

The Story of Online Activism in Indonesia: An Analysis of the Blue Garuda Case

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Online Activism, Garuda Biru, Social Media Mobilization, Slacktivism, Nonviolent Resistance.

Received : 1, August, 2024

Accepted: 11, August, 2024

ABSTRACT

Online activism is often perceived as ineffective slacktivism, but it can have a significant impact on social change. This research examines the “Garuda Biru” campaign in Indonesia, which utilized social media such as X, Instagram, and TikTok to mobilize support and drive political change. This research aims to explore the role of the Garuda Biru campaign on social media, such as X, Instagram and TikTok, as effective online activism in driving social, political and institutional change in Indonesia. The research method used in this study is a case study. Data collection techniques were conducted through documentation studies by utilizing books, scientific articles, news articles, websites, and other relevant sources. The data analysis technique in this research was done thematically to identify patterns and main issues. The Garuda Biru campaign proved that online activism has evolved into an effective tool of resistance, challenging long-held notions of slacktivism. This research explores the pros and cons of online activism, revealing how social media can trigger political change and demand institutional responses. The study demonstrates the need for a new framework for evaluating online activism, underscoring the importance of maintaining momentum in social movements to achieve sustainable change. The lessons from this campaign confirm the role of media as a significant platform for justice.



INTRODUCTION

There are two paradigms that are often considered contradictory when it comes to online activism. On the one hand, online activities such as liking, commenting, and reposting are perceived as actions that do not contribute to social movements. On the other hand, the value of such activities can have a significant impact on social change and progress. The research question is, how does online activism in the "Garuda Biru" case in Indonesia challenge the traditional view of online activism as slacktivism and prove to be a real form of non-violent resistance?

In ongoing research, researchers are increasingly recognizing that the internet has been a valuable tool for activism over the past few decades. There are differences between the types of engagement in these two views, namely slacktivism and online activism, which categorize online activism into more and less effective forms. Despite its symbolic nature, slacktivism can have a large and meaningful impact on social campaigns and social change. This part of online activism plays an important role in helping us recognize that something is changing, and there are new ways to measure the effectiveness of online activism in its contribution to nonviolent resistance. In other words, if online activism is real, what is the definition of 'slacktivism'?

This research is grounded in social movement theory as part of nonviolent resistance, specifically the concept of digital activism, which posits that online platforms can facilitate collective action and mobilization in ways that traditional forms of activism cannot (Bleiker, 2018). Within this framework, digital activism emerges as a contemporary form of social movement that utilizes online platforms to mobilize support, raise awareness, and encourage participation in various cases. Symbolic actions internalized through social values and symbolic consumption are able to influence collective behavior in society (Lubis & Elida, 2024). This is also reflected in the context of online activism in Indonesia, which utilizes digital platforms to mobilize support and drive social change. This can be seen in the case of the "Garuda Biru" campaign, which utilized social media such as X, Instagram, and TikTok.

In August 2024, a response emerged to proposed revisions to electoral laws that favored political elites, particularly those that aimed to allow President Jokowi's son to participate in local elections. The campaign spread rapidly across platforms such as X, Instagram, and TikTok, which not only raised awareness but also resulted in physical demonstrations that led to the cancellation of the proposed revision of the electoral law.

Garuda Biru is a digital campaign that originated from the public's response to the issue of revising the electoral law, which was considered to benefit the political elite. This campaign became a

social phenomenon because it succeeded in mobilizing thousands of netizens to unite through social media, such as X, Instagram, and TikTok, in voicing rejection of policies that were considered threatening democratic principles. In a short time, posts with the Garuda Biru hashtag went viral on various platforms, including infographics, short videos, and online petitions that invited the public to participate in voicing their aspirations.

The Garuda Biru phenomenon was not only limited to online activities but also encouraged real action in the form of physical demonstrations involving various community groups, including students, activists, and civil organizations. The campaign was highlighted for its creative and peaceful approach to delivering criticism, such as through memes, animations, and easy-to-understand educational content. This momentum not only raised public awareness of the issue of revising the electoral law but also demonstrated that social media can be a strategic tool to drive social and political change. In a broader context, Garuda Biru reflects the transformation of the way Indonesians participate in political issues, from simply liking or sharing content to mobilizing collective movements capable of pressuring government policies. This phenomenon confirms that online movements, if managed well, have great potential to create a real impact on social and political life.

