

## Social media power for protest in Indonesia: The Yogyakarta's #gejayanmemanggil case study

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**Abstract** Hashtag #GejayanMemanggil (Gejayan is Calling) became a trending topic on social media one day before the protest against several problematic laws, and the bills that were going to be passed. At that time, activists had successfully circulated the issues to the public through social media. As a result, at least 5000 protesters had joined in the protest in Yogyakarta. This phenomenon showed activeness of Indonesia's civil society in the movement by involving digital media technologies. The author argued that social media allows the citizens, either communal or individual, to disseminate the issue and encourage others to join the protest in such short notice. This article aims to describe the role of social media and the impact of mobilisation through social media through the hashtag #GejayanMemanggil in the Yogyakarta movement. The qualitative method was employed to examine the phenomenon of the protests and to describe the role of social media. The data in this study was taken from online news, the official account of the movement, and blog posts. The results indicated that social media has the potential to trigger Indonesians to express their willingness and participate in activism.

**Keywords:** social media; civil movement; #gejayanmemanggil

## INTRODUCTION

22 September 2019 was the day in which #GejayanMemanggil hashtag trended on Indonesian social media, especially on Twitter. This trend happened due to the protest against several problematic laws and bills such as the Law concerning KPK (*Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi* or Corruption Eradication Commission), Indonesian Criminal Code Bill, Manpower (Labour) Bill. This movement also urged the legalisation of the PKS (*Penghapusan Kekerasan Seksual* or Elimination of Sexual Violence) Bill by the parliament. The interesting thing from this movement was the rapid campaign through social media in Yogyakarta, which happened only one day before the protest. The campaign attracted thousands of university students from several campuses in Yogyakarta as well as the surrounding societies to get involved in the #GejayanMemanggil movement (Darmawan, 2019). This phenomenon showed that digital media technologies had penetrated the Indonesian civil societies and affected the ways of civil society movement. Ultimately, it has been influencing the socio-political involvement in the last few years.

Initially, Indonesian civil society movements relied heavily on Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), especially in building networks and collaboration. NGOs and CSOs formed coalitions outside the controlling regimes and worked with politicians to advocate for public services, social rights, decent working relations, inclusive growth, and other common interests in public governance. NGOs and CSOs seek to change social conditions that do not promote better living conditions. Furthermore, NGOs and CSOs also function to monitor state officials, parliaments, and even the President, to push them to work according to their authorities and functions.

Technological progress, especially the emergence of social media, has caused civil society to become independent, active, and not reliant on NGOs and CSOs. The civil society also utilises social media to express their intention and desire individually to promote changes and better condition. People become communal when they share similar interests. Through social media, people can meet and promote their interests in the public sphere. This type of social movement has been growing around the world. For example, the 2010 Arab Spring movement was powered by social or digital media (Asif & Yousufi, 2014). In this case, digital or social media technologies can be a powerful tool for civil society activists to promote democracies.

The history records that the media can be a tool of change for civil society to build a democratic society. Unfortunately, many mainstream media only represent the state, the oligarchs, and the elitists without fully considering the public's desire for a change. The mainstream media is not entirely at fault here because they must also face many challenges such as the high demand for the media industry, competition among media companies, and Indonesian journalists and news lack of quality. These issues have caused the mainstream media to be unable to meet

the ideal standard of journalism. It is also exacerbated by the many violations of the journalistic code of ethics that do not get significant sanctions (Nugroho & Syarief, 2012). The combination of all these conditions provides an opportunity for the public to create and distribute information by citizen journalism.

Today's civil society movements have just found a useful tool to disseminate information and opinions as well as mobilise the masses for protest, namely social media. Social media is also actively used by the government, politicians and political parties to campaign their agenda to the broader community. Therefore, of course, NGOs and CSOs are also using social media to support social and political change. Moreover, social media can also be a vital tool for maintaining the existence of individual, communal, or institutional movements such as governments, NGOs and CSOs.

In this paper, The author focused on one of the most significant protests in Indonesia in recent years; the #GejayanMemanggil movement occurred in Yogyakarta. This protest is interesting to study because of the extraordinary response it received from various Indonesian communities, especially in Yogyakarta, albeit the short promotion on social media. The author argued that that social media provided an outlet for the public to influence others to join protests and to disseminate the issue to the broader society in such a short time. Social media allows activists and movements to spread their influence and goals very quickly. It is often stated that social media can provide opportunities for citizens and other groups in society to bypass the state, market control, and mainstream media in building collective identities for a movement (Cammaerts, 2015).

