

Generation Z Instagram Activism: Between Slacktivism and Online Civic Engagement in Indonesia's Democracy

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Abstract: This study analyzes how Generation Z's digital activism through Instagram during the August–September 2025 demonstrations reflects substantive civic participation. A mixed-method approach with a sequential explanatory design was used. Quantitative data were analyzed using simple linear regression, and qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The study involved 200 Generation Z respondents selected through purposive sampling. The results indicate a statistically significant relationship between Instagram digital activism and online civic engagement ($r = 0.818$; $p < 0.001$). Approximately 66.9% of the variation in civic engagement is explained by digital activism. Qualitative findings reveal that Generation Z's digital activism transcends symbolic slacktivism and demonstrates substantive civic participation. Through Instagram features such as Stories, Reels, and templates, they disseminate information, shape public opinion, and coordinate real actions both online and offline. Instagram functions as a strategic medium for reflective and transformative civic engagement, showing that digital participation can evolve into meaningful social movements within the digital democracy ecosystem. Future research should include other social media platforms, expand the sample, and examine digital literacy as a mediating variable.

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z's political engagement is growing stronger in the digital age, where social media has become the main arena for civic participation (Cortés-Ramos et al., 2021). Instagram, as a digital platform focused on visuals, can shape shared narratives and quickly spread messages of activism (Pandit et al., 2025). Globally, digital participation triggers political participation that combines personal stories with public action (Rezaei & Owens, 2023). This has an impact on young people, not only as consumers of information, but also as agents of change who shape political meaning through their digital activities.

This global phenomenon is relevant in Indonesia, where the August–September 2025 demonstrations show how digital interactions can turn into real public action. The demonstrations on August 25–29, 2025, began as an expression of public discontent with the House of Representatives, including protests over House members' allowances. The demonstrations not only took place in Jakarta but also in other cities, including Bandung, Surabaya, Makassar, and Medan. Some actions turned into riots and unrest involving students, online motorcycle taxi drivers, and the public, who condemned the authorities' actions and demanded accountability (CNBC, 2025).

The large-scale protests were also triggered by DPR members' responses, which further angered the public. Responses from several DPR members also fueled public anger. A statement by the Deputy Chair of Commission III of the DPR, Ahmad Sahroni, calling people who said the DPR should be dissolved "the world's stupidest people," sparked widespread controversy. Added to this were issues such as increases in allowances and the behavior of other DPR members, such as Eko Patrio, who danced amid the people's difficulties, which reinforced negative sentiments toward the legislative body. As reported by Kompas.com (26/08/2025), the slogan "Dissolve the

DPR!" that was rampant on social media reflects the fading public trust in the behavior and statements of the people's representatives, who are perceived as lacking empathy. This digital sentiment then became the primary trigger for a wave of large protests in various cities.

Controversial statements by members of the House of Representatives and widespread public anger not only sparked anger in physical spaces but also demonstrated that digital activism has made social media an important arena for opinion formation and protest mobilization. Digital activism practices have made social media an ideal platform because it serves as a communication medium that bridges interactions among actors and other social media users (Zakaria, 2022). According to data from APJII (2024), the number of internet users in Indonesia has reached 221 million people. In addition, the Hootsuite (We Are Social) survey and the Indonesian Digital Report 2021 reported that the number of active social media users in Indonesia was 170 million, or 61.8% of the population (Utami & Zanah, 2021). Although information is easily accessible, this does not necessarily improve the younger generation's literacy in digital activism. On the contrary, they are often exposed to misinformation, hate speech, and differing views, which certainly hinder the formation of healthy civic engagement (Erfain, 2025).

The interaction between online and offline engagement remains poorly understood, with some studies showing a positive relationship, while others indicate that online participation does not always lead to offline action (Kim & Yang, 2016; Moon & Bai, 2020; Wui et al., 2025). This study examines whether digital activism, as online civic engagement, is substantive for Gen Z through Instagram during the August-September 2025 demonstrations, or merely reflects slacktivism. Cabrera et al (2017) define slacktivism as a form of digital participation that requires minimal effort, such as sharing posts or signing online petitions, which often does not result in real social impact. In contrast, Pathak-Shelat & Bhatia (2019) online community engagement involves active participation through digital platforms to solve public problems and encourage meaningful policy change. Researchers chose Instagram because, during the demonstrations, it was the most popular and widely used platform by Generation Z and various groups to voice their opinions.

