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Motivation for Digital Activism in the Save the KPK Movement in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study explores the motivating factors behind digital activism in Indonesia, focusing on the Save KPK movement as a case study. The movement emerged in response to perceived threats to the independence and effectiveness of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). Using qualitative content analysis of social media campaigns, online petitions, and digital discourse, the study identifies key motivators that drive individuals and communities to engage in digital activism. Findings suggest that motivations are influenced by a combination of moral outrage, political awareness, collective identity, and accessibility of digital platforms. The study also highlights the role of social media in strengthening citizen engagement and mobilizing support across diverse demographics. This research contributes to the understanding of digital political participation in the Global South and underscores the importance of online spaces in contemporary democracy movements.

Keywords: Digital Activism, Save KPK, Indonesia, Social Media, Citizen Engagement, Political Participation.

Introduction

Digital activism has become an important force in supporting social and political change, especially in countries like Indonesia where corruption is still a serious problem. In the digital era, anti-corruption movements such as Save KPK (2015) utilize digital media to disseminate information, raise public awareness, and at the same time build solidarity among the community, mostly young people. A study by Suwana (2019) emphasized that intrinsic motivation—especially personal experience and belief in democracy—was the main trigger for young people's involvement in Save KPK digital activism, with a primary focus on disseminating credible information to combat hoaxes and strengthen political participation. This is in line with recent findings that social media is an effective medium for young people, due to its interactivity, low cost, and viral potential that can accelerate mass mobilization.

On the other hand, modern research such as Nugraha et al. (2023) shows that in some cases, negative emotions—such as disgust towards people or parties who are considered to be against corrupt values—can also trigger intense, even non-normative collective action. While books and articles on global digital activism highlight the phenomenon of “slacktivism,” research in Indonesia indicates that digital platforms such as Twitter or X remain an important initial step—although often only as a trigger for real action in the offline realm.

Furthermore, the #ReformasiDikorupsi (2019) and #PeringatanDarurat (2024) movements show

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a pattern of rapid adoption of hashtags as an instrument of coordination and political pressure on state institutions, including the Corruption Eradication Committee (KPK), which further demonstrates the evolution of Indonesia's digital activism landscape, especially among students and generation Z.

This, this study aims to explore the motivations of digital actors in the Save KPK movement: (1) whether their motivation is intrinsic or emotional; (2) how digital media is used as an information and mobilization strategy; and (3) to what extent digital activism is translated into real collective action. The results of this study are expected to broaden understanding of the dynamics of digital activism in Indonesia, as well as offer insight into how digital media can strengthen democracy and eradicate corruption.

Literatur Review

The following is a Literature Review for the theme “What Motivates Digital Activism? The Case of the Save the KPK Movement in Indonesia”, compiled based on several main aspects of motivation and dynamics in digital activism:

a. Intrinsic Motivation and Personal Beliefs

Research by Suwana (2019) on the Save KPK movement using interviews and FGDs with 52 students showed that intrinsic motivation—especially personal experience and belief in democracy and commitment to justice—was the main driving factor for digital engagement. They are driven by the desire to spread credible information, fight hoaxes, and maintain the sustainability of democracy.

The Role of Emotions: Contemptuous and Non-Normative

Nugraha et al. (2023) highlighted the role of negative emotions, especially contempt (disgust towards parties considered anti-KPK values). They found that contempt mediated between Dark Triad tendencies (especially psychopathy and Machiavellianism) and non-normative collective action in Save KPK. This finding confirms that digital activism can be triggered not only by moral norms, but also by destructive emotions to a certain extent.

Digital Affordances: Access, Virality, and Mobilization

Rachimoellah et al.'s (2020) study shows that platforms such as Twitter and Facebook do facilitate mobilization due to their low cost and viral capacity, but are overshadowed by the challenges of disinformation and polarization. Previously, an analysis by Susanto & Thamrin (UGM, 2022) on digital activism in Indonesia—apart from corruption—underlined that social media functions as a space for spreading awareness and connecting social actors, although it is still constrained by the "digital divide".

The Phenomenon of Slacktivism vs Real Action

International and local literature highlights the phenomenon of slacktivism, which is digital engagement with minimal risk and little real impact. Lim (cited by Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2022) calls it “many clicks, little sticks”. However, several studies note that online campaigns can still be the first step towards offline action, as long as they are accompanied by digital education and social bonding.

