



The Transformation of Youth Social Movements: #Reformasidikorupsi and Digital Politics in the Social Media Era

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Abstract: *This study aims to analyze the transformation of youth social movements in Indonesia in the digital era through a case study of the #ReformasiDikorupsi movement. The research focuses on how social media reshapes mobilization patterns, expands political participation, and constructs a new, more inclusive democratic public sphere for young citizens. It also examines the role of digital strategies such as hashtag activism, infographics, emotional narratives, and decentralized communication in building solidarity, producing public discourse, and driving collective action both online and offline. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were gathered through literature review, document analysis, and observation of digital activity across various social media platforms. Data analysis employed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Theoretical frameworks such as Resource Mobilization Theory, Political Opportunity Structure, and the concept of connective action were applied to understand how youth actors utilize digital networks and political opportunities to shape contemporary social movements. The findings indicate that #ReformasiDikorupsi successfully broadened youth political engagement through rapid mobilization and multi-layered discourse production in digital spaces. Social media functioned as a deliberative arena where political narratives were produced, contested, and disseminated widely, fostering political literacy and collective awareness. However, the sustainability of the movement faced challenges, including disinformation,*

digital repression, limited long-term advocacy structures, and weak linkage to formal policy processes. Overall, this study demonstrates that digital politics has become a crucial arena in Indonesia's democratic landscape, strengthening youth participation and shifting discourse production from political elites to civil society.

Keywords: *Digital Social Movement; #ReformasiDikorupsi; Political Participation; Social Media; Youth.*

Introduction

The phenomenon of youth-driven social movements in the digital era illustrates a fundamental shift in how young generations channel political aspirations and construct power relations in the public sphere. In the 1990s, political participation among students and youth was closely tied to street demonstrations organized through formal institutions such as student executive bodies (BEM), NGOs, or study groups. However, in the past decade, these forms of participation have undergone a significant transformation. This shift is driven by advances in communication technology and the rise of social media, which provide new spaces for political expression and civic engagement. The #ReformasiDikorupsi protests in September 2019 serve as a critical milestone that demonstrates how Indonesian youth have transitioned from passive users of digital media

to political actors capable of leveraging online platforms to build collective awareness, organize movements, and shape public opinion on a large scale. This phenomenon aligns with Castells' (2015) argument in *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, which emphasizes that contemporary social movements are networked, horizontal, and heavily dependent on digital technologies as tools for constructing solidarity and collective identity.

The #ReformasiDikorupsi movement emerged in response to a series of government policies perceived as threats to the values of reform and the principles of democracy, particularly the revision of the Anti-Corruption Commission (KPK) Law, the Draft Criminal Code (RKUHP), and several other bills considered to restrict civil liberties. In this context, social media especially Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp became a new political arena that brought together young people from diverse campuses, regions, and social backgrounds. The hashtag #ReformasiDikorupsi functioned not only as a tool of communication but also as a symbol of resistance against state power seen as deviating from reform ideals. According to Adhipermana and Subono (2022), this phenomenon reflects a form of digital contention, in which the digital sphere becomes a site of mobilization, meaning-making, and issue-framing that operates rapidly and beyond the limits of conventional political institutions.

This transformation is not merely about how youth protest, but also reflects a shift in the political paradigm of digital natives. Sastramidjaja (2021) of the ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute argues that social media serves a dual function as a space for expression and a battleground for political discourse. In her analysis of *The Hashtag Battle over Indonesia's Omnibus Law*, she affirms that hashtag activism such as #ReformasiDikorupsi and #TolakOmnibusLaw signals the rise of a new political culture in which digital actions enable political participation without formal organizational membership, instead relying on affective solidarity and shared digital identities. Thus, contemporary youth social movements embody the characteristics of a networked society, as described by Castells, where power and resistance are no longer centralized in institutions but dispersed through symbolic networks and communication technologies.

Nonetheless, the digital transformation of social movements also presents a paradox. While social media facilitates rapid mobilization and broad participation, it also brings challenges such as “slacktivism” superficial engagement that is not followed by concrete action. A study by EAI (2020), *Hashtag Activism: A Thematic Analysis of Online Social Movements in Indonesia*, found that digital participation often stops at symbolic expression without leading to tangible policy outcomes. Similarly, research by ISEAS (2024) in *Beyond Slacktivism: Understanding Online Mobilization in Southeast Asia* shows that the success of digital movements depends heavily on their ability to connect online and offline spaces and build long-term organizational structures. This dynamic was evident in #ReformasiDikorupsi, where despite the success of digital mobilization in creating national momentum, the movement eventually weakened due to limited organizational structure, political repression, and declining public attention once the issue was no longer viral.

