

Social Media Fatigue and the Effectiveness of Digital Activism: A Case Study of the “17+8 People's Demands” Movement in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of social media fatigue (SMF) within the context of digital activism, focusing on the “17+8 People's Demands” movement in Indonesia in 2025. Data were collected qualitatively through content analysis of online media monitoring Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and X from August 28 to September 21, 2025. Findings reveal that after an initial surge of participation and viral attention, there was a sharp decline in engagement and discussion, driven by information overload, opinion polarization, and disappointment with the slow response from authorities. A significant concern is that despite the demands remaining unfulfilled, conversations on social media quickly ceased and were no longer discussed. This study confirms that while social media is effective in raising awareness, it is not necessarily efficient in driving structural or policy change. The results contribute to the literature on social media fatigue and the de-amplification of social issues in the digital age, highlighting the need for sustained activism strategies that integrate online and offline approaches.

Keywords: *Social Media Fatigue, Digital Activism, De-Amplification, 17+8 Demands, Indonesia, Social Change*

INTRODUCTION

Social media in the digital age has become the main space for people to express their aspirations, build solidarity, and drive social change. Ideally, social media is expected to strengthen sustainable public participation, expand the reach of social movements, and generate effective collective pressure on policy makers. (Leong et al., 2019), in their research on social media empowerment in social movements, put forward the concepts of “power activation” and “power accrual.” Power activation refers to the ability of social media to enable previously powerless individuals to voice widespread grievances and organize uneven resources. Meanwhile, power accrual is the process of how social media can be used to sustain activism over time, enabling individuals to take a more proactive role in driving social movements (Leong et al., 2019).

However, the reality on the ground shows the opposite phenomenon. In the case of the “17+8 People's Demands” movement in Indonesia, public participation, which was initially massive and viral on social media, actually declined dramatically in a short period

The visual map shows a strong connection between the keywords fatigue, exhaustion, user, and participation with clusters that also include the concepts of Twitter, Facebook, and social media activism. This indicates a shift in the focus of global research from simply discussing mobilization to the issues of user fatigue and declining engagement in the digital space.

Based on this, the novelty of this study lies in its analysis of the relationship between the phenomenon of social media fatigue and the effectiveness of digital activism, which is examined through a case study of the “17+8 People's Demands” movement. This research seeks to explain how digital fatigue affects the sustainability of participation, changes in public sentiment, and collective pressure on policy. By placing social media fatigue as a central variable, this research not only describes the decline in online participation but also explores the psychological and social mechanisms that accompany it. The purpose of this study is to understand how social media fatigue affects the sustainability of participation and effectiveness of digital activism in the “17+8 People's Demands” movement in Indonesia. Scientifically, this study is expected to enrich the literature on the de-amplification of social issues in the digital age and provide strategic recommendations for the maintenance of sustainable social movements on online media platforms. The method used is qualitative analysis with a case study approach, utilizing data from online media that monitored activity on various social media platforms during the period of August 28–September 21, 2025.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Fatigue and Digital Activism

Social media fatigue (SMF) is psychological exhaustion resulting from overexposure to information, social pressure, and expectations of continuous participation on social media (Sheng, Yang, Han, & Jou, 2023; Sunil, Sharma, Amudhan, Anand, & John, 2022). Factors triggering SMF include information overload, opinion polarization, privacy concerns, and cyberbullying. SMF can lead to disengagement, decreased participation, and even cessation of social media use (Santiago, Borges Tiago, & Tiago, 2025).

Digital activism utilizes social media to build awareness, mobilize support, and push for policy change (Chon & Park, 2020; Mundt et al., 2018). (Leong et al., 2019) explain that social media plays an important role in activism by enabling powerless individuals to voice widespread grievances and organize uneven resources, which he refers to as “activation of power.” However, its effectiveness is often limited to the level of awareness, without being followed by concrete action or structural change (Cabrera et al., 2017). The phenomenon of “slacktivism” poses a particular challenge in digital activism (Cabrera et al., 2017).