Cuba Digital Political Activism in Indonesia

The *#ReformasiDikorupsi* (2019) and *#TolakOmnibusLaw* (2020) movements show that digital movements can have an impact on delaying legislation—although they do not guarantee permanent policy changes. This is parallel to the research results of Fadli et al. (2024) which concluded that structured hashtags, coherent logic, and credible actors are effective in encouraging public reactions but do not always influence the policies of the Jokowi regime.

Literacy and Disinformation Gap

The effectiveness of digital activism is also influenced by public digital literacy. A study by Thomas et al. (2021) confirmed that digital literacy programs were able to reduce the acceptance of hoaxes in Indonesia. In addition, Danaditya (2021) warned of potential threats such as the use of bots and hashtag hijacking that could mislead the discourse of digital activism.

Relevance in the Context of Degenerating Democracy

The article by Politika (2021) on “digital citizenship” notes that despite the post-2019 democratic regression, digital activism continues to thrive through actions such as sharing, connecting, witnessing—something that also applies in the Save KPK case.

Materials and Methods

Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method (Yin, 2018), which aims to understand the deep motivations behind individual involvement in digital activism, especially in the context of the Save KPK movement in Indonesia. This approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences, values, emotions, and communication strategies of digital movement actors.

Research Location and Context

The research focuses on digital activities that occurred on social media platforms such as Twitter (X), Instagram, and Facebook during the peak period of the Save KPK movement, namely in January–March 2015 and continued during the momentum of the issue reactivation in 2019 and 2021. This context was chosen because it displays significant political dynamics, as well as the involvement of the younger generation in fighting the weakening of anti-corruption institutions.

Data Collection Techniques

a. In-Depth Interview

The main data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 informants, consisting of :

1. Digital activists and students involved in the Save KPK campaign,
2. Journalists and social media analysts,
3. Anti-corruption activists from NGOs (eg ICW, Transparency International Indonesia),
4. Active Twitter users with the role of “digital opinion leaders”.

Interview questions were designed to explore personal motivations, perceptions of justice, the role of social media, and the forms of participation they engage in (online and offline).

Interviews were conducted online via Zoom and Google Meet, each lasting 45–90 minutes.

b. Digital Document Analysis

As complementary data, researchers collected and analyzed:

1. Digital campaign content (hashtags, infographics, threads, captions)
2. Opinion articles, press releases, and online petitions
3. Digital footprints on Twitter through manual scraping with keywords "Save KPK", "*Cicak vs Buaya*", "*Revision of the KPK Law*"

c. Digital Participatory Observation (Digital Ethnography)

The researcher also conducted non-interventional observations in the digital space for 3 months to observe communication patterns, interactions between accounts, and the spread of narratives and emotions. This approach refers to the digital ethnography method (Pink et al., 2016).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach according to Braun & Clarke (2006), which consists of six stages:

1. Reading and familiarizing data
2. Initial coding
3. Theme search
4. Theme review
5. Theme naming
6. Writing analytical narratives.

NVivo 12 software was used to assist in coding and grouping data. The validity of the findings was tested through triangulation of sources (interviews, documents, observations), as well as intersubjective discussions with fellow researchers.

Key Informants

In this study, key informants were selected purposively based on their involvement in the Save KPK movement in digital space and in real action. The selection of informants took into account the relevance of their experiences, reflective capacity, and social position in the digital activism ecosystem.

Informant Category	Number of Selection	Criteria
Digital Activist	5	Have been directly involved in the Save KPK campaign through social media (2015–2021)
Student & BEM Member	3	Have mobilized online or offline campus-based actions related to the KPK issue
Journalist/Social Media	2	Reported or analyzed the Save KPK phenomenon and netizen involvement
NGO Anti-Corruption	3	Representatives from institutions such as ICW,

Activist		TII, or Lokataru
Twitter Leader	Opinion	2 Accounts with ≥10K followers who actively voice support for the KPK

Table 1. Informant Categories and Criteria

General Characteristics of Informants :

1. Age: 22–45 years
2. Domicile: Majority in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya
3. Educational background: Students, law graduates, activists, and journalists
4. Digital experience: Majority active on Twitter/X and Instagram; some also manage community accounts or advocacy blogs

Data Analysis

1. Analysis Approach

This study uses the Thematic Analysis approach developed by Braun & Clarke (2006), to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) in qualitative data. This approach was chosen because it is flexible and suitable for exploring subjective motivations in complex social phenomena such as digital activism.