The author also sided with Tapsell's who asserted that social (digital) media is an essential tool which provides a space for the empowerment of society to support policy reforms (Tapsell, 2017). Tapsell's statement was employed to analyse the social movement of #GejayanMemanggil. However, The author did not deny that social media can not be the only tool used to achieve policy reforms. Even social media can not be separated from the mainstream or large media that played an essential role in echoing, limiting, and intervening issues in social media movements (Lim, 2013).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper used a qualitative case study research method. Case study method has been utilised in many fields of studies such as social sciences, education, business, law, and health to answer various questions. According to Stake, the case study research method is the study of the uniqueness and complexity of a case to understand its activity within relevant conditions (Harrison et al., 2017). This approach was used to examine selected cases and describe the role of social media. The study used data from online news, the official account of the movement, and blog posts.

By analysing #GejayanMemanggil protest in Yogyakarta, this article examined the use of social media on protest movements and the impact of mobilisation through social media. In order to get a thorough understanding of the social media movement, the discussion was divided into two parts. The first part was a discussion of social media in Indonesia. The first part explored the background experiences of the country and its people in using social media for daily activities and social movements. Meanwhile, the second part analysed the #GejayanMemanggil protest social movement in Yogyakarta that heavily utilised social media. This section also discussed the dynamics and new trends of expressing protest against policy reforms through the #Gejayan movement.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Social Media in Indonesia: Between Lifestyle and Activism**

Before discussing the relationship between social media and Indonesian activism further, it is essential to understand the position and development of social media in the country. Social media is a new digital platform that allows people who are members of various online communities to interact with each other and share information, news, knowledge and opinions (Eren-Erdoğan & Ergun, 2017). Social media will be at the core of life in urban youth in Indonesia. Currently, the majority of Indonesian youths have various social media platform accounts. The penetration of affordable Chinese brand smartphones into Indonesia makes internet access, especially social media, more affordable than through *warnet* (*warung internet* or internet cafe) (Tapsell, 2017).

With a population of more than 250 million people, Indonesia has a large number of social media users. Indonesians spend an average of 3 hours 26 minutes using social media each day, surpassing the global average of 2 hours 22 minutes. This is almost half the time of overall online activity, namely to connect, find, shop, and share rides every day for an average of 8 hours 36 minutes, exceeding the global average of 6 hours 42 minutes (Wong, 2019). Indonesia is also the largest Facebook user in Southeast Asia and fourth in the world (Haryanto et al., 2019).

Indonesian people, especially the younger generation, are avid users of social media. It is most evident in Jakarta and other big cities. In fact, on Twitter, Jakarta is named as the most dynamic city compared to other urban cities in the world (Jurriëns & Tapsell, 2017). Most of Indonesia's social media users are urban elites who belong to the middle class with an urban cultural lifestyle. The majority of them are young people aged 18-34 years. The United Nations has predicted that by 2025, about half of Indonesia's population will consist of young people living in urban areas with a median age of about 28 years (Tapsell, 2017). Besides, this trend has also changed the style of consumption

from traditional media, such as newspapers, magazines, and the like, to digital media, such as social media or online news platforms. Indiana University ranks Indonesia first in Asia in terms of using social media to consume news or information, ahead of Taiwan, China, Thailand and Japan (Tapsell, 2017).

Not infrequently, especially in big cities, young Indonesians sit quietly and watch their smartphones for hours in public spaces. They mostly use their smartphones to connect with other friends who are far away or reunite with past school friends via social media. Similarly, young parents usually use social media such as Facebook or Instagram to share photos and activities of themselves or their children. Some other people focus more on collecting 'likes' on their posts or getting lots of followers on their social media accounts. There are even those who are willing to buy fake followers and appear to be social media influencers. They use social media to share everything about life, love, politics, religion and many other things, including products to sell.

However, there is still a positive side to the use of social media. The involvement of social media users can be considered as civic engagement in social movement networks (Lim, 2014). Some of the younger generations were actively involved in social change marked by the use of hashtags. Civil activism and involvement in socio-politics can be divided into several categories, namely from citizens to citizens (#supportFEBRY, #saveahok), from citizen to an organisation (#bubarkanFPI/dissolution of FPI, (*Front Pembela Islam* or Islamic Defender Front)), from citizen to a corporation (#SavePrita), and from citizen to the government (#saveKPK or #akuKPK) (Suwana, 2018). In these movements, social media has become part of the daily life of Indonesia's young generation, not only for voyeurism and narcissism but also for supporting social movements for policy reform in the country.