(Smith & Taylor, 2017) highlight the importance of the “user sense of influence” in encouraging empowering engagement on social media. They argue that when users feel their actions on digital platforms have an impact, it increases their participation. However, if this sense of influence diminishes, for example due to a lack of response from authorities or the issue fading, this can contribute to social media fatigue and disengagement.

Platforms such as TikTok, known for its short video content, have become an important arena for digital activism, especially among the younger generation. (Fatimatuzzahro & Achmad, 2022) researched how digital activism on TikTok, such as the #WIIWY

campaign, is used to combat online gender-based violence and cyberbullying, demonstrating the platform's potential to mobilize support and raise awareness. However, TikTok's fast-paced dynamics and visual nature can also contribute to information overload and fatigue if content is not managed properly.

Translated with DeepL.com (free version)

De-Amplification of Social Issues

De-amplification is the process of an issue fading after going viral, influenced by SMF, overload, and agenda shifts (Castillo-Esparcia, Caro-Castaño, & Almansa-Martínez, 2023). Studies on the Black Lives Matter and #SayHerName movements show that the sustainability of participation is greatly influenced by emotional dynamics, collective identity, and the response of authorities (Brown, Ray, Summers, & Fraistat, 2017; Mundt et al., 2018).

(Thomas et al., 2018) introduced the concept of “compassion fade,” whereby strong initial emotional responses to an issue, such as the death of a refugee child, can fade over time due to emotional exhaustion or a lack of tangible results. They found that although social media can trigger dramatic action and solidarity initially, these high levels of support are often not sustainable in the long term, and feelings of overwhelm can reduce engagement (Thomas et al., 2018). This phenomenon is highly relevant to de-amplification, where emotional fatigue and a lack of tangible progress can lead to demobilization.

In Indonesia, simple narratives, low-risk actions, and connections to nationalist or religious meta-narratives can increase the success of mobilization, but remain vulnerable to de-amplification due to SMF. How does social media fatigue affect the sustainability of participation in digital activism in the “17+8 People's Demands” movement in Indonesia?

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data was collected qualitatively through content analysis of online media monitoring activities on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and X during the period of August 28–September 21, 2025. The data collected included conversation volume, dominant themes, and public sentiment related to the “17+8 People's Demands” movement. The analysis was conducted using thematic coding techniques to identify patterns, themes, and dynamics of participation. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and discussions among researchers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes the dynamics of public participation in the “17+8 People's Demands” movement in Indonesia in 2025, focusing on the phenomena of social media fatigue (SMF) and issue de-amplification. Data collected through content analysis of online media monitoring activities on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and X during the period August 28–September 21, 2025, revealed a clear pattern of an initial surge in participation followed by a drastic decline.

The “17+8 People's Demands” movement itself is a summary of 211 different demands originating from various civil society organizations as well as academic and labor unions. These demands were formulated by public figures such as Salsa Erwina Hutagalung,

Fathia Izzati, Abigail Limuria, Andovi da Lopez, Andhyta Firselly Utami, and Jerome Polin. The presence of these public figures initially provided a significant boost to the movement's visibility and legitimacy on social media.

Dynamics of Initial Participation and Peak Virality (August 28 – September 4, 2025)

In the early stages of the movement, social media proved to be a highly effective platform for mobilization and information dissemination. Public enthusiasm was evident in the rapidly increasing volume of conversations. This reflects the “power activation” described by (Leong et al., 2019), whereby social media enables individuals to voice their grievances widely and organize scattered resources. Furthermore, during this phase, users felt a high “sense of influence,” believing that their participation could bring about change (Smith & Taylor, 2017).