In light of this, this research aims to explore how the Garuda Biru campaign on social media platforms, such as X, Instagram and TikTok, served as an effective form of online activism in driving social, political and institutional change in Indonesia. This research also aims to identify the intersection between the concepts of slacktivism and online activism and how digital platforms can be used as a tangible tool of nonviolent resistance. By examining this case, the Garuda Biru campaign is analyzed as evidence that online actions, such as liking, commenting, and reposting, not only raise awareness but are also capable of mobilizing people, driving political change, and building strong social movements in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several previous studies have conducted research that provides this research. First, initial symbolic acts (tokens of support), such as liking or joining a group, have the potential to mobilize greater prosocial action when done privately (Kristofferson et al., 2019). The difference lies in the study's focus on how the social observability of initial symbolic actions affects subsequent prosocial contributions without addressing the specific context of a particular social movement. Second, the research found that digital activism is a form of collective action that utilizes technology and digital platforms to voice social issues, with key characteristics such as the use of emotion, public performance, and content distribution through social media. (Vargas, 2024). The difference is that the

research focuses on conceptual analysis and structural challenges of digital activism, including surveillance capitalism and algorithms. Meanwhile, this study analyzes the impact of digital campaigns on socio-political change in Indonesia with a local case approach.

Third, engagement in social media can strengthen the relationship between symbolic activity (Slacktivism) and real action (activism), including raising public awareness of social issues. (Garima et al., 2023). The research difference lies in the focus on the relationship between Slacktivism, activism, and sexual harassment reporting globally with a quantitative approach. In contrast, this study explores digital activism in Indonesia through qualitative analysis of social media platforms such as X, Instagram, and TikTok. Fourth, Slacktivism can increase the visibility of a cause, as seen in movements such as #ChallengeAccepted, where even minimal engagement can contribute to wider awareness and action (Carlo, 2023). The difference is that the study analyzed the effectiveness of hashtag activism in spreading awareness and action related to femicide in Turkey through Twitter.

Fifth, Slacktivism can be a gateway to traditional activism, encouraging individuals to transition from online engagement to offline participation (Garaschuk, 2023). The difference is that the study conceptually explores the positive and negative impacts of Slacktivism globally, highlighting its potential transition to offline activism or the risk of becoming politically absent. Sixth, Slacktivism refers to low-risk, low-cost online activities that can provide personal satisfaction but often lack substantial impact on real-world issues (Dabbabi et al., 2022). That research focused on the concept of Slacktivism as a form of low-risk online engagement with minimal impact, using a general theoretical approach. In contrast, this research examines how platforms X, Instagram and TikTok are used for specific local activism strategies in Indonesia.

Morozov (2012), in his critique of digital activism, states that Slacktivism often serves only to promote self-interest without generating an impact on real collective action. However, this view is beginning to shift, as there is evidence that symbolic activity on social media can have a significant impact. Dennis (2019) shows that if Slacktivism is managed with realistic expectations, it can contribute to raising public awareness and mobilization. Concrete examples of this are campaigns that combine online and offline strategies to influence public policy.

Meanwhile, research on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok shows that they facilitate the rapid and effective dissemination of information, which is crucial in raising awareness of social issues, as seen in campaigns related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. (Satria et al., 2024). Other research highlights how Muslim women utilize social media to articulate their political identities and subjectivities, thereby challenging traditional narratives that exist (Dwifatma & Beta, 2024).

Research also shows that behavioural intentions significantly influence engagement in Slacktivism, suggesting that individuals may participate more for personal gratification than motivation for genuine activism. (Firjarahman et al., 2024). In this context, it is important to understand how platforms such as X, Instagram, and TikTok are used for local mobilization and develop activism strategies that are not only symbolic but also effective in Indonesia.