Previous studies have shown that digital spaces can serve as a means of activism for social change (Yusuf & Wibowo, 2021). Other studies note that social media such as Instagram and TikTok strengthen political interest without polarization (Oden & Porter, 2023), although they can also trigger negative reactions due to the spread of bias and emotions (Lee et al., 2025). However, research on young people's civic engagement through social media is often superficial, prone to misinformation, and focuses more on Twitter, Facebook, or WhatsApp (Mulyono, 2020; Rachimoellah et al, 2024; Tarsidi et al., 2023) (Mulyono 2020; Rachimoellah, et al, 2024; Tarsidi et al. 2023). In addition, low digital literacy makes their civic engagement substantially questionable (Gherguț-Babii et al., 2025). Furthermore, Iyengar et al. (2019) reveal that the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok influences political interest and civic engagement both online and offline.

The urgency of this research lies in the fact that although digital activism through Instagram is growing in promoting Generation Z's political participation, research related to its influence on online civic engagement in the context of demonstrations in Indonesia is still limited, with most studies focusing on other digital platforms and Western countries (Barley et al., 2020; Coddington, 2015; Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Valenzuela et al., 2009), and often only highlight symbolic expressions without explaining their impact on substantive participation (Guess et al., 2020; Loader et al., 2014).

This study contributes to the academic understanding of digital activism practices by Generation Z on Instagram, particularly in the context of substantive civic engagement. This study offers in-depth insights into how social media serves as a medium for political mobilization and public opinion formation in Indonesia. It highlights the dynamics of digital political participation in the contemporary democratic landscape of developing countries. Theoretically, this study also develops a conceptual framework for digital activism, emphasizing the characteristics of the younger generation and the use of social media as a tool for political expression. In the Indonesian

context, this study seeks to bridge the gap between conventional political participation theory and the rapidly developing digital practices of the younger generation.

In light of the identified issues, the research questions in this study are: how does Generation Z's digital activism on Instagram influence online civic engagement in the context of the August-September 2025 demonstrations, and does this activism reflect substantive civic participation or merely symbolic expression? This study aims to analyze the influence of Generation Z's digital activism on Instagram on online civic engagement and to describe the form of this activism, assessing the extent to which substantive civic participation is reflected in the August-September 2025 demonstrations. Theoretically, this research enriches the discourse on digital citizenship and citizen participation in developing countries. Meanwhile, in practical terms, this study offers educators, policymakers, and digital communities a valuable perspective on promoting political literacy and digital engagement.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a mixed-method approach with a sequential explanatory design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of Generation Z's digital activism, particularly through Instagram during the August-September 2025 demonstrations. The sequential explanatory model consists of two phases: the first phase involved collecting and analyzing quantitative data on digital activism on Instagram and Generation Z's online civic engagement; the second phase involved qualitative data collection and analysis to elaborate on and strengthen the quantitative findings (Habibullah et al., 2025).

The quantitative stage aims to measure the level of digital activism and online civic engagement among Generation Z activists in Lampung Province. This study focuses on this group because Lampung, as a developing province with a diverse youth population, serves as a microcosm of the broader Indonesian digital generation. Generation Z in Lampung is also actively involved in socio-political discourse through Instagram, making it a relevant and strategic population for analyzing patterns of digital citizenship and activism.

The research population consists of Generation Z activists residing in Lampung Province. Using purposive sampling, the researcher selected participants who met the following criteria: born between 1997 and 2012, have an active Instagram account, participated in digital activism during the August-September 2025 demonstrations, and were involved in internal and external campus organizations.

A total of 200 respondents who met these criteria completed a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree). This study focused on two variables: Digital Activism (X) and Online Community Involvement (Y). Initially, each variable was measured through 30 statement items (60 items in total). However, after validity and reliability tests, only 19 items for Digital Activism and 15 for Online Community Involvement were found to be valid and retained for further analysis.

