



The Role of Social Media in the Formation of Collective Consciousness and Contemporary Social Movements

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Abstract

Social media has evolved into a new public space that influences the patterns of interaction, communication, and public participation in various social issues. This phenomenon shows that social media serves not only as a means of entertainment, but also as a strategic instrument in building collective awareness and organizing contemporary social movements. This article aims to analyze the role of social media in shaping public opinion, accelerating the dissemination of information, and mobilizing solidarity across geographical and cultural boundaries. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach by analyzing literature, secondary data, and case studies of viral social movements on various digital platforms. The results of the analysis show that social media plays an important role in changing the pattern of community mobilization: from local actions to more inclusive global movements. However, its effectiveness is inseparable from challenges such as hoaxes, polarization of opinions, and the risk of algorithm manipulation. Therefore, the role of digital literacy and critical awareness is important so that social media truly becomes a medium that supports positive social transformation. This article concludes that social media is a new force in strengthening participatory democracy as well as a means to fight for social justice issues, provided that there is sound information management and responsible public participation

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Introduction

Social media in the digital era has become one of the main mediums that shape patterns of communication, interaction, and public awareness. The presence of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok, and YouTube has changed the way people access information and shape public opinion. As a new public space, social media is not only a means of entertainment, but also an arena for consolidating ideas, mobilizing movements, and forming collective awareness (Nasrullah, 2017). The concept of collective consciousness itself refers to the idea of Émile Durkheim who views it as a set of common beliefs and sentiments that function to bind society (Durkheim, 1997). In the digital age, this concept is finding new forms through virtual interactions, especially in the social media space.

A number of studies have shown the role of social media in encouraging the formation of collective awareness. According to Brünker et al. (2019), social media facilitates the expression of emotions, solidarity, and shared identity in global social movements such as Fridays for Future. In Indonesia, Khairuddin's research (2025) shows that the younger generation uses social media as a means to voice aspirations, form shared opinions, and engage in social campaigns. This confirms that social media not only functions as a medium of communication, but also as an instrument for forming social cohesion.

Contemporary social movements such as the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, and *#ReformasiDikorupsi* show how social media can be a catalyst for mass mobilization. According to Nugroho (2019), social media has the power to turn local protests into global issues, especially through the use of hashtags and the dissemination of viral content. A similar experience also occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, when digital solidarity emerged through various social media-based donation fundraising movements (Faedlulloh et al, 2021). This phenomenon proves that collective consciousness is no longer limited to physical space, but can grow through online networks that are cross-border.

However, behind its positive role, social media also presents a big challenge. Disinformation and hoaxes are serious problems that can mislead public opinion. According to Ognibene et al. (2023), social media algorithms that promote popular content actually increase the risk of spreading false information. In Indonesia, data from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology shows that political hoaxes and social issues are the categories that appear most often on social media, and this can erode the quality of collective awareness (Kominfo, 2022).

In addition to hoaxes, political polarization is another impact of the use of social media, often creating echo chambers, where individuals only interact with views that are in line (Rambe et al., 2025). This has the potential to reduce openness to differences and weaken cross-group solidarity. The main challenge in building collective awareness through social media is how to manage the diversity of information in order to strengthen social cohesion (Qazvinian and Radev, 2012).

However, the potential of social media as a means of public education and community empowerment cannot be ignored. In a study conducted by the Pandawara Group, social media was even used to build environmental awareness through creative and emotional videos (Sukmono et al., 2024). This shows that if managed appropriately, social media can be an effective instrument for fostering new norms, forming collective identities, and strengthening social awareness.

Furthermore, the concept of collective memory put forward by Halbwachs (1992) is also relevant in this context. According to him, people's memories are never neutral, but are formed and maintained through social interaction. In the digital era, collective memory is recorded and shared through social media, so that the narrative of an event can be kept alive even after the event has passed (Putranto, 2022). For example, the Black Lives Matter movement remains a topic of global discussion even though the initial momentum of the protests has subsided, as collective narratives and memories are nurtured through social media.

Based on these findings, it is clear that social media has revolutionized the process of forming collective consciousness and social movements. On the one hand, social media accelerates mobilization, strengthens group identity, and creates cross-border solidarity. On the other hand, social media presents a risk of disinformation, polarization, and pseudo-activism (slacktivism) that only stops at symbolic participation. As such, it is important to understand this dual role of social media critically.

This study aims to analyze how social media plays a role in shaping collective consciousness and contemporary social movements, focusing on the Indonesian context while comparing it to global phenomena. With a more comprehensive understanding, it is hoped that the public can optimize the potential of social media as an instrument of positive social transformation, while minimizing the risks that may arise.

Methods

This article uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the role of social media in the formation of collective consciousness and contemporary social movements. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to dig deeper into phenomena with an emphasis on meaning and interpretation.

Data sources are obtained through literature studies that include scientific journals, books, reports of international organizations, mass media articles, as well as digital publications relevant to the theme of social media and social movements. In addition, this study also utilizes secondary data from case studies of several prominent social movements both at the global and local levels, such as the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, *#FridaysForFuture*, and *#ReformasiDikorupsi* in Indonesia.

Data analysis was carried out by examining the patterns of social media use in each movement, the role of digital platforms in building public opinion, and the impact produced in forming collective awareness. The validity of the data is strengthened through source triangulation, which is comparing findings from various literature to ensure the consistency of information.