- a) Instagram became the main channel for visual expressions of solidarity. The “add yours” feature was used extensively, allowing users to easily add their own content in support of the demands. Eye-catching infographics, short reels, and stories with emotional narratives spread rapidly, creating a wave of user-generated content participation.
- b) TikTok plays a crucial role in triggering instant virality, especially among young audiences. Short videos explaining the demands, challenges related to the issue, and the use of relevant sounds encourage mass participation. TikTok's aggressive algorithm accelerates the spread of content, making this issue a trending topic in a matter of hours.
- c) X (formerly Twitter) serves as a center for real-time discussion and information aggregation. Hashtags related to the movement quickly topped trending topics, facilitating the spread of news, opinions, and initial coordination. Influencers and news accounts also strengthened the issue's reach on this platform.
- d) Facebook, although not as fast as TikTok or X in triggering virality, plays a role in building communities and more in-depth discussions through groups and pages. Sharing news articles, opinions, and calls to action is common on this platform.
- e) YouTube provides space for longer and more in-depth content, such as explanatory videos, interviews, or short documentaries. Although not as fast as other platforms in terms of virality, YouTube contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of issues for some audiences.

Peak participation was clearly seen on September 4, 2025, with conversation volume reaching 3,508, dominated by positive sentiment and enthusiasm. This demonstrates the initial effectiveness of social media in raising awareness and mobilizing support, in line with the findings (Mundt et al., 2018) and (Chon & Park, 2020) on the potential of social media in strengthening networks and building collective identity.

The Emergence of Social Media Fatigue and Polarization of Opinion (September 5–9, 2025)

After the peak of virality, there was a significant shift in the dynamics of participation. Between September 5 and 9, 2025, although the volume of conversation increased to more than 4,000, public sentiment began to show signs of polarization and fatigue.

- a) Information Overload: Users are becoming saturated with the constant flood of information about this movement across all platforms. Repetitive content, lack of significant developments, and the emergence of other issues competing for attention are causing disengagement. This phenomenon is consistent with the definition of social media fatigue (SMF) caused by overexposure to information (Chon & Park, 2020; Sheng et al., 2023; Sunil et al., 2022).

- b) Polarization of Opinion: On X and Facebook, discussions began to become divided. The emergence of counter-movement narratives, heated debates about the validity of the demands, and personal attacks between users exacerbated the situation. This created an uncomfortable environment for some participants, prompting them to withdraw.
- c) Criticism of Visual Communication Strategy: Particularly on TikTok, criticism has arisen regarding the graphic design of the movement's demands. Some content highlights that graphics that are too informative and aesthetic are considered unrepresentative of all segments of Indonesian society and irrelevant to the preferences of audiences who prefer simple and easily digestible messages. This criticism, which also spread to Instagram through reposts and comments, accelerated the process of de-amplification because messages that did not match audience preferences weakened engagement and accelerated information fatigue (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023).

De-amplification and Drastic Decline in Participation (After September 9 – September 21, 2025)

The period after September 9 to September 21, 2025 was marked by a drastic decline in participation, indicating a rapid de-amplification of the issue.

- a) Disappointment with the Slow Response of Authorities: The lack of concrete responses from authorities was a significant factor in triggering disappointment. Participants who were initially enthusiastic hoped for change or at least dialogue, but when these expectations were not met, frustration and skepticism arose. This is in line with the findings (Lim, 2013) that digital participation in Indonesia tends to be superficial and easily fades if not supported by concrete action.
- b) Shift in Social Media Agenda: The dynamic and rapidly changing nature of social media caused the issue of “17+8 People's Demands” to be quickly replaced by newer, fresher, or more viral topics. Platform algorithms such as TikTok and Instagram, which continuously push new content, as well as the real-time nature of X, accelerated this shift in attention.
- c) Disengagement and Discontinuance of Usage: As a result of the combination of the above factors, many initially active users began to reduce their engagement, even stopping following or discussing the issue. The volume of conversations plummeted dramatically to only 15 on September 21, 2025, with sentiment dominated by negative and skeptical tones. This confirms that SMF can cause disengagement and discontinuance of social media usage for certain issues (Knupfer, Neureiter, & Jörg Matthes, 2023; Santiago et al., 2025).
- d) Cessation of Key Actor Engagement: The decline in participation was also exacerbated by the cessation of posting activities by public figures who formulated the demands (Salsa Erwina Hutagalung, Fathia Izzati, Abigail Limuria, Andovi da Lopez, Andhyta Firselly Utami, and Jerome Polin) as well as influencer and organization accounts such as @malakaproject.id and @greenpeaceid. The lack of continued support from these key actors, even though the demands have not been met, significantly reduces the visibility and momentum of the movement, accelerating the process of de-amplification.

