

Constructing Student Political Participation in Safeguarding Democratic Integrity After the 2024 Elections

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamics of virtual public space through the construction of political participation among students of Sunan Gunung Djati State Islamic University Bandung in safeguarding democratic integrity after the 2024 General Election via Instagram. The post-election period has been marked by public debates concerning constitutional court decisions, political dynasties, and the neutrality of state institutions, which have stimulated digital political engagement among university students. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design, this research collects data through in-depth interviews, digital observation of Instagram content, and documentation of political posts shared by students. The findings reveal that Instagram functions as a significant digital public sphere where students articulate political criticism, construct democratic discourse, and perform social control through features such as feeds, stories, and reels. Students' political participation is primarily driven by idealistic motives rooted in intellectual responsibility, Islamic moral values, and collective solidarity within student organizations. Rather than being spontaneous or purely trend-driven, digital activism emerges as a reflective process shaped by academic background and social interaction. However, the study also identifies challenges, including limited audience reach, algorithmic filtering, and the risk of echo chambers that may constrain broader democratic deliberation. Despite these limitations, students perceive digital political participation as a meaningful contribution to maintaining democratic awareness and fostering critical discourse within Indonesia's evolving virtual public sphere. This study recommends strengthening digital literacy to enhance the quality and substantive impact of student activism in digital democratic practices.

Keywords: Democracy, Digital Citizenship, Digital Public Sphere, Instagram, Political Participation, Student Activism

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian democracy represents a historical process that has continuously evolved and undergone significant dynamics since the Reformasi era of 1998, marked by the expansion of political participation, the strengthening of civil liberties, and the institutionalization of regular electoral mechanisms. Elections are not merely understood as five year procedural events, but rather as a fundamental instrument for ensuring popular sovereignty, power circulation, and political accountability. However, the trajectory of Indonesia's democratic development has not followed a linear path toward full consolidation. Alongside relatively stable institutional achievements, Indonesian democracy continues to face structural challenges, including political oligarchization, the personalization of power, and unequal relations between the state and citizens.

Within this context, the 2024 General Election constitutes a critical moment that reflects the ambivalence of Indonesian democracy. On the one hand, the election demonstrated the continuity of democratic procedures; on the other hand, it reignited public concern regarding the quality and integrity of democracy. Various post election dynamics, such as the controversy surrounding the Constitutional Court's ruling on presidential and vice presidential candidacy requirements, questions regarding the neutrality of election management bodies, and the strengthening of dynastic politics, became major points of public and media scrutiny. An election that was expected to reinforce democratic consolidation was instead perceived by segments of the public as exposing latent problems within Indonesia's electoral democracy.

Investigative reports published by national media outlets such as Tempo (2024) and Kompas (2024) reflect growing public anxiety regarding democratic backsliding, electoral fairness, and the declining neutrality of state institutions following Indonesia's 2024 elections. These concerns are consistent with broader academic discussions on democratic regression in

contemporary electoral democracies, where the weakening of institutional accountability and increasing concentration of political power may gradually erode public trust in democratic systems (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Bermeo, 2016). In the Indonesian context, debates surrounding electoral integrity, political polarization, and the perceived instrumentalization of state institutions have intensified public skepticism toward the quality of democratic governance after the election period. Consequently, the challenges faced by Indonesian democracy after the 2024 election extend beyond technical electoral administration, encompassing a broader crisis of democratic legitimacy, institutional credibility, and citizen trust in representative political processes.

Alongside these developments, advancements in information and communication technology have significantly transformed political participation practices that were previously centered in physical public spaces, such as discussion forums, public speeches, street demonstrations, and face to face deliberative arenas. Digitalization has not merely altered the medium of political communication but has also reconstructed how citizens interact, form opinions, and participate in democratic processes. Public spaces that were once understood as physical arenas for rational discourse among social groups have increasingly expanded into virtual spaces mediated by digital platforms and social media.

The transition from physical public spaces to virtual public spaces is not merely substitutive but rather reformative and hybrid in nature. Social media enables political discourse to occur beyond spatial and temporal constraints, broadens access to participation, and introduces new actors previously marginalized in conventional public spheres. In this framework, virtual public spaces function not only as extensions of physical public spaces but also as sites that generate new logics of political discourse production, power relations, and opinion mobilization. Political interactions that once required physical presence are now facilitated through digital practices such as content

uploads, comments, hashtag usage, and the circulation of political symbols. This transformation aligns with Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere as recontextualized in the digital era, wherein social media enables relatively autonomous public discourse beyond direct domination by state and elite actors (Papacharissi, 2015).