Before the main questionnaire was distributed, validity and reliability tests were conducted using SPSS 25 on a pilot sample of 30 respondents. Items were considered valid if their r-count value exceeded the r-table value of 0.361 ($df = 28, \alpha = 0.05$). Based on this test, 34 valid items were retained (19 for Digital Activism and 15 for Online Community Engagement). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.887 for Digital Activism and 0.907 for Online Community Engagement, indicating high reliability ($\alpha > 0.6$).

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression. The normality test showed a p-value of 0.619 ($p > 0.05$), indicating that the data were normally distributed, while the linearity test showed a p-value of 0.068 ($p > 0.05$), confirming a linear relationship between Digital Activism and Online Community Involvement. Since all prerequisites were met, regression analysis was performed to test the hypothesis.

The qualitative stage aimed to deepen the interpretation of quantitative findings by exploring the life experiences of Generation Z activists involved in digital movements. In-depth interviews were conducted with several selected activists affiliated with various organizations, including the Lampung University Civic Education Forum, the Student Executive Board of the

Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (Lampung University), the Student Executive Board of the Faculty of Law (Bandar Lampung University), UKM BS Komunitas Biroe IIB Darmajaya, the Indonesian National Youth Committee, the Student Executive Board of the Bakti Nusantara Institute (Pringsewu), representatives of BEM Nusantara from Lampung, the Islamic Student Association, and the Indonesian National Student Movement (GMNI) Bandar Lampung branch.

This interview aims to validate and elaborate on quantitative results and to provide contextual insights into the motivations, challenges, and forms of participation in digital activism among Generation Z in Lampung. Qualitative data is analyzed thematically, and data triangulation is used to ensure consistency and credibility between quantitative and qualitative results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents quantitative data and analysis of the influence of digital activism on Instagram during the August-September 2025 demonstrations, highlighting the relationship between symbolic slacktivism and substantive online participation with real impact. A higher level of commitment in this form of participation often implies offline involvement, such as voting in elections, attending demonstrations, or engaging in direct advocacy activities (Milošević-Đorđević & Žeželj, 2017; Penney, 2015). Although slacktivism is often viewed negatively due to its superficial involvement, several studies show that this form of participation can serve as a gateway to more substantial socio-political involvement. Jones (2015) and Štětka & Mazák (2014) argue that symbolic expressions of support in the digital space can be a starting point for individuals to develop political awareness and increase the intensity of their participation in public issues.

Slacktivism and online civic engagement are two forms of digital participation that differ fundamentally. Slacktivism refers to online acts of support that require minimal effort, such as sharing posts or signing digital petitions, which often have little real impact. In contrast, online community engagement involves active participation through digital platforms, such as community forums or e-government services, which aim to solve social problems and encourage policy change (Puplampu & Macpherson, 2023; Scotto di Carlo, 2023).

The main differences between the two lie in the level of effort, impact, and motivation. Slacktivism tends to be done to build self-image or feel like one has contributed, while online engagement is driven by a desire to participate in solving public problems. Although slacktivism can be a first step towards more meaningful engagement, online engagement is more often designed to support real action in society and has greater potential impact (Leonel et al., 2023; Zait & Andrei, 2019).

Although low-intensity digital actions, such as reposting or creating templates, are generally categorized as symbolic forms of slacktivism, this study's findings indicate that these activities can be significant catalysts for more meaningful engagement. This form of engagement is reflected in deliberative (in-depth discussion) and collaborative (action-oriented coordination) practices, indicating that Generation Z's digital participation has evolved beyond mere statements of support in the online realm.

Meanwhile, digital activism (independent variable) is defined by three main elements by Joyce (2010): public opinion formation, action planning, and mass mobilization. This methodological approach ensures that the quantitative findings presented below not only reflect relevant digital dynamics but also rest on established civil engagement theory, yielding in-depth, contextual interpretations.

Quantitative Data Findings

In this study, simple linear regression was applied to examine the influence of digital activism on the Online Civic Engagement of Generation Z during the August–September 2025 demonstrations. The table below presents the regression results and the coefficient of determination used to test the research hypothesis.