The national political context further complicates the dynamics of digital social movements. After 2019, the Indonesian government tightened digital regulation through

content moderation policies and the enforcement of the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE). Badrun (2025), in *A Study of the Paradox of Democracy in Civil Liberties*, notes that increased state control over digital expression has created a “chilling effect” on freedom of speech, particularly among young activists. This situation has turned the digital space into an arena filled with negotiations between freedom and surveillance. Nevertheless, for young people, social media remains a symbolic space of resistance and an arena for negotiating political identity amid the constraints of conventional political arenas. The #ReformasiDikorupsi movement also illustrates a pattern known as online-to-offline mobilization, in which digital actions transform into concrete street protests. *The Jakarta Post* (2019) reported that the coordination of student demonstrations across cities relied heavily on social media, from sharing posters and protest maps to facilitating inter-campus communication. This indicates that youth are not only engaged in symbolic activism but also articulate political demands through coordinated collective action. In this context, digital politics cannot be viewed as separate from real-world activism but rather as a new arena of contestation that blends network logic, emotion, and direct action.

Although youth political participation in digital spaces has increased, several studies indicate that such engagement has not yet significantly influenced policy-making processes. Wahyuningroem (2024), in *Youth Political Participation and Digital Movement in Indonesia*, highlights the weak connection between digital activism and policy outcomes. One contributing factor is the absence of long-term advocacy strategies and intermediary institutions capable of channeling movement aspirations into formal political processes. Nugroho (2025) further asserts that sustaining digital movements requires efforts to institutionalize activist networks, strengthen advocacy capacities, and build cross-sector collaboration so that they do not remain momentary bursts of euphoria.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive methods and a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of a complex social phenomenon—namely, how youth social movements are formed, adapt, and transform through digital media. This approach enables the researcher to explore the meanings, experiences, and strategies used by movement actors within the context of digital politics in Indonesia. As explained by Creswell (2013), qualitative methods emphasize the interpretation of social reality and the meanings constructed by individuals or groups in particular situations.

The descriptive method is used to present a detailed account of how the #ReformasiDikorupsi movement emerged, developed, and interacted within digital spaces. At the same time, analytical elements are applied to examine communication patterns, mobilization strategies, and forms of political participation carried out by young people through social media. This study seeks to understand not only the process of message dissemination and hashtag usage but also how the movement has become a new arena for political articulation among the younger generation.

The selection of a case study as the primary method is based on the research focus on a specific phenomenon, namely the digital social movement #ReformasiDikorupsi. According to Yin (2018), case studies are suitable for examining phenomena that occur in real-life contexts where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined. Through this case study, the researcher can trace the dynamics of digital mobilization, the role of youth activist networks, and the relationship between online discourse and real-world actions. The data used in this study are primarily secondary data collected through literature review and documentation. Data were obtained from scholarly articles, reports from civil society organizations concerned with democracy and freedom of expression, online news sources, as well as government reports from agencies such as the Ministry of Communication and Information (Kominfo) and Statistics Indonesia (BPS) concerning internet usage trends and youth political participation. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram were also referenced to identify the forms of public narratives, symbols, and hashtags used within the movement.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive analysis model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by selecting relevant information, such as digital communication strategies or political narratives employed in the movement. Data display was organized narratively to clearly depict the patterns of the social movement. The final stage, conclusion drawing, was conducted by linking research findings with the Political Opportunity Structure and Resource Mobilization Theory to understand how young people utilized political opportunities and digital resources in shaping social movements in the era of social media.

Result and Discussion

The Transformation of Youth Social Movements from Conventional to Digital Networking in the Age of Social Media

The transformation of youth social movements in Indonesia from conventional to digital networking patterns is a fundamental change in the way citizens, especially the younger generation, participate in politics and articulate resistance. In the pre-digital era, social movements were usually based on formal organizational structures such as student organizations, civil society groups, or activist networks that had clear hierarchies, formal decision-making mechanisms, and centralized mobilization strategies. Mobilization could only be carried out through face-to-face processes, organizational meetings, leaflet distribution, and mass actions in physical public spaces. This pattern reflected the traditional social movement model that emphasized the importance of collective leadership, physical solidarity, and structural organization as the driving force for change. However, with the advent of social media and the expansion of digital infrastructure, this pattern of movement has undergone a significant transformation. Castells (2012) refers to this change as the birth of networked movements, which are movements that do not depend on formal structures but move through flexible, horizontal digital networks that enable broad participation in a short period of time.