Many crucial cases use social media as the primary tool to support social activism and movements in Indonesia to support individuals as citizens, organisations and corporations, as well as government institutions. One of the pioneering and most phenomenal cases is social activism in helping individuals fight corporations. The #SavePrita case in 2008 could be the first popular issue in the rise of social media activism for civic engagement in social movements. Prita Mulyasari, a mother of two, was sued for defamation after confessing to a friend via email about poor service at a private hospital in 2008. The hospital sued Prita for 204 million rupiahs based on Information and Electronic Transactions Law No. 11 of 2008 article 27, paragraph 3.

Prita's case was circulated in the media and quickly went viral. A campaign entitled "*Koin Untuk Prita*" or "Coins for Prita" was launched to raise money to help Prita pay the court's fine. This campaign was launched in Jakarta and then spread to other cities such as Bandung, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, and several other areas outside the island of Java. In fact, Indonesian communities abroad, such as the Indonesian Student Association in the Netherlands, also donated to Prita through

the campaign. Apart from conventional media, the campaign is also spread across various online platforms, especially Facebook and YouTube. In just under two weeks, from 5 to 14 December 2009, the campaign managed to raise more money than the fines that had to be paid. Ultimately, at the end of December 2009, the court found Prita not guilty. The money collected was transferred to other charitable organisations to help others who finds themselves in a similar situation to Prita's (Lim, 2013; Postill & Saputro, 2017; Tapsell, 2017).

This case is an excellent example of various online civil society actions that use social media as a tool to achieve a common goal. The facts show that social media allows ordinary citizens to engage in political and social issues in new ways. It is evident that social media can support both online and offline activism, and Prita's case shows that social media has succeeded in supporting ordinary citizens to mobilise protests. However, it cannot be denied that not all social media activism has succeeded in achieving the movement's goals. It should be noted that a large amount of content shared through extensive social media networks causes users to be unable to understand every problem that arises. Therefore, only issues that are presented in an attractive, straightforward manner and using symbols and icons that are easy to understand, will attract public attention and go viral (Lim, 2013).

### **The Protest Mobilisation on Social Media: The #GejayanMemanggil Case in Yogyakarta**

#GejayanMemanggil is a wave of demonstrations that took place on 23 and 30 September 2019 in Yogyakarta. It was carried out as an expression of the public's stance on specific events that occurred in Indonesia, especially in connection with several problematic bills that were going to be passed by the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia. This demonstration was also responding to several protests in the country the same issues, especially in Jakarta. This protest originated from the concern of several students and activists, which was continued in Twitter discussions three days earlier. The discussion probed on the role of the regions, especially the Yogyakarta region, in addressing the current issue. Yogyakarta is known to have triggered the 1998 reform movement and is currently seen as urgently needed to respond to this issue. Then, organically and informally, activists from various elements and communities came together and formed *Gerakan Aliansi Rakyat Bergerak* (An Alliance of The People's Movement) to take action on the streets. About 100 people gathered and discussed the issues that would be raised in the protest (Konco, 2019).

Then, they decided to hold a demonstration on Jalan Gejayan as a response to the problems that occurred in the country. This protest aimed to urge the postponement and review of several laws and bills that were considered to be problematic. Meanwhile, Jalan Gejayan was

chosen because this road section was close to the location of the tragedy on 8 May 1998, a demonstration calling for accelerated reform that resulted in the death of an activist named Moses Gatotkaca (Gusmian, 2007; Maksum & Bustami, 2014). In addition, this road section was a strategic area that connects several well-known public and private universities in Yogyakarta, such as Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY), Universitas Sanata Dharma (USD), Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana (UKDW), Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga and some other universities.