Table 1. Simple Linear Regression Analysis
Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Beta		
1 (Constant)	16.590		9,968	.000
Digital Activism	.589	.818	20,010	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Online Civic Engagement

Source: SPSS 25 Processing Results

The regression analysis results show that the Digital Activism variable through Instagram has a positive and significant effect on Generation Z's Online Civic Engagement in the August–September 2025 demonstration phenomenon. This is evidenced by a constant value of 16.590 and a regression coefficient of 0.589. This means that even without digital activity, Generation Z's Online Civic Engagement remains at a base level of 16.590. However, every 1% increase in Digital Activism through Instagram will increase Online Civic Engagement by 0.589. Additionally, the t-test results show a t-value of 20.010 and a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating that the effect of Digital Activism on Online Civic Engagement is statistically significant. Therefore, the research hypothesis stating that Digital Activism through Instagram has a positive effect on Generation Z's Online Civic Engagement is accepted.

Hypothesis Testing

The basis for regression analysis is to look at the significance value (Sig.) with the SPSS output results:

- If the significance value is less than 0.05, it means that there is an effect of variable (X) on variable (Y).
- If the significance value (Sig.) is greater than >0.05 , it means that there is no influence of variable (X) on variable (Y).

Based on the significance test, the output is $p < 0.000$, so the regression model is considered valid. In addition, the regression coefficient value of 0.589 with $t = 20.010$, $p < 0.000$ reinforces that every increase in Digital Activism will increase *Online Civic Engagement* among Generation Z through Instagram.

Table 2. Coefficient of Determination
Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	.818 ^a	.669	.667	2.681

a. Predictors: (Constant), Digital Activism

b. Dependent Variable: Online Civic Engagement

Source: SPSS 25 Processing Results

Based on the Model Summary table, the R value is 0.818, which indicates a strong relationship between the Digital Activism variable and Online Civic Engagement. The R-square value of 0.669 indicates that Digital Activism can explain 66.9% of the variation in Online Civic Engagement among Generation Z on Instagram. Meanwhile, the remaining 33.1% is explained by other factors not included in this research model. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.667 indicates that, after adjusting for the number of variables and samples, the regression model still consistently explains the relationship.

Based on the results of a simple linear regression analysis, it can be concluded that digital activism on Instagram has a significant, positive influence on Generation Z's online civic engagement during the August–September 2025 demonstration phenomenon. The regression results show a constant value of 16.590, indicating that even without digital activity, the level of Generation Z's online civic engagement remains at 16.590. In addition, the regression coefficient of 0.589 indicates that a 1% increase in digital activism via Instagram is associated with a 0.589 increase in online civic engagement. The t-test results show that the t-value is 20.010 and the significance is 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the influence of digital activism through Instagram on online civic engagement is statistically significant. Thus, the hypothesis stating that there is a positive influence between digital activism and Generation Z's online civic engagement can be accepted. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.669 indicates that approximately 66.9% of the variation in Generation Z's online civic engagement can be explained by digital activism on Instagram, while the remaining 33.1% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study. The Adjusted R^2 value of 0.667 reinforces that this regression model remains consistent and valid after adjusting for the number of variables and samples.

This study demonstrates that digital activism on Instagram has a positive, significant effect on Generation Z's online civic engagement during the August–September 2025 demonstrations. Instagram has proven to be more than just a symbolic medium (slacktivism); it is a platform that encourages real and meaningful civic participation. Qualitative findings reinforce that digital expression has developed into substantial civic engagement in everyday life.

Results of Descriptive Qualitative Research Interviews

This study involved seven informants from Generation Z who are active Instagram activists affiliated with internal and external student organizations in Lampung. The interviews aimed to elaborate on three elements of Digital Activism according to Joyce (2010), consisting of Public Opinion Formation, Action Planning, and Mass Mobilization, as well as three practices of Online Civic Engagement according to

