for criticism and aggregation of public opinion. This phenomenon reinforces SLR's results that social media acts as an alternative advocacy channel and participatory public space as shown in the research Li *et al* (2021) and Jenzen *et al* (2020), online spaces or digital space enable social mobilization and articulation of political messages outside the boundaries of formal institutions.

In Addition, challenges such as hijacked activism and disinformation found in global research are also evident in the Indonesia context. Some digital movements in Indonesia have seen attempts to co-opt public messages and polarize discourse, as advocacy hashtags are taken over by groups with different interests. This phenomenon clarifies SLR's results that digital activism is not only an arena for contestation of meaning and political legitimacy in online public spaces (Battisti & Bruno, 2023; Fitzgerald & Graham, 2024).

Therefore, the main contribution of these findings is to strengthen the development of locally based communication science that positions Indonesia as an important case study for Global South perspectives. This approach not only expands the understanding of connective action theory and digital public sphere but also shows that digital activism in Indonesia takes shape through a unique interplay between algorithms, affect and cultural values, making it a relevant model for understanding forms of political participation in post democratic societies.

3.6 Limitations

There are several limitations that need to be considered in understanding the dynamics of digital activism in social media. In terms of methodology on the unit of analysis, most studies use data from Twitter (X) as the main object of analysis, while other platforms such as TikTok receive less attention, given the differences in audience characteristics and algorithm mechanisms on each platform so it is hoped that a cross-platform approach is needed to explore how digital activism develops in various social media ecosystems.

Furthermore, there is a lack of research on the real impact of digital activism on social

change in the offline/real world. Many studies focus on user engagement on social media without measuring whether the digital campaign actually results in real action or policy change (Terren & Soler-i-Martí, 2021); (Battisti & Bruno, 2023). Further studies on misinformation and hijacking activism are needed to understand how social media algorithms contribute to the spread of disinformation in digital activism and find effective communication strategies to avoid this phenomenon.

4. Conclusion

This systematic literature review concludes that research on digital activism predominantly uses a combination of qualitative, quantitative and mixed approaches. Qualitative studies, such as discourse analysis and content analysis, explore meaning formation and framing, while quantitative approaches such as sentiment analysis, NLP, and SNA analyze engagement and network structure. Blended approaches remain dominant, enabling a more integrated understanding of the complex interactions between users, platforms and discourses in digital activism.

This review identifies four key insights that align with the research questions. First, studies most often apply Social Movement Theory, Framing Theory, Connective Action Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, which together explain how activism mobilizes, frames meaning and sustains participation in digital networks.

Second, the contexts and issues explored include global social movements such as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, #FridaysForFuture as well as emerging topics such as environmental and feminist activism, disinformation, and digital ethics.

Third, the methods applied show an increasing convergence between computational and interpretive approaches, reflecting a shift towards interdisciplinary models of analysis.

Fourth, the role of social media is central, meaning that platforms function at once as mobilization tools and as contested arenas where civic engagement, emotion and algorithmic visibility intersect.

Based on these global insights, the findings are also highly relevant to Indonesia's digital landscape. Local cases such as #TolakOmnibusLaw, #ReformasiDikorupsi, and #BubarkanDPR show that the connective and affective logics identified in the global study are also visible in Indonesia although shaped by local values such as communal solidarity, moral discourse, and political humor. This convergence highlights how social media in Indonesia functions as a hybrid public sphere both expressive and controversial where collective identities and civil resistance are continuously negotiated.

These findings highlight the importance of further developments towards cross-platform and longitudinal studies of social media to assess how broad digital movement participation or digital activity is by considering some of the impacts of its use.

Policymakers can apply these insights to strengthen digital literacy, counter disinformation, and design inclusive communication strategies that reflect Indonesia's cultural and moral diversity. Via digital activism, makers policymakers also expected to be more active in seeing the voices of community digitally for evaluation in a policy which already formed.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the development of communication studies rooted in local contexts, placing Indonesia in the Global South discourse on digital activism especially on the function of social media not only as a space of resistance, but as a dynamic arena for negotiating identity, morality, and accountability in the digital public sphere

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