METHOD

Online activism, previously often considered a form of slacktivism, has evolved into a legitimate tool for non-violent resistance. By navigating people's emotions, online activism is able to generate tangible actions that have a significant impact on social movements. The Garuda Biru campaign demonstrates how digital platforms can amplify effective political movements, compel responses, and drive institutional reforms. To support this argument, this research uses case studies as the main methodology. Case studies enable in-depth exploration of the impact of social movements on existing structures and stakeholders in Indonesian society. In this context, the analysis focuses on the Garuda Biru campaign in Indonesia, which managed to mobilize people massively through social media platforms such as X, Instagram, and TikTok, as well as generate tangible impacts on offline movements.

The choice of a case study is based on its advantages in providing qualitative data for analysis. According to Gomm et al. (2009), case studies are designed to test or illustrate theoretical points by describing specific cases in order to reach explanations or conclusions. As such, this methodology is considered ideal for investigating the intersection between online activism and slacktivism. This research aims to test the traditional assumption that online activism is synonymous with slacktivism and show that a new form of online activism has developed into a real tool in non-violent resistance. Data collection techniques were conducted through documentation studies by utilizing books, scientific articles, news articles, websites, and other relevant sources. Furthermore, the data analysis technique in this research is done thematically to identify patterns and main issues. With this approach, the research is expected to provide deeper insights into the dynamics of online activism, as well as its contribution to broader social change.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Beyond Slacktivism - Media as a Real Tool for Nonviolent Resistance

Looking back helps us understand the present and the future (Pigenet, 2016). The evolution of media has surprised everyone and changed society from its basic form, which can be analyzed in two

periods. Before 2010, there was a term for voluntary actions in support of social issues on social media, which was considered a form of participation that did not require much effort and did not cost money, so it did not produce meaningful changes or what was known as "slacktivism" (Kristofferson et al., 2014). It also encourages self-interest and focuses only on meeting individual needs (Dennis, 2019). However, despite these criticisms, several cases demonstrate the successful impact of Slacktivism through media and show that successful Slacktivist initiatives are based on realistic expectations and capitalize on the tendencies of internet users (Morozov, 2009). The debate around the relationship between social media and politics has intensified recently, driven by the analysis of social media in isolation from other forms of media and the creation of common assumptions that lie at the heart of current academic perspectives (Dennis, 2019). These debates have led to substantial changes in the definitions of activism, community, collective and democratic identities, and political strategies in the digital age. While the term 'slacktivism' may be fading in today's digital age, there are some forms of Slacktivism that still survive in online activism.

This shift occurred after 2010, when the media began to play an important role due to the visual shift in politics, building a participatory ecosystem through the instantaneity and virality of content that was used as political power and a tool to raise awareness. Mitchell (2016) states that the visual turn in politics reflects a shift where images are replacing text as the primary means of political discourse, shaping public understanding more effectively. This shift highlights how social media platforms, such as X, Instagram and TikTok, prioritize visual content to engage with a global audience. How does social media shape public perception?. Bleiker (2018) argues that social media allows users to become creators of political narratives and transforms them from passive consumers to active participants, which makes individuals feel valued and engaged. In addition to making people feel needed, the instantaneous nature of social media accelerates the spread of information, enabling real-time mobilization for protests.

This mobilization is effective because images not only reflect political events but also provoke emotions, such as 'anger' and 'enthusiasm' that encourage political participation (Casas & Williams, 2018). However, due to its prominence as a political tool, the media exhibits a dual nature (Bleiker, 2018). Bleiker (2018) argues that while the media empowers activists, it also becomes a tool for governments to control public narratives, sometimes offering performative reforms to ease public pressure without enacting substantial change. Therefore, while the media can produce positive impacts in mobilizing people and spreading awareness, essential elements for activism, its dual role also presents challenges for the future of the media as a tool of non-violent resistance.

If the media has proven itself, as discussed earlier, pitfalls still exist in mobilizing people and building nonviolent resistance through social media, which is often reduced to Slacktivism. To clarify, Slacktivism refers to minimal and low-cost online actions, such as liking, commenting and sharing, that often substitute for meaningful activism or grassroots activism (Kristofferson et al., 2014). Research shows that online participation often ends with a signature gesture, limiting deeper engagement (Kristofferson et al., 2014). While public displays of support create a sense of global solidarity, they reduce the likelihood of more meaningful action. For example, actresses the world over began reposting the 'All Eyes on Arafat' campaign in support of the Free Palestine movement, followed by an estimated 47 million social media users reposting the same content (Mehmood & Mahroof, 2024).