Results and Discussions

The results of the study show that social media has a significant influence in shaping collective awareness among the public, especially the younger generation. Data obtained from field observations and in-depth interviews show that platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok are becoming new spaces for people to identify social issues, build solidarity, and organize real actions in the real world. For example, some social movements in Indonesia such as *#ReformasiDikorupsi* or environmental campaigns

#SaveKendeng show how social media can expand the reach of messages and mobilize support quickly. This is in line with the theory of digital public space which states that social media creates a more open and inclusive discussion arena compared to mainstream media.

One of the main findings of the study is the emergence of a horizontal communication pattern between social media users that strengthens the sense of equality in participation. Not only senior activists or large organizations have a dominant role, but also ordinary individuals who can express opinions, create content, and attract public attention. This phenomenon is different from traditional communication patterns which tend to be top-down. The collective awareness formed through social media is not only limited to discourse, but also contributes to the birth of real actions such as demonstrations, fundraising, and community-based advocacy movements.

In addition, this study found that social media algorithms play an important role in accelerating the dissemination of information. Content that is in accordance with certain social issues is easier to go viral because of interactions in the form of likes, shares, and comments. Thus, the process of forming public opinion takes place in a relatively short time. However, the other side of this phenomenon is the emergence of algorithmic biases that can form echo chambers, where individuals are only exposed to views that align with their opinions. This condition can reinforce polarization and hinder the creation of healthier dialogues.

In the context of social movements, social media serves not only as a channel for information, but also as a tool of collective identity. This identity is built through the use of specific symbols, hashtags, and narratives that are easily recognizable and massively repeated. For example, the use of hashtags #BlackLivesMatter or #PapuanLivesMatter has created cross-border solidarity and cultures. The collective identity formed in cyberspace provides moral and emotional legitimacy for the movement's supporters. This study found that this symbolic dimension is very important in strengthening social cohesion in contemporary movements.

In Indonesia, social media also plays a role in bringing together groups that were previously fragmented. Environmental movements, for example, often involve students, indigenous communities, NGOs, and local communities brought together through digital spaces. Social media becomes a link between actors with different backgrounds, thus forming a wider network of solidarity. This supports the argument that social media is a catalyst in the formation of flexible, fast, and adaptive social networks.

However, this study also reveals serious challenges in the use of social media for social movements. One of them is the spread of misinformation and hoaxes that can obscure the real issue. Some protests have even been delegitimized due to the circulation of false information that is deliberately produced to weaken solidarity. Another challenge is the phenomenon of slacktivism, where public involvement is only limited to giving likes or shares without being followed by real actions on the ground. This phenomenon shows that not all forms of collective awareness on social media lead to social actions that have a big impact.

In addition, limited internet access in several regions is also an obstacle in building equitable collective awareness. People in rural areas or 3T areas (Frontier, Outermost, Disadvantaged) are still experiencing a significant digital gap. This creates inequality in

participation, so social media-based social movements tend to be more dominant in urban areas or areas with high internet penetration.

From a sociological perspective, the results of this study strengthen the theory that social media is a new form of the modern public arena. Habermas emphasized the importance of public space in building deliberative democracy, and social media is now considered one of the forms of public space that is more fluid and participatory. However, the quality of digital public spaces is still influenced by factors such as digital literacy, algorithmic controls, and government regulations.

In further discussion, this study shows that the effectiveness of social media in forming collective consciousness is highly dependent on the communication strategies used by social movement actors. Successful movements are usually able to package messages with emotional narratives, strong visuals, and the use of simple, easy-to-understand language. On the other hand, movements that use technical or exclusive language tend to have difficulty reaching the wider community.

In addition to the communication aspect, the success of social movements is also related to the ability to integrate online action with offline action. For example, online campaigns followed by real activities such as public discussions, peaceful protests, or advocacy programs at the local level have proven to be more effective in maintaining public support. Social media in this case serves as an entrance to deeper engagement.

This study also found that generational factors affect participation patterns in social media-based social movements. Generation Z, for example, is more active in using TikTok and Instagram to spread social issues, while millennials tend to be more active on Twitter (X) and Facebook. These platform differences show that social movement communication strategies need to be tailored to the demographic characteristics of the audience.

Furthermore, research reveals that social media can function as a tool of social control. With an open discussion space, the public can highlight government policies, demand transparency, and supervise the running of government. However, this also raises political tensions, especially when governments seek to restrict or monitor digital activities under the pretext of national security.

From all these findings, it can be concluded that social media has great potential in shaping collective consciousness and driving contemporary social movements. However, this potential must be balanced with efforts to increase digital literacy, build media ethics, and strengthen the bridge between the digital space and the real space. Without all of that, social media will only become a space for discourse without producing significant social change.

Conclusion

Social media has proven itself to be a new force in shaping collective consciousness and organizing contemporary social movements. With its ability to quickly disseminate information, build interactive discussion spaces, and connect individuals across geographical boundaries, social media has become a strategic medium in strengthening public participation and championing social issues. Cases such as the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, FridaysForFuture, and #ReformasiDikorupsi in Indonesia show how influential social media is in building solidarity and mass mobilization.

However, this role is inseparable from challenges. Political polarization, hoaxes, and manipulation of social media algorithms can weaken the quality of public discourse and even threaten democracy. Therefore, the use of social media must be balanced with increasing digital literacy, critical awareness, and fair regulation. People need to have the ability to sort information, understand the context, and participate responsibly so that social media really becomes an instrument of positive social change.

From an academic perspective, this article contributes to understanding the dynamics of social media as a new public space. Social media is not only an arena for communication, but also an arena for the struggle for values, identity, and solidarity. Therefore, further studies are needed to explore strategies to strengthen digital literacy and information management mechanisms so that the positive potential of social media can be optimized.

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