In-depth interviews were conducted to understand concept of Joyce (2010), namely the formation of public opinion, action planning, and mass mobilization. *First, regarding the formation of public opinion*, informant JS said, *"Instagram is very influential in discussing socio-political issues and became the most massive platform during the August-September 2025 demonstrations."* RZ added, *"Educational content from official media and influencers influences public opinion as education through reels and templates."* The informant's statement is relevant to the opinion of (2025), which emphasizes the important role of Instagram in influencing public opinion. Then IM stated, *"I also participated in sharing information during the demonstrations."* FD stated, *"I don't often participate in digital activism, but I have done so before."* Haris et al., (2024) stated that Generation Z, who are accustomed to digital technology, often engage in digital activism to express their opinions and participate in political life. The researchers concluded from the interview findings that Instagram plays a dominant role in shaping public opinion through educational content and effective information dissemination, thereby encouraging the active participation of young people in digital activism as a response to contemporary socio-political conditions. This statement explicitly reinforces Joyce (2010) framework, which highlights Instagram's role as the primary space for shaping public opinion among Gen Z. This phenomenon reflects a shift in the sources of information legitimacy; concise and easily understandable visual content (such as reels and templates) from trusted figures, such as activists or influencers, has proven to be more effective in driving discourse than conventional media.

Second, action planning in social media digital activism such as Instagram is not only about disseminating information but also about planning and coordinating social actions effectively. HR explained, *"Instagram's role in consolidating the masses through the creation of easily shareable templates strengthens the movement's message and supports action planning."* ML emphasized *"the importance of coordination between collaborating organizations to disseminate information about demonstrations through Instagram and other platforms."* IH added that *even though they do not always take to the streets, they are still involved through digital activities, saying,*

"I still feel involved through digital activities such as sharing posts and collaborating with other organizations." This shows the flexibility of action planning that is tailored to individual circumstances. Below is the call to action shared via Instagram by the Student Executive Board (BEM) of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP) at the University of Lampung to coordinate the August-September 2025 demonstrations, which aim to expand the reach of the masses.

These findings illustrate the Action Planning dimension in Joyce (2010) theory, which is realized through collaboration (Brandtzaeg, Mainsah, & Følstad, 2012). Templates and reels serve as decentralized coordination tools, enabling activists to disseminate instructions and action agendas quickly and uniformly. This flexibility where IH Informants still feel involved "through digital activities" even though they are not always physically present explains that Digital Activism can be a gateway to more substantial participation, as stated by (Jones, 2015). Digital platforms not only design physical actions but also facilitate "virtual actions" that have equal value in civic engagement.



Figure 1. *Call to Action (RZ)*

As seen in the call to action from digital platforms, especially Instagram, it plays a crucial role in mobilizing the masses. The interview results show that the speed of information dissemination on social media is a key factor in the success of mobilization. The *three* indicators of mass mobilization in the digital activism variable. *"Mass mobilization in the digital era has now experienced significant expansion with Instagram's role as the main platform capable of mobilizing the participation of many people, even without physical presence at the action location,"* as emphasized by informant RZ. HR added that *"social media enables fast and effective connectivity between individuals, which amplifies the impact of mass movements."* Meanwhile, FD argues that *"calls to action through Instagram are far more effective than conventional media thanks to their wide reach and rapid dissemination."* JS also acknowledges *"the strong influence of Instagram, especially in motivating Generation Z to participate in socio-political actions."* Ferreira et al., (2021) emphasize that political discussions on Instagram form dynamic communities and influence political participation, especially for individuals who are less interested in politics. Overall, digital calls to action serve as a catalyst that transforms passive participation into collective action, indicating that mass mobilization today does not only depend on physical action, but also on the power of networking and information dissemination in the digital realm.

The call to action (as shown in Figure 1) demonstrates the element of Mass Mobilization according to (Joyce, 2010). The rapid spread and wide reach of content on Instagram (through stories and reels) are important factors that transform passive participation (slacktivism) into collective action. This is the main explanation for the strong *R* coefficient (0.818) in the quantitative results; the speed of digital networks is directly related to the ability of student organizations to reach and mobilize Gen Z, both directly and through online media.