Social media such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have created a new ecosystem where young people can connect, share ideas, frame political issues, and produce collective action without having to be involved in formal organizations. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) explain this phenomenon as connective action, a contemporary model of action driven by the personalization of messages, the use of hashtags, and the distribution of content that allows individuals to form political connections without the need for a collective identity imposed by an organization. This concept explains why the #ReformasiDikorupsi campaign was able to grow so quickly: each individual was able to produce and disseminate political narratives personally, while remaining connected to a large network with a common goal. Thus, collective action was not only led by established organizations, but by thousands or millions of users who built resonance for the discourse through social media algorithms

Tufekci (2017) asserts that the main strength of digital movements does not lie in organizational capacity, but in the ability of digital networks to accelerate mobilization. She calls this phenomenon mobilization without organization, which is the ability of a movement to gather a large mass without a large organizational infrastructure. The #ReformasiDikorupsi movement shows how infographics, educational threads, political memes, and short videos can trigger massive and urgent collective awareness. Digital activism creates a new space where young people can generate political discourse in creative and easily replicable ways, thereby accelerating the process of spreading ideas. In addition, digital transformation also brings about decentralized leadership: there is no single figure or institution leading the movement. The power of the movement shifts to a network of interacting accounts, such as student communities, citizen journalists, content creators, and anonymous individuals who are able to influence public discourse.

These changes not only alter organizational structures, but also modify resistance strategies and the formation of solidarity. Fuchs (2014) explains that social media shapes the digital public sphere, a new public space that allows citizens to debate, express criticism, and produce political identities. In the Indonesian context, #ReformasiDikorupsi shows how the digital space has become an arena for contesting meaning between the state and society. Young people utilize this space to reframe issues such as the weakening of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), the Criminal Code Bill (RKUHP), and other policies as threats to democracy. Through digital framing, this movement creates a new awareness that resistance can be carried out by controlling public discourse, influencing opinion, and mobilizing support quickly. This transformation indicates that social movements in the digital era do not only take place on the streets, but also on device screens, in the form of interactions, retweets, comments, and content production.

Thus, the transformation of youth social movements from conventional to networked digital patterns is a process that involves structural, cultural, and technological changes simultaneously. Social movements are now more flexible, not tied to formal organizations, and rely on the dynamics of digital conversation as the center of mobilization. This pattern expands the space for political participation of the younger generation, while challenging traditional concepts of how a social movement should operate. #ReformasiDikorupsi is proof that digital movements can create real political impact, strengthen public awareness,

and produce new solidarity that transcends geographical, organizational, and formal political structures.

The Role of Social Media as a Space for Political Participation and an Arena for Discourse Production in the #ReformasiDikorupsi Movement

Social media has transformed the landscape of political participation by shifting some of the functions of traditional public spaces to digital spaces that are open, fast, and measurable. In the case of #ReformasiDikorupsi, platforms such as Twitter/X, Instagram, and YouTube act not only as communication channels but also as new institutional infrastructure that enables the production, debate, and legitimization of political discourse by a wide audience. Conceptually, this phenomenon is in line with the logic of connective action, where individuals produce personal content that is connected through hashtags and digital networks, enabling collective action to form without a formal organizational structure (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Empirical studies in Indonesia show that the hashtag #ReformasiDikorupsi (Reform Against Corruption) serves as an aggregation point for conversations connecting student actors, citizen journalists, advocates, and the general public, transforming technical issues (e.g., bill clauses) into easily understood and widely disseminated public narratives.

First, social media lowers barriers to participation. Young users who were previously alienated from the formal political arena are able to express their opinions, share educational materials, and organize actions through simple mechanisms (posting, retweeting, sharing, video duets). This process facilitates practical political literacy: users learn to read draft legislation, compile explanatory threads, and produce data visualizations that facilitate public understanding. Quantitative and qualitative research results in the context of #ReformasiDikorupsi show an increase in political activity among students and the younger generation, reflected in the intensity of hashtag use, document sharing, and the proliferation of educational content a phenomenon recorded in Twitter conversation analysis and local field studies.

Second, social media functions as a discursive field where framing, framing, and legitimacy are contested. Movement actors use layered framing strategies: (a) legal framing (explaining problematic articles), (b) moral framing (presenting narratives of corruption as a betrayal of reform), and (c) identity framing (positioning students and the younger generation as heirs to the values of reform).

The combination of analytical threads, infographics, and video testimonials allows the movement to control the narrative so that the issue resonates affectively and rationally sparking empathy as well as normative arguments for policy change. Conversely, pro-government actors or supporters of the bill attempt to engage in counter-framing; this makes the digital space an arena for intense, fast-paced, and often multipolar discourse contestation. A number of local studies confirm that the effectiveness of this digital framing depends on the network's ability to produce easily shareable material and optimize platform affordances (e.g., trending topics, short video features).