2. Data Analysis Stages

The analysis was carried out in six systematic stages:

a. Familiarization with Data

All interviews were recorded (with permission), transcribed verbatim, and read repeatedly to understand the context and nuances of each narrative. Field notes and social media documentation were also read for initial triangulation.

b. Generating Initial Codes

The researcher identified important pieces of text and conducted open coding manually or with the help of NVivo 12 software. Examples of initial codes include: “feelings of anger at the state”, “need to express oneself”, “drive for digital solidarity”, etc

c. Searching for Themes

The initial codes were then grouped into potential themes, such as:

1. Moral motivation (anti-corruption values, social justice),
2. Collective emotions (contempt, frustration, hope),
3. Media affordances (ease of access, hashtags as mobilization),
4. Need for identity and representation,
5. Limitations of digital participation (slacktivism, algorithms, misinformation).

d. Reviewing Themes

Themes were reviewed to ensure internal consistency and relevance between informants. Visual

data (e.g., hashtag content on Twitter) was used to strengthen the validity of the thematic context.

e. Defining and Naming Themes

Each theme was given a clear operational definition and given a representative name based on the content of the data, for example: "Moral Emotions that Drive Action" or "Hashtags as a Medium of Digital Resistance".

f. Producing the Report

The findings are presented in narrative form, supplemented with direct quotes from informants, as well as supporting data from digital documents. This analysis is also compared with previous theories or findings to show theoretical contributions

3. Triangulation and Validation

To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, the researcher applies triangulation as follows:

1. Source triangulation: comparing interview results, digital observations, and document analysis.
2. Researcher triangulation: discussions between researchers to avoid interpretation bias.
3. Member checking: confirming some interpretations to informants to ensure accuracy of meaning.

4. Supporting Software

1. NVivo 12 Plus is used for data management, coding, and visualization of relationships between themes.
2. Twitter API manual scraping (with supporting tools such as Twint) is used for digital content analysis of the hashtag #SaveKPK and its derivatives.

Results

Based on the results of in-depth interviews, digital observations, and social media content analysis, this study identified five main themes that explain the motivations behind individual involvement in digital activism in the Save KPK movement:

1. Moral Motivation and Sense of Justice

Most informants stated that their involvement in the Save KPK digital campaign was based on moral motivation and a desire to defend the values of justice and anti-corruption.

“I joined in voicing Save KPK not because I was just following suit. I believe that if we remain silent, the weakening of the KPK will continue to occur. This is also about the future of the nation.”

— Faisal, Law Student, Yogyakarta

This motivation is often related to education, previous activism experience, and belief in the importance of independent institutions in democracy.

2. Collective Emotions: Anger, Disgust, and Fear of Corrupt Regimes

Informants indicated that emotions such as anger and disgust (contempt) towards political elites were significant triggers in triggering digital participation.

“When I watched the DPR hearing on the revision of the KPK Law, I felt really angry. It was like being slapped in the face by our logic. That’s when I actively tweeted and created threads.”

— Rika, Digital Activist

This theme also intersects with concerns about the decline of democracy and collective trauma over past corrupt practices.

3. Digital Solidarity and the Power of Online Communities

Many informants felt that their involvement was influenced by social dynamics in digital networks: seeing fellow community members, role models, or public figures who actively voiced the hashtag #SaveKPK

“When I see BEMs posting together, it feels like there is collective energy. We feel like we are together in this struggle.”

— Andri, BEM Chair, Surabaya

This solidarity is strengthened by the use of shared hashtags, special avatars (twibbon), and simultaneous actions (digital storm).

4. Social Media as a Medium of Expression and Resistance

Social media is seen as an alternative space for the public to speak up, especially when formal channels are deemed ineffective.

“We know that tweets don’t directly change laws. But it’s a way for us to show that we care, we know, and we fight. That’s important.”

— Maya, Anti-Corruption Activist

Informants also emphasized ease of access, potential for virality, and open discussion space as factors that motivate them to use platforms such as Twitter and Instagram.

5. Disappointment with the State and Political Representation

Disappointment with state institutions, especially the DPR and the executive, is an important motivational background. Many informants feel that people's representatives do not represent public aspirations.

"It feels like we don't have people's representatives. Everyone seems to be united in weakening the KPK. So we intervene through social media."

— Deni, Journalist

This shows that digital activism in the Save KPK case is not just a form of expression, but also a protest against the democratic deficit.

No	Main Theme	Short Description
1	Moral Motivation	The push for anti-corruption, justice and democracy values
2	Collective Emotions	Anger, disgust, fear of corruption and democratic decline
3	Digital Solidarity	The effects of digital communities and network-

		based mobilization
4	Social Media as a Space for Resistance	Media as an alternative channel to voice aspirations
5	Disappointment with Political Representation	Distrust of the DPR and the government as a trigger

Table 2. Summary of Findings

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