The transformation of public space in the digital era has not only relocated sites of interaction but has also fundamentally reshaped the ways individuals and groups engage in political life. In Indonesia, social media has become an integral part of everyday life, particularly for younger generations, in accessing information, shaping opinions, and expressing political aspirations. As one of the most popular social media platforms, Instagram occupies a strategic position within Indonesia's digital landscape. Recent data indicate that Instagram was used by more than 173 million users in Indonesia in 2025, accounting for approximately 85 percent of the country's internet users, making it one of the most dominant platforms for social and digital interaction (Global Statistics, 2025).

Instagram's popularity among younger users further reinforces its role as a central arena for the formation of digital public discourse. Survey data indicate that approximately 68.2 percent of Generation Z respondents use Instagram to access political information, positioning it as one of the primary platforms for political content consumption compared to other social media platforms such as TikTok and YouTube (GoodStats, 2024). Beyond functioning merely as a channel for information distribution, Instagram also facilitates interactive political engagement through comment sections, repost features, live discussions, and visual-based political campaigns that enable users to actively participate in public conversations. In this context, the platform contributes to the construction of a virtual public sphere where political opinions, criticism, and collective responses toward democratic issues can circulate rapidly among young citizens. The participatory and algorithm-driven nature of Instagram therefore not only shapes patterns of political

communication, but also influences how younger generations interpret political events, negotiate political identities, and engage in democratic participation within contemporary digital society.

The strength of Instagram as a political interaction space lies in its diverse communicative features, including Feed for curated visual narratives, Stories for immediate and responsive expressions, and Reels for dynamic and viral content. These features allow users not only to act as passive consumers of information but also as active producers of content, fostering horizontal dialogue among users. Hashtags, comment sections, sharing functions, and the more recent reposting feature further expand the circulation of discourse, enabling political narratives to develop into broader public conversations within virtual public spaces. This condition aligns with communication studies emphasizing that social media facilitates youth political participation not merely as a site of information consumption, but also as a medium for opinion formation and discursive mobilization.

Research published in *Jurnal Komunikasi Indonesia* indicates that political communication on Instagram is no longer conveyed solely through rational argumentation, but increasingly through symbols, emotions, visual narratives, and the construction of collective identities (Rahmawati & Nugroho, 2022). This transformation reflects broader shifts in digital political communication, where social media platforms encourage the personalization and emotionalization of political discourse in ways that strongly influence public perception and engagement. Papacharissi (2015) argues that digital platforms facilitate the emergence of “affective publics,” in which emotions, sentiments, and shared expressions become central elements in shaping political participation and collective action. Similarly, studies by Highfield and Leaver (2016) demonstrate that Instagram’s visual-oriented architecture enables political actors and users to construct political meanings through images, hashtags, and symbolic representations that are easily disseminated and reproduced within online networks. In the context of contemporary

democracy, these dynamics indicate that political participation in digital spaces is increasingly mediated by algorithmic visibility, emotional resonance, and symbolic interaction rather than solely by deliberative rational debate. Consequently, Instagram functions as a digital public sphere that not only reflects political realities but also actively shapes how individuals interpret political events, negotiate political identities, and respond to democratic dynamics in everyday online interactions.

Within this evolving virtual public sphere, students of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung are selected as the research locus because they represent a relatively active and progressive group of young actors in utilizing digital media as a platform for political expression. Sociologically, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung is recognized as a state Islamic university with a long standing tradition of student activism, both in conventional movements and in digital political communication practices. As social media penetration, particularly Instagram, has increased, patterns of student activism at this institution have shifted from physical public spaces toward virtual ones, where social media serves as a medium for advocacy, policy critique, and public opinion formation.

National journal studies demonstrate that digital activism among Indonesian students has expanded alongside increasing media literacy and political awareness among youth. Social media is understood not merely as a communication channel, but as an arena for discourse production, issue framing, and symbolic mobilization that broadens political participation (Putra and Savirani, 2019; Rahmawati and Nugroho, 2022). In the context of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, these practices are evident in the intensity of Instagram usage by students, both individually and collectively, to voice concerns related to democracy, social justice, and power relations. Such activities often extend beyond the internal campus sphere and resonate within national public discourse, indicating that the university's virtual public space is open and networked.