**Table 1.** The Actions Prior to the Protest

Date	Actors	Actions	Place/Media
20 September 2019	University students and activists	Discussion on several problematic bills and asked the position of activists in Yogyakarta	Twitter
21-22 September 2019	University students, activists, and NGOs in Yogyakarta	Discussion on the issues, consolidation to hold street movement, and formed <i>Gerakan Aliansi Rakyat Bergerak</i> (An Alliance of The People's Movement).	Yogyakarta
22 September 2019	University students, activists, NGOs in Yogyakarta, and publics.	Calling the public through social media to join the protest by using the hashtag #GejayanMemanggil.	Social Media: Twitter, Instagram, etc.
23 and 30 September 2019	University students, activists, NGOs, and publics in Yogyakarta.	The Protest of #GejayanMemanggil I and II	Gejayan Street

Source: Author (2020)

The day before the protest, activists working on social media, particularly Twitter, called on the public to follow the action using the hashtag #GejayanMemanggil. In just a short time, this hashtag received much response from many communities and managed to collect more than 40,000 tweets and retweets, all within 24 hours. This hashtag was not only used in Yogyakarta as the epicentre of the action, but also in other areas in Indonesia, such as Jakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, Semarang, Surakarta, and others (Fahmi, 2019). This movement has even triggered various demonstrations in other cities, such as in Solo with the hashtag #BengawanMelawan on 24 September 2019, in Surabaya with #SurabayaMenggugat on 26 September 2019, and several other areas (Konco, 2019).

The impact of hashtag #Gejayanmemanggil on social media, particularly Twitter, is very significant for the current generation of students. This can be seen from the high enthusiasm for responding to this demonstration (Nofrima et al., 2020). However, according to Ismail



Fahmi, a social media observer, social media is not the only tool in carrying out a movement. The role of hashtags in social media is only as a means to create trending issues in a short time. In the #Gejayanmemanggil case, activists previously carried out offline activities to study and analyse laws and bills that were deemed to be problematic. After carrying out the offline activities, the activists then took advantage of social media, especially Twitter, to announce the planned action and invite others to join. Thus, for this type of action or announcement, at least two methods must be carried out, namely offline and online (Media, 2019).

Meanwhile, in response to this demonstration agenda, several Rectors of universities in Indonesia issued a circular letter prohibiting students from participating in demonstrations (Sabandar, 2019). The reason for the prohibition was that some universities feared that certain political interests would infiltrate the protests. However, there was a strong argument that the government was trying to control universities to prohibit students from participating in demonstrations. This argument was not entirely unreasonable. From the statement of the Minister of Research and Higher Education at the time, M. Nasir, it could be concluded that universities were expected to prohibit their students from participating in the action. Furthermore, any rector who allowed students to participate in demonstrations would be subject to sanctions (Erwanti, 2019). It seemed that the government was trying to systematically suppress the wave of demonstrations from the community by controlling the role of universities towards students as central figures for activism.

Even so, on the day of the action, thousands of people from various circles of students, activists, and the general public joined the demonstration on *Jalan Gejayan*. The protesters started the action on *Jalan Gejayan* at noon from three starting points, namely the T-junction of UIN Sunan Kalijaga, UGM Boulevard, and the main gate of USD. In this protest, they took turns giving speeches and submitted at least seven demands. Their demands included the postponement and revision of the Draft of Criminal Code Bill; a review of the Corruption Eradication Commission Law that was recently passed; the solving of environmental damage issues in Indonesian territory and prosecution of the political elites involved; Revision of several problematic articles in the Draft of Manpower Act Bill and dubious articles in the Draft of Land Affair Bill; the ratification of the Eradication of Sexual Violence Bill which seems to be stalled; the promotion of the democratisation process in Indonesia; and the ending of arrests of activists in various sectors (Baslon, 2019). The protest resulted in a partial closure of the Gejayan road and diverted traffic. The action lasted about 4.5 hours and ended at 16.30 (Sabandar, 2019). In short, the entire demonstration process ran smoothly, peacefully and without violence, although this did not guarantee that the demands submitted are accepted.



Furthermore, the style of expression of the protest against the policy reforms undertaken in this protest was very different compared to its predecessors, the 1998 reform protests. At the 1998 demonstration, even though the internet was readily available, the communication system was still minimal and was strictly regulated by the government. At that time, the consolidation demonstration only relied on the limited internet network, namely Mailing Lists in Yahoo Groups and Email. Cell phones were also available but only limited to SMS (Short Message Service). However, the dissemination of information related to the democracy movement can still be disseminated to all activists in Indonesia and even other countries, even if only through mailing lists. One of the most popular mailing lists at that time was "Indonesia-L" also known as "*Apakabar*" moderated by John Macdougall in Maryland, USA. Many activists in the NGO community considered "*Apakabar*" to be an essential mode of uncensored dissemination of important domestic and international news materials and sources (Sen & Hill, 2007). This limitation is one of the reasons that the demonstration styles at that time tended to be more formal and conventional.