The Role and Challenges of Data Visualizations in Issue Communication

In the context of digital activism, data visualizations play a crucial role in simplifying complex information and attracting public attention. Various studies show that data visualizations can help in understanding complex concepts and presenting reports effectively in graphic form.

In the context of the “17+8 People's Demands” movement, criticism of the visual aspect was particularly striking. Poster reels that used predominantly pink and green colors—inspired by Bu Ana's headscarf when she participated in demonstrations in the field and referred to as her initiative—were accompanied by very dense narratives, which were counterproductive. Most Indonesians prefer entertaining and easily digestible content to overly informative and complex material. This was clearly reflected on September 7, 2025, when the TikTok account @itsannwardhani uploaded content titled “Why most people in Indonesia would not care about 17+8,” which received many agreeing comments from netizens.

On the other hand, between September 5 and 8, information circulated revealing that Bu Ana's “pink brave” post was produced by AI technology. Additionally, a video emerged showing behavior that was irrelevant to the purpose of the demonstration, which included insults against the President of Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto, and demands to replace Anies Baswedan—which contradicted the main objective of the “17+8 People's Demands” movement. This information added to the complexity of public perception of the movement.

The decline in participation in this movement was also influenced by the characteristics of social media, which emphasizes simple narratives, low-risk actions, and relevance to the dominant meta-narrative (Lim, 2013). When the main narrative begins to be questioned or new issues arise, public attention quickly shifts, accelerating the process of issue de-amplification (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023). This study shows that although social media is effective in raising initial awareness, these platforms are not always efficient in driving structural or policy change without strategies that integrate online and offline actions and sustainable and adaptive narratives, supported by consistent engagement from key actors.

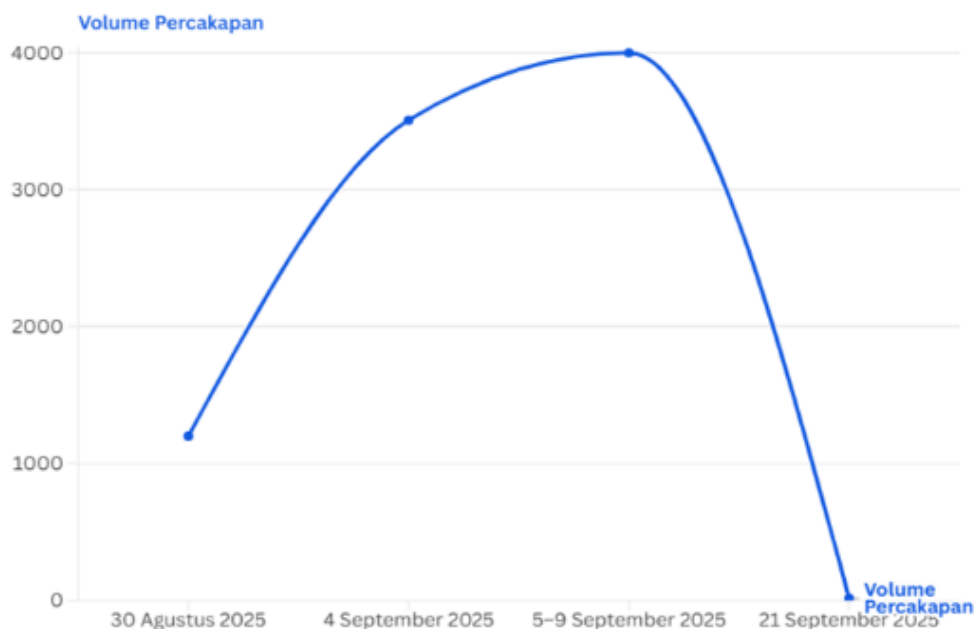


Figure 2. Graph of Public Participation Fluctuations in the “17+8 People's Demands” Movement on Social Media (August 28 – September 21, 2025).

Source: Personal processed data, taken from <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/178-tuntutan-rakyat-yang-meredup>.