Furthermore, the character of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung as an Islamic higher education institution provides a distinctive dimension to the construction of students' digital political participation. Political critiques and democratic appeals are frequently framed through moral perspectives, public ethics, and Islamic values. Nevertheless, scholarly research remains limited in examining how students at Islamic higher education institutions construct political participation within virtual public spaces, particularly through Instagram, amid the democratic dynamics following the 2024 General Election. Moreover, few studies critically analyze students' motives, discursive construction patterns, and the quality of digital political participation in responding to issues of democratic integrity.

Based on the foregoing discussion, democratic dynamics after the 2024 election indicate that political participation is no longer confined to physical public spaces, but increasingly shifts toward virtual public spaces mediated by social media. Instagram has emerged as a strategic arena for younger generations, especially students, to express political positions, construct critical discourse, and safeguard democratic integrity through digital communication practices.

In this context, students of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung occupy an important position as young intellectual actors actively utilizing Instagram as a digital public sphere. With an institutional background rooted in religious values and a strong tradition of activism, UIN Bandung students construct political participation by linking democratic critique with moral values, public ethics, and social justice. However, the mass proliferation of political expression on social media also raises critical questions regarding the quality and substance of such participation.

Therefore, this study examines how students of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung construct and express political participation through Instagram in the post-2024 election context. Specifically, the study seeks to analyze how Instagram functions as a virtual public sphere for political expression,

discussion, and democratic engagement among students, as well as to explore the extent to which these digital participation practices contribute to safeguarding democratic integrity in Indonesia. By focusing on student political participation within digital spaces, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between social media, virtual public discourse, and contemporary democratic practices in the digital era.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design to examine the dynamics of student political participation through Instagram as a digital public sphere. A qualitative case study approach was selected because this method enables an in-depth exploration of subjective experiences, meanings, interactions, and forms of political expression constructed by students within digital spaces. Qualitative inquiry is particularly relevant for understanding how individuals interpret political participation and democratic engagement in everyday social contexts that are shaped by technology and online communication (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, the case study design allows the research to investigate contemporary social phenomena within their real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2017). In the context of this study, Instagram is not merely treated as a communication platform, but as a socio-political arena where students negotiate political identities, construct public discourse, and express democratic concerns after the 2024 election. This approach is therefore considered the most appropriate for capturing the complexity of digital political participation, symbolic interaction, and the formation of virtual public spaces among university students.

The data sources in this study consist of primary data obtained from in-depth interviews with active students of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung who are involved in campus organizations and actively express political views

on Instagram, as well as secondary data in the form of relevant literature, official documents, and digital content related to post-election democratic discourse. Data collection was conducted between early 2025 and mid-2025, a period marked by ongoing public debate concerning democratic integrity following the 2024 general election.

The population of this research includes students of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung who actively use Instagram to engage with political issues. The sample was determined using purposive sampling techniques, with criteria focusing on students who consistently post, repost, or comment on political content related to democracy, governance, and public policy. Data were collected through digital observation of Instagram accounts, both organizational and personal, followed by in-depth interviews conducted either online or offline to explore students' motives, perspectives, and interpretations of political participation in the digital space. Documentation techniques, such as screenshots of relevant Instagram feeds, reels, and stories, were also used to support the data.

Data analysis was carried out using an interactive qualitative analysis technique, involving data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Interview transcripts and digital observations were categorized and interpreted to identify patterns of political participation, motives, and issue construction among students. The analyzed data were then presented in a narrative and thematic form to ensure clarity and coherence. This methodological approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how students construct political participation through Instagram and how digital activism contributes to the process of safeguarding democratic integrity in the post-election context.