Third, social media reorganizes leadership and mobilization structures from centralized to decentralized. The #ReformasiDikorupsi movement demonstrates a network leadership model: no single actor holds sole authority; instead, authority is distributed among key accounts (nodes) such as campus organizations, independent journalists, progressive influencers, and community accounts.

This model increases the movement's resilience to centralized reprisals (e.g., blocking one figure does not automatically shut down the movement), but it also poses coordination challenges (tactical friction, message inconsistency). Networked movements theory explains how mobilization capacity depends on inter-node relationships, the quality of content disseminated, and the ability to synergize online and offline actions (Castells; Tufekci). Local studies note that online activity often leads to coordinated physical action (hybrid mobilization), especially when digital platforms succeed in building emotional and practical momentum (location, time, safety tips).

Fourth, social media facilitates the practice of collective verification and counter-disinformation in an ambivalent manner. On the one hand, digital communities play a role in fact-checking, publishing original documents, and legal education that enhance the credibility of the movement's demands; local research shows the emergence of verification networks consisting of academics and citizen journalists who help debunk false narratives. However, on the other hand, platform algorithms, echo chambers, and actors spreading disinformation can cause public confusion and weaken the coherence of the movement's narrative. Therefore, the success of producing valid discourse depends on the movement's ability to maintain the quality of information and the technical capability to utilize platforms to amplify reliable content.

Fifth, the normative impact on democratic public space is quite significant: social media expands access to deliberation, curbs agenda monopoly by mainstream media, and provides new vertical accountability mechanisms (public monitoring). The #ReformasiDikorupsi case shows how digital pressure can change the national political agenda creating space for discussion of issues that were previously marginalized. However, it is important to note that the digital public sphere is not a substitute for formal democratic institutions but rather a complement: online pressure is effective when linked to legal advocacy strategies, public lobbying, or street action. Empirical studies in Indonesia emphasize that the sustainability of digital movements depends on the ability of civil actors to institutionalize demands into formal political channels and maintain the consistency of long-term narratives.

Finally, the limitations of digital spaces must be critically acknowledged: the threat of polarization, digital suppression (doxing, account takedowns), and dependence on platform logic (which may prioritize certain forms of content for the sake of algorithms) pose risks to the quality of deliberation.

Therefore, the analysis of #ReformasiDikorupsi requires a holistic approach combining content studies (what is said), networks (who amplifies), platform affordances (how it spreads), and political consequences (what changes) to assess the extent to which social media truly strengthens the democratic public sphere and political participation of the

younger generation in Indonesia. Recent local studies show that, although not perfect, the role of social media in this case has opened up the possibility of more inclusive and responsive political participation with the caveat that civil actors must continue to improve their media literacy and advocacy strategies that link the digital world and formal institutions. The #ReformasiDikorupsi movement utilizes various digital communication strategies to strengthen mobilization, spread the discourse of resistance, and build public legitimacy in the online space.

First, this movement uses hashtag activism as its main strategy, where hashtags serve as a tool to bind narratives and facilitate the aggregation of public conversations. The hashtag #ReformasiDikorupsi not only marks the issue, but also works as a discourse framework that highlights deviations from the reform agenda through revisions to the KPK Law, the Criminal Code Bill, and various other policies that are considered detrimental to democracy. Second, activists and netizens use visual storytelling infographics, digital posters, political memes, and short videos to simplify complex issues and attract the attention of young people who dominate social media. Third, the movement practices decentralized communication, which is the horizontal dissemination of messages without a command center, so that each individual can become an information producer and discourse curator. This accelerates mobilization and expands the reach of the message. Fourth, counter-narrative strategies are implemented by refuting Framing the government or mainstream media through analytical threads, data verification, and legal explanations shared by academics, independent journalists, and activists. Fifth, emotional framing is used to build a sense of urgency and solidarity, for example through testimonials, moral appeals, and narratives of injustice. All of these strategies work together to strengthen public legitimacy for the movement, create political pressure, and build the perception that the protests are a legitimate and reasonable representation of the people's voice.

The Impact of the #ReformasiDikorupsi Digital Social Movement on Democratic Public Space and Political Participation of the Younger Generation in Indonesia

The #ReformasiDikorupsi digital social movement marks one of the major turning points in the evolution of Indonesia's democratic public sphere post-1998. The emergence of this movement amid controversial legislative processes including revisions to the KPK Law, the Criminal Code Bill, and various other bills considered to weaken democracy_ shows that social media has become a new deliberative arena that openly accommodates public concerns, transcending the limitations of physical space. The presence of the hashtag #ReformasiDikorupsi has made political issues that were previously considered technocratic and exclusive now accessible and debatable by young citizens at large. Public debates, which were once fragmented among small groups such as campus activists, have now turned into national conversations involving millions of participants, showing how digital spaces have expanded the scope of deliberative democracy while shifting the center of discourse production from the political elite to civil society.