Table 1. Dynamics of Public Participation and Sentiment in the “17+8 People's Demands” Movement on Social Media (August 28 – September 21, 2025)

Date	Conversation Volume	Dominant Themes	Public Sentiment
30/8/2025	1.200	Reset Indonesia	Positive, enthusiastic
4/9/2025	3.508	Viral demands	Predominantly positive
5/9/2025– 9/9/2025	4.000+	Criticism of graphics, narratives, and polarization	Mixed, beginning to polarize
21/9/2025	15	Fading issues, skepticism	Negative, skeptical

Source: Results of online media content analysis, 2025.

This decline in participation is also influenced by the characteristics of social media, which emphasize simple narratives, low-risk actions, and connections to dominant meta-narratives (Lim, 2013). However, when narratives begin to be questioned or new issues arise, public attention quickly shifts, accelerating the process of de-amplification (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023). This study confirms that although social media is effective in raising initial awareness, it is not necessarily efficient in driving structural or policy change without a more comprehensive strategy that integrates online and offline actions, as well as sustainable and adaptive narratives.

CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively examines the phenomena of social media fatigue (SMF) and issue de-amplification in the context of the digital activism of the “17+8 People's Demands” movement in Indonesia. The findings show that after an initial wave of massive and viral participation on various social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and X, there was a drastic decline in public engagement and conversation. This decline was triggered by a combination of factors, including information overload, polarization of opinion, disappointment with the slow response of the authorities, and the incompatibility of visual communication strategies with audience preferences.

Specifically, this study confirms that social media, while highly effective in building initial awareness and mobilizing support in a short period of time, is not necessarily efficient in driving structural change or sustainable policy. This limitation arises because of the nature of social media, which is prone to information fatigue, rapid agenda shifts, and a tendency toward shallow participation (slacktivism) if not supported by real action outside the network. Criticism of the graphic design of demands on TikTok, for example, highlights the importance of adapting narratives and visuals to the cultural context and preferences of local audiences in order to maintain sustainable engagement.

Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, data was collected from online media monitoring social media activity, which may not capture the full nuances of conversations or participation on these platforms. Second, the limited research period (August 28–September 21, 2025) may not fully capture the long-term dynamics of social media fatigue or the potential resurgence of the issue in the future. Third, the sentiment analysis was conducted qualitatively, which, although in-depth, may not be as comprehensive as a large-scale quantitative analysis.

Theoretical Implications

This study enriches the literature on social media fatigue by providing empirical evidence from the context of digital activism in Indonesia, showing how SMF not only affects social media use in general but also specifically impacts the sustainability of social movements. This research also contributes to the understanding of the process of de-amplification of social issues in the digital age, identifying triggering factors such as information overload, polarization, and disappointment with the authorities' response as the main mechanisms that cause issues to fade after going viral. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of considering the specific characteristics of each social media platform in analyzing the dynamics of digital activism, rather than treating them as a single entity.

Practical Implications

For activists and social movement managers, this study underscores the need for more adaptive communication strategies and sustainable issue management. It is important to not only focus on initial virality, but also to design a strong, consistent, and digestible narrative that can maintain long-term engagement. The integration of online and offline actions is crucial to turning awareness into effective collective pressure. In addition, movements need to develop mechanisms to overcome information overload and polarization, as well as manage public expectations of the authorities' response.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research is recommended to:

1. Explore deeper interactions between social media fatigue, visual communication strategies, and the role of platform algorithms in accelerating or slowing down the de-amplification of social issues.
2. Conduct comparative studies between digital activism movements that have successfully maintained their momentum and those that have experienced de-amplification to identify clearer distinguishing factors.
3. Use mixed methods that combine large-scale quantitative content analysis with in-depth interviews or participant surveys to gain a more holistic understanding of the experience of social media fatigue and motivations for disengagement.
4. Analyze the impact of influencers and micro-influencers on various social media platforms on the sustainability or de-amplification of social issues.
5. Investigate the role of counter-narratives and disinformation in accelerating polarization and social media fatigue in the context of digital activism.

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