To strengthen the credibility and methodological reliability of the study, several data validation techniques were employed throughout the research process. The study applied source triangulation by comparing data obtained from interviews, digital observations of Instagram activities, and

supporting documentation such as posts, comments, stories, and organizational social media content. This triangulation process was intended to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the findings across different sources of evidence. In addition, member checking was conducted by reconfirming several interview interpretations with selected participants to minimize misinterpretation and ensure that the narratives presented accurately reflected participants' perspectives and experiences. The researchers also applied prolonged engagement with the observed digital environment by continuously monitoring political discussions and interactions on Instagram during the research period to obtain a deeper contextual understanding of students' online political behavior. These validation techniques are important in qualitative research to enhance credibility, trustworthiness, and analytical rigor in interpreting complex social phenomena within digital public spaces (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Instagram Features as Instruments of Political Resistance

Based on interviews conducted with UIN Bandung students from different backgrounds, it is not uncommon for UIN Bandung political science students to use Instagram after the 2024 elections not only as a medium for consuming information, but also as a means of political resistance in the digital space. Various features available on Instagram are used to voice criticism of democratic issues, such as disputes in the Constitutional Court, political dynasty issues, and allegations of state apparatus neutrality. In this context, Instagram has become an alternative space for students to safeguard democracy through the dissemination of critical narratives, political education, and the formation of public opinion. This discussion outlines three main forms of utilizing Instagram features as instruments of student political resistance, namely through Instagram Stories, Reels, and Feeds, as revealed in the interview results. From the perspective of Jürgen Habermas' public sphere

theory, student activities on Instagram can be understood as an adaptation of the public discourse space from physical to virtual space (Habermas, 1996), where the platform's features function as a medium to expand critical discourse and monitor the course of democracy outside the formal mechanisms of the state.

Instagram Stories have become the most frequently used feature for responding to political issues quickly and in real time. Stories are used to disseminate brief information related to current events that are being widely discussed, thereby attracting attention and sparking discussion among account followers. Their temporary nature and ability to immediately reach audiences make Stories an effective form of spontaneous activism. Students use Stories to share updates related to state institution decisions, mass actions, and other political events that are considered detrimental to democracy. In addition, the repost feature in Stories is used to redistribute content from mainstream media or activist accounts that are considered credible. This practice serves as an effort to educate politically and strengthen critical narratives, so that followers not only receive raw information, but are also directed to substantial issues. Based on findings, the use of Stories also has limitations. Information that is presented briefly and in fragments has the potential to cause misinterpretation. However, Students continue to view Story as an effective instrument of resistance because it is able to elicit an initial response and encourage the audience to be more concerned about the state of democracy. From the perspective of digital citizenship theory as proposed by Ribble (2011), the use of Story reflects the obligation of citizens to use digital space actively, ethically, and responsibly in democratic life, despite the risk of misunderstanding due to its short format.

In addition to Stories, Reels are used as a medium to convey political criticism in a concise, visual, and easily digestible manner, especially for the younger generation. Reels are considered effective because their short video format allows political messages to be conveyed in a lighthearted yet critical

manner. Reels content is often packaged in the form of short educational videos, infographics, or political satire that pokes fun at problematic practices of power. Reels are used to explain complex issues, such as power ethics violations or political dynasty practices, in a short duration so that they are easier to understand. This approach is considered capable of attracting the attention of audiences who were previously less interested in formal political issues. Thus, Reels serve as a gateway to increasing political awareness in the digital space. However, based on the findings, students also realize the risk of spreading hoaxes through Reels if the content is not properly verified. Therefore, the use of Reels needs to be done wisely by prioritizing clear data and sources, so that political resistance remains credible and not misleading. The connective action theory proposed by Bennett and Segerberg (2012) explains that in the digital age, political participation often takes place through patterns of message dissemination that do not depend on formal organizational structures, where Reels allows for the personalization of political content to build broad collective awareness.

Unlike Stories and Reels, Feeds are used as a more permanent and in-depth space. Based on our findings, Feeds are used to convey student organizations' statements, political analysis, and structured infographics. Content in Feeds usually goes through a process of curation and discussion beforehand, so it has stronger arguments. Feeds are an important medium for building collective awareness and representing the political stance of students as an institution. Through long captions and informative visuals, students try to encourage their audience to not only see, but also understand and reflect on the issues of democracy that are currently happening. In this case, Feeds serve as a more systematic form of political resistance oriented towards long-term issue monitoring. The use of Feeds is also linked to efforts to maintain the credibility of the student movement. By including media sources that are considered trustworthy, students seek to emphasize that the criticism expressed is not merely emotional opinion, but is based on data and public

interest. Through a social constructivist approach as proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1966), the political reality voiced on Feeds is the result of social interactions within the campus environment and student organizations, which form a collective framework for digital resistance.