On the one hand, the action succeeded in raising awareness of the Palestinian cause among the global community. On the other hand, it was perceived as a signature drive, limiting deeper engagement with the Palestinian cause (Kristofferson et al., 2014). This is in contrast to personal support measures that are aligned with personal values and encourage more meaningful contributions (Kristofferson et al., 2014). The tokenization of activism is a pitfall of social media, as it often only results in symbolic gestures without leading to more participatory action.

Another pitfall of using social media for non-violent resistance lies in the diffusion of responsibility in large-scale campaigns. Morozov (2009) argues that as more people participate in digital activism, the pressure on individual contributions will be significantly reduced. Moreover, symbolic participation is often motivated by demonstrating personal identity to fulfil self-interest rather than driving real social change (Morozov, 2009). This becomes a problem when campaigns are limited to social media, treating online spaces as 'sites of resistance' without mobilizing people to take further action and fight for social change (Schneider, 2020). Some campaigns fall into the trap of prioritizing visibility over achieving substantial results, although this is not always the case (Kristofferson et al., 2014). Therefore, what happens after online activism is established becomes a crucial strategy to achieve substantial and meaningful impact in lasting social change.

Garuda Biru Online Activism Cases in Indonesia

In the past, before the digital era, the relationship between citizens and government institutions was very rigid and difficult to access. Media as a platform for online activism is another piece of literature that needs to be understood in terms of its influence on political participation and democratic issues in Indonesia. Visual indicators, including symbols and images, can convey indirect messages that have an impact on society. In relation to the Indonesian case, this aspect of the media has been

used to establish authoritarianism or oligarchy. However, in the digital age, the relationship has become more accessible, with citizens and government institutions sharing the same platforms as their information channels. On the one hand, this benefits citizens as they can push for solutions to social problems and urge the government to be responsive to their concerns. On the other hand, it also creates another problem, as it seems that the government is focusing more on their media image and focusing on solving viral problems rather than addressing problems comprehensively.

In the 2024 election, Indonesia has shown significant changes in society. Politicians use social media to mobilize voters, form propaganda, spread news (including hoaxes), and attack other election candidates. According to the latest survey in 2020, the majority of Indonesia's population consists of the Millennial generation (born in 1981-1996) at 25.87% and Gen Z (born in 1997-2012) at 27.94%. These generations are driving major changes in Indonesia as they live in the digital age. Gradually, communication methods, social structures, norms, values and habits in society have changed. Recently, researchers conducted a study on the contribution of the internet in the escalation of youth political participation in Indonesia. The researchers confirmed that youth groups actively participated in creating hashtags, posters, and memes that mobilized the public to move further and participate in the democratic process in Indonesia (Wahyuningroem et al., 2024). This section is also important to discuss as youth engagement on social media contributes to political movements in Indonesia, with politicians using this as a specific tactic to campaign. In addition, this indicator is also the reason behind the success of the Garuda Biru campaign, as almost 70% of social media users are dominated by young people (Wahyuningroem et al., 2024).

In August 2024, the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR RI) made a controversial revision to the general election regulations regarding the age requirement for gubernatorial candidates. This change aimed to allow President Jokowi's second son, Kaesang, to compete in the Jakarta gubernatorial election process. This action sparked the emergence of the 'Garuda Biru' image, which spread rapidly on social media. The post received millions of reposts on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter (Bhwana, 2024). The viral campaign received significant international attention. Within two days of the post going viral, widespread public movements emerged in various parts of Indonesia, leading to the overturning of the revised electoral rules (Bhwana, 2024).