If the trend of calling for the 1998 reformation movement tended to be firm in tone, then the style in the #GejayanMemanggil was more towards the expression of personal problems in a more relaxed, unconventional, and less rigid style but still in accordance with the idea to be conveyed. The participants in this action brought various posters containing satirical messages to criticise the parliament. For example, a poster reads "*Aku kira yang lemah cuma hatiku, ternyata KPK juga*" (I thought my heart was weak, but it turns out the KPK is weak too), which insinuated the weakening of the Corruption Eradication Commission carried out by the House of Representatives. They also used some of the lyrics for jingle songs such as "*Entah Apa yang Merasukimu*" (Whatever Has Gotten Into You) to criticise the parliament for betraying the people for drafting bills that were problematic and detrimental to the people. As a result, messages on posters full of satire words and unique actions became increasingly viral on social media as well as took the top trending spots for quite a long time. In fact, other regions have also followed and used a similar style of action as a way of expressing their demands.

The #GejayanMemanggil protest, which was different from other protests is also due to the role of the state in safeguarding democratic freedom and the role of social media. This condition enabled communication to be carried out freely and in various ways. In addition, social media also directs individuals to express their political views as a varied routine, depending on the characteristics of their citizens, especially the younger generation in developing the role of social media. The case of #GejayanMemanggil that used a newer style of expression compared to the 1998 demonstration is an example of how social media led users to express opinions in their way.

Meanwhile, to fund the action, the activists raised funds through a digital crowdfunding platform, Kitabisa.com, which was also distributed via Twitter. Fundraising is not only limited to the #GejayanMemanggil, but also other similar demonstrations in the country, especially in Jakarta. Fundraising was carried out starting 22 September 2019 and managed to raise 175.6 million Rupiah from the target of 50 million Rupiah on 25 September 2019 (Wardhana B, 2019). The organisers always update the funds spent from this platform and social media to maintain accountability and reliability. This phenomenon showed that social or digital media have indeed a significant proven in the civil society movement in Indonesia. Social media has a vital role in facilitating mobilisation and coordination for offline movements or street protests. One of the main functions of social media is the efficiency of mobilisation and coordination for offline movements which can reduce costs and also enable real-time communication beyond regional boundaries. Protest movement activists can take advantage of social media to spread the objectives of the action quickly (Cammaerts, 2015). Therefore, it is no exaggeration to suggest that social media can provide opportunities for activists and ordinary citizens to bypass state authoritarianism and enable policy reform. In short, social media can give new nuances to a reformation action or other social movements.

## CONCLUSION

The development of social media is not just an increase in communication technology, but rather a fundamental change in how individuals communicate with each other as well as with political actors and organisations. Social media is changing the way civil society activism in Indonesia and also affecting socio-political engagement. Social media is an integral part of Indonesian urban society, especially young people. In general, young people use social media only for personal gains, such as communicating with friends and sharing information and personal achievements. However, on the other hand, they also use social media to express their opinions on the state or government, especially those related to state policies that disregard the social conditions of the people in the country. Movements demanding policy reforms in the name of society and justice have emerged massively and have been initiated by activism figures and ordinary people through social media.

By analysing #GejayanMemanggil in Yogyakarta, the authors concluded that social media has a significant impact on citizens to engage in the protest movement in Indonesia as well as demand policy reform. Social media is a tool that can unite the power of society in one goal and movement. However, social media cannot be an independent tool without the creative role of activists in formulating issues. Movements need fundamental and stimulating ideas that concern public interests or injustices.

For the #GejayanMemanggil case, social media has become an extraordinary tool in influencing the public to be more involved in the problems of the country. Activists can appropriately and adequately use social media to build a narrative about the reasons for conducting the #GejayanMemanggil protests. In addition, unique, casual, even funny, eye-catching ways of expressing oneself in protest can easily be accepted by the public through social media. So, through the broad and fast reach of social media, which allows direct interaction between message recipients and senders, the #GejayanMemanggil movement has pioneered other regions to create similar movements. This proves that social media has the potential to attract people to declare their participation and join activism movements in the country.

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