B. Construction of Student Participation Motives at UIN Bandung

Based on the results of interviews with several students from UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, it shows that the digital political participation of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung students on Instagram in safeguarding the integrity of democracy after the 2024 Election shows a relatively consistent pattern and is not spontaneous. Where the political participation of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung students can be said to be the result of a process of constructing political awareness shaped by academic backgrounds, Islamic values, the environment of student organizations, and the dynamics of the virtual public space. Social media, especially Instagram, functions not only as a means of consuming information, but also as a space for the articulation of students' political attitudes after the 2024 Election.

From the perspective of Jurgen Habermas's public sphere theory, the activities of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung students on Instagram can be understood as an adaptation of citizens' discourse space from physical to virtual space (Habermas, 1996). Students utilize Instagram's features (feeds, stories, reels, and broadcast channels) as a medium to express opinions, expand critical discourse, and monitor the progress of democracy outside of formal state mechanisms. Meanwhile, through a social constructivist approach, the political reality they voice on Instagram is the result of social interactions that occur within the campus environment and student organizations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This practice also reflects the role of students as digital citizens, namely citizens who utilize digital technology to carry out the functions of social control and democratic participation (Ribble, 2011).

The findings also indicate that students' digital political participation on Instagram is driven primarily by idealistic motives. Activities such as reposting, commenting, and sharing political content are not interpreted as momentary emotional outbursts, but rather as a form of moral and intellectual responsibility inherent in student identity, particularly Political Science students. This participation is understood as a conscious effort to maintain the values of democracy, justice, and accountability of power after the 2024 General Election. This finding aligns with the concept of cognitive mobilization proposed by Dalton (2008), which explains that individuals with higher levels of political education tend to participate autonomously based on normative awareness and cognitive capacity, rather than solely due to structural pressures or elite mobilization.

Furthermore, this idealism is not only derived from academic knowledge but is also reinforced by the internalization of Islamic values, such as justice (*al-'adl*), honesty (*ash-shidq*), and the principle of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*. These values are understood as relevant and contextual ethical principles in modern democratic life, particularly in responding to practices of power deemed deviant. Therefore, silence regarding violations of democracy is perceived as a form of denial of moral responsibility and the historical role of students as part of civil society and agents of social change. The relationship between political awareness, moral values, and digital practices is in line with the theory of digital citizenship proposed by Ribble (2011), which emphasizes that citizens have an obligation to use digital space actively, ethically, and responsibly in democratic life.

Other findings also indicate that students' digital political participation on Instagram is driven not only by individual idealism but also by collective solidarity formed through student organizations. Involvement in student organizations creates an intensive social space for shaping political awareness, issue preferences, and the courage to express critical attitudes in the digital public sphere. Organizations serve as arenas for political socialization,

bringing together students with relatively aligned values, discourses, and political orientations. Although some students interpret the decision to post about political issues as a personal and reflective choice, the organizational environment still plays a crucial role as a space for initial deliberation. Informal discussions, study forums, and content exchange within internal groups serve as a medium for fostering shared understanding before the issues are expressed individually on Instagram. Thus, digital political participation does not emerge spontaneously, but rather through a process of social interaction that builds a collective framework.

This pattern suggests that collective solidarity does not operate through direct instruction or structural mobilization, but rather through the normalization of critical attitudes within the organizational community. Students are motivated to participate not by formal obligation, but by a shared awareness that voicing democratic issues is part of their collective identity as student activists. In this context, Instagram functions as an extension of the offline organizational space, where collective values and agendas are reproduced through digital citizenship practices.

The research also shows that the motive for digital existence is implicitly present in students' digital political participation on Instagram. This existence is not interpreted as a drive to seek popularity, virality, or algorithm-based recognition, but rather as an effort to affirm their identity as rational, critical, and politically responsible students in the digital public sphere. Students interpret activities such as selecting credible sources of information, distinguishing between valid content and hoaxes, and determining appropriate forms of expression (e.g., infographics or news rather than memes, which are considered less credible) as part of self-representation. This practice demonstrates that digital political participation functions not only as a means of disseminating information but also as a medium for forming and affirming symbolic identity as political subjects with intellectual capacity and digital ethics.