The democratic public sphere formed through this movement is more egalitarian, participatory, and distributed. Social media allows each individual to become a producer of

discourse, not just a consumer of information. Young people can create analysis threads, infographics, political memes, or educational videos that demonstrate their knowledge of the legislative process and the impact of policies. Thus, a process of horizontal political education takes place organically. The digital space also becomes an arena for discourse contestation, where the legitimacy of policies is tested through public debate, whether by academics, journalists, activists, or ordinary citizens. Debates about controversial articles in bills criticized by movements, for example, mark an increase in the political literacy of the younger generation. In other words, social media functions as an "open political class" that shifts the pattern of political education from a top-down model to a more democratic and inclusive bottom-up model.

From a political participation perspective, #ReformasiDikorupsi encourages young people to move from awareness to engagement, and even to collective action. Participation is no longer limited to voting in elections, but has evolved into forms of digital participation such as sharing information, correcting misinformation, producing campaign materials, exerting political pressure through trending topics, and organizing street protests. It is this hybrid mobilization that made the 2019 movement one of the largest mass actions since the Reformation. Digital actions such as retweets, shares, or video uploads have become gateways for much more coordinated offline actions. Young people who had never participated in political actions before were now encouraged to get involved after seeing how narratives of solidarity were collectively built on social media. This momentum demonstrated the growing political confidence of the younger generation and confirmed that social media has the ability to transform political expression into real political practice. This movement also provides the foundation for the development of more mature digital citizenship.

Digital citizenship is not just the ability to use technology, but also includes the ethics of expressing opinions, the ability to read information, and the courage to express views on public issues. #ReformasiDikorupsi broadens the meaning of citizenship: the younger generation is now not only watching politics, but also becoming actors who determine the direction of national political discourse. In this context, social media has strengthened the watchdog function of public scrutiny of government policies in a way that was difficult to achieve before the digital era. Many problematic policies only came to light after netizens, especially young people, raised them en masse on digital platforms.

However, the strengthening of the digital public sphere also presents new challenges. Disinformation, hate speech, political polarization, and digital attacks on activists are an integral part of the digital democracy ecosystem. This dynamic shows that the democratic space in the era of social media is ambivalent: it expands access to participation, but also opens the door to opinion manipulation and symbolic violence. In fact, attempts at silencing in the form of doxing or digital intimidation against several activists show that the state and pro-status quo groups are still trying to control the narrative in the digital space. However, overall, the #ReformasiDikorupsi movement continues to make a significant contribution to strengthening the democratic public sphere.

by providing channels that are more open, participatory, and oriented towards political transparency.

Thus, the greatest impact of #ReformasiDikorupsi on Indonesian democracy is the revival of a culture of political participation among the younger generation, the creation of a more dynamic arena for public deliberation, and the expansion of forms of political expression beyond the formal channels of state institutions. This movement confirms that Indonesian democracy has entered a new phase: a phase in which politics no longer takes place only in parliament or demonstration halls, but also in the hands of millions of citizens connected through digital platforms.

Conclusion

The #ReformasiDikorupsi digital social movement shows that youth activism in Indonesia has undergone a fundamental transformation from a conventional organization-based model to a networked model that utilizes digital technology and social media as the main space for political articulation, with social media functioning as a new arena for discourse production, collective mobilization, and the formation of fast, fluid, and participatory solidarity that expands political involvement previously marginalized in formal channels. This movement demonstrates how digital strategies such as hashtags, issue visualization, analytical threads, and decentralized communication can encourage massive participation and create significant political pressure on the government while also successfully linking online mobilization with offline protests on a national scale, reinforcing the role of democratic public spaces. However, despite its wide resonance and success in raising public awareness, the sustainability of the movement faces challenges such as disinformation, digital repression, the absence of long-term organizational structures, and weak connections to formal policy processes, resulting in limited policy impact despite large public mobilization. Overall, the #ReformasiDikorupsi movement confirms that digital politics has become an essential component of contemporary Indonesian democracy by opening more inclusive participation spaces, enhancing youth political literacy, and shifting the center of discourse production from elites to civil society, showing that modern social movements unfold not only on the streets but also in digital spheres that have become a new arena for democratic struggle.

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