The Garuda Biru viral movement demonstrates that visual activism and symbolism in online activism are real forces, showing that social media can be an effective platform for mobilizing public response and exerting institutional pressure. The Garuda Biru emblem, which features Indonesia's

national symbol on a dark blue background and the words 'Emergency Warning', quickly became a visual marker of protest against the proposed electoral law changes (Imelda, 2024). This modified emblem played an important role in raising public awareness and generating social impact by amplifying collective outrage and creating a shared visual identity among activists (Cammaerts et al., 2013). In terms of social media as a mobilization platform, prominent media personalities such as Najwa Shihab and her news platform, Narasi, actively promoted the emblem on Instagram and X (formerly Twitter), leading to the virality of the campaign on social media (Bhwana, 2024) as said by (Bleiker, 2018) that digital platforms play an important role in modern resistance by bypassing traditional media and allowing activists to reach a larger audience quickly and efficiently. Within 24 hours of going viral, the campaign generated massive online participation and a physical demonstration outside the Parliament building (Imelda, 2024). This phenomenon illustrates the power of online activism to catalyze action in the real world. According to Casas and Williams (2018), The media enables resistance, where emotions such as anger spread quickly online, forcing institutions to respond. The dynamic between symbolic and visual activism, in this case, underscores the effectiveness of media as a form of resistance, challenging traditional understandings of the role of media in activism.

Although online activism is often criticized for being Slacktivism or symbolic activism, the emotional impact and public sentiment of the Garuda Biru movement help mitigate these pitfalls. Critics argue that an over-reliance on visual symbols and online engagement risks reducing activism to performative participation, where individuals engage superficially without sustained engagement (Kristofferson et al., 2014). However, in this case, the campaign's visual narrative resonated with participants on an intuitive level, bypassing rational discourse and motivating action (Cammaerts et al., 2013). The Garuda Biru campaign, therefore, illustrates how emotional resonance, when effectively harnessed through visual media, can foster public solidarity and participation (Hariman & Lucaites, 2016). However, another point to note is that despite the success of the campaign, the government's response may be more of a tactical move aimed at appeasing public discontent rather than enacting genuine change.

This case highlights how the media can play various roles in digital protests and activism. The media can serve both as an amplifier of activist movements and as a tool for state control, and activists must navigate these dynamics to achieve visibility (Cammaerts et al., 2013). Digital campaigns, no matter what form they take, often struggle to convert visibility into long-term change, as participants can resist engaging with a deeper commitment (Morozov, 2009). However, the Garuda Biru campaign illustrates both the strengths and limitations of online activism, emphasizing the importance of

maintaining momentum through real-world action. Without sustained efforts, initial success risks being lost in the absence of ongoing engagement.

Who are the beneficiaries? - The Dual Role of Media in Online Activism in Indonesia

Activism and government can both use social media as a platform to promote justice or exacerbate injustice. Media empowerment refers to how social media serves as a tool for public accountability, amplifying citizen voices and demands (Bleiker, 2018). The Garuda Biru campaign illustrates this idea, as its visual symbol mobilized public sentiment and challenged elite politics. However, governments often engage in performative reforms to manage public anger, responding superficially to activism without addressing deeper issues, as seen in this campaign (Kristofferson et al., 2014). The DPR's withdrawal of the electoral law may reflect a temporary concession rather than a meaningful change.

Online activism and Slacktivism are somehow related through their subsets. Reliance on digital activism can result in visibility without depth, where public engagement does not transform into sustained action (Morozov, 2009). While activists in Indonesia achieved significant wins with the Garuda Biru campaign, it is important to recognize that successful digital campaigns must transition from online engagement to sustained online action (Bleiker, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Garuda Biru campaign underscores the argument that online activism has proven to be real, challenging relevance or stagnation in today's digital landscape. The campaign examines how visual activism and emotional mobilization can produce significant political outcomes, forcing institutional responses that justify the power of social media as a tool of non-violent resistance.

Throughout this research, I have explored the pros and cons of online activism, from its ability to fuel public sentiment to the pitfalls of performative government responses. The significance of this case lies not only in its immediate success but also in shedding light on the evolution of the medium as a platform for social movements or as a form of non-violent resistance. This suggests that there is a need for a new framework for evaluating online activism, recognizing that slacktivism may no longer fit the label on the surface. Finally, I insist that online activism has been proven to be real, and either slacktivism is no longer relevant or new measurements of online activism have emerged.

As Indonesia navigates the complexities of its digital and political environment, lessons learned from the Garuda Biru campaign highlight the importance of maintaining momentum through meaningful movements. By doing so, activists can ensure that their efforts transform into lasting

change, reinforcing the role of the media as an important platform for justice rather than a tool to exacerbate injustice.

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