From a social construction perspective, students' digital existence is formed through a dialectical process between the individual and the digital environment. When students externalize their political stances through posts or interactions with content on democracy issues, they project a particular identity before an audience. Audience responses, whether in the form of attention, discussion, or growing awareness, play a role in the objectification process, where this identity gains social recognition. This recognition is then re-internalized as part of the student's self-concept, strengthening the consistency of the student's political stance in the digital space. The motives for this digital existence are also normative and relational, as students consider not only their own existence but also the impact of what they share on others. The expectation that followers will be more critical, less reactive, and responsible in disseminating information demonstrates that digital existence is understood as a form of social responsibility, not merely personal expression. Thus, students' digital existence is closely related to idealism and collective solidarity, and is oriented towards strengthening the quality of public discourse.

C. Impact and Challenges

Interview results indicate that students' digital political participation on Instagram has the most noticeable impact on their closest social circles, particularly among their peers. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) explain that in the digital era, political participation often occurs through a pattern of bridging actions, where the dissemination of political messages does not depend on formal organizational structures. Students view activities such as reposting and uploading political issues to their feeds as effective ways to disseminate information and build political awareness among fellow students. Political messages conveyed through personal accounts are considered more easily accepted because they originate from individuals with whom they have a close relationship, making them more trustworthy.

However, this impact is acknowledged to be limited. Students recognize that the majority of audiences exposed to their political content are people with relatively similar views. This situation makes digital political participation function more as a means of strengthening awareness and critical thinking within groups already interested in politics, rather than as a means of reaching or changing the views of disparate groups. However, students do not interpret this limitation as entirely negative, but rather as a consequence of their social patterns and social networks on Instagram.

Another challenge many students recognized was the way Instagram presented content. They felt that their timelines tended to be filled with content aligned with their personal interests and preferences, including on specific political issues. This meant they rarely saw significantly opposing views. Some students expressed concern that this could narrow their perspectives and potentially lead to a sense of self-righteousness on issues, due to a lack of exposure to alternative perspectives. Awareness of the platform's limited reach and logic influenced how students participated. Some students became more careful in selecting the content they shared, refraining from posting emotionally charged or provocative information. Students also indicated a tendency to focus more on conveying information deemed factual and relevant, hoping to maintain the quality of political discourse in the digital space, even within a limited audience.

Thus, interview results indicate that the impact of students' digital political participation on Instagram is micro- and relational, strengthening awareness and critical thinking among peers. Meanwhile, the main challenges lie in the limited reach of messages and the tendency of digital spaces to narrow information exposure. Despite these limitations, students still view digital political participation as a meaningful contribution to maintaining awareness of democratic issues in the digital public sphere.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the political participation of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung students on Instagram after the 2024 elections was formed through a conscious, reflective process based on moral and intellectual responsibility as students. Instagram not only functions as a medium for sharing information, but has also developed into a digital public space where students voice criticism, build democratic discourse, and exercise social control over the practice of power. Digital activism carried out by students contributes to strengthening political awareness in their immediate social circles, especially among peers and campus communities. Although the reach of messages tends to be limited and often trapped in echo chambers, such participation remains important in maintaining concern for democratic issues and encouraging a culture of critical thinking in the digital space.

This study also found that student political participation is influenced by a combination of organizational experience, moral values, and the dynamics of interaction on social media. However, challenges such as platform algorithms, limited digital literacy, and the risk of spreading inaccurate information still need to be anticipated. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy, media ethics, and information verification skills are key to ensuring that student activism in the virtual public sphere is not merely symbolic, but capable of making a more substantive contribution to the quality of democracy.

In this context, universities and policymakers need to develop more systematic programs that support democratic digital participation among young people. Higher education institutions should strengthen civic and digital literacy education by integrating critical media analysis, ethical online communication, and fact-checking competencies into both academic and student organizational activities. At the policy level, government institutions and digital platform providers should encourage the creation of safer and more inclusive digital public spaces through stronger protections against disinformation, algorithmic polarization, and online intimidation that may

discourage democratic expression among youth. In addition, collaborative initiatives between universities, civil society organizations, and digital communities are necessary to foster participatory political culture and constructive democratic engagement in online environments. Future research is also encouraged to explore comparative studies across universities and social media platforms in order to understand broader patterns of youth political participation in Indonesia's evolving digital democracy landscape. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing discourse on digital democracy by demonstrating that student participation on social media represents not merely a form of online interaction, but an important manifestation of contemporary civic engagement in which young citizens actively negotiate political meanings, democratic values, and public accountability within the increasingly dominant virtual public sphere.

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