Online citizen engagement Brandtzaeg, Mainsah, & Følstad (2012) supportive practices, deliberative practices, and collaborative practices. First, supportive actions show that the difference between slacktivism (which is symbolic) and deeper engagement does not fully apply to Gen Z in Lampung. Online activities such as sharing information (IM) and forming opinions (JS)

are forms of supportive practices that build emotional foundations and understanding (Jude, 2025). Analytically, these qualitative findings provide important context for interpreting the regression constant value (16.590) that Gen Z's initial level of online civic engagement is already high because they naturally use social media to show socio-political support, which is then reinforced by Digital Activism. Suyato et al., (2023) states that responsible citizens realize the importance of their involvement in supporting the progress of society and the country.

Regarding the *two* indicators of deliberative practices, there are two components here. *First*, there are discussions based on facts and logic. RZ prefers content that provides comprehensive explanations and in-depth analysis, as he said: "*content that is more explanatory or opinionated.*" RZ also pointed out the importance of group discussions within the organization: "*we first discuss issues in Indonesia, the conditions in various provinces, and then we decide to post.*" This is in line with Tarsidi et al.'s (2023) which states the importance of the younger generation in strengthening democracy. *Second*, there are discussions that are driven more by feelings than facts. JS explains that "*Indonesian society wants to take action not because of objective facts but because of post-truth emotional feelings.*" The problem, as expressed by CT, is that there is a lot of false information or hoaxes circulating: "*There are many hoaxes, for example, buzzers, which make digital citizens on Instagram and other media platforms confused about distinguishing between facts and hoaxes.*" This discussion highlights the challenges mentioned by (Lee et al., 2025), such as emotional bias and the spread of false information (post-truth). However, Gen Z continues to strive to overcome these challenges, as demonstrated by Informant IH, who considers various perspectives. Analytically, Gen Z's Online Deliberative Participation can be seen as a battlefield of ideas, where Digital Activism acts as a filter and catalyst. This means that activities on Instagram encourage discussion and increase engagement, but also risk spreading hoaxes. This shows that although Digital Activism can increase participation, the quality of engagement (depth of understanding) remains a challenge that needs to be addressed by improving digital literacy.

The *three* collaborative practices For example, RZ revealed that "*the August-September 2025 demonstrations at the Lampung Provincial DPRD building involved various organizations such as BEM UNILA, UIN Raden Intan Lampung, the Sumatra Institute of Technology, Malahayati University, the PGRI Lampung College of Teacher Training and Education (STKIP), Bandar Lampung University, and the Darmajaya Institute of Informatics and Business, as well as himself who was active in participating in the demonstrations, which showed the diversity and breadth of the network of organizations involved in mass mobilization through social media.*" This shows that cross-organizational collaboration is key to strengthening social movements and expanding the reach of messages. HR emphasized "*the important role of utilizing various digital platforms, such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, TikTok, and Twitter, in expanding the coverage of information about social actions.*" Collaboration in action provides strong evidence that Digital Activism is more than just slacktivism. This reflects the maturity of the student movement in the digital age (Ramadhan & Aminuddin, 2025). In this context, Instagram serves as a coordination hub, bringing together various organizations in Lampung to achieve common goals. This is the primary way Digital Activism (X) transforms into meaningful Online Civic Engagement (Y), as indicated by an R Square value of 66.9%. Collaboration strengthens the impact of every digital action taken.

The findings of this study confirm the strategic role of Instagram in digital activism carried out by Generation Z during the August–September 2025 demonstrations in Lampung. Based on in-depth interviews with seven activists from various student organizations, it was found that Instagram not only functions as a medium for disseminating information related to issues such as the Asset Seizure Bill and DPR budget reform, but also as an instrument for shaping public opinion, planning actions, and mobilizing the masses.

The activists actively utilized the story, reels, and template features to carry out educational campaigns, consolidate the masses, and build cross-organizational collaboration. Collaboration between student organizations—including BEM Unila, UIN Raden Intan, ITERA, Bandar Lampung University, and IIB Darmajaya—shows that this movement goes beyond symbolic slacktivism and represents a substantive and transformative form of digital civic participation.

Digital activism through Instagram has proven capable of strengthening solidarity, increasing public literacy, and mobilizing collective action based on civic values and high socio-political awareness. These findings are in line with the study Oden & Porter (2023), which shows that Instagram can increase political interest without triggering polarization, as well as the research Lee et al., (2025), which highlights emotional bias and post-truth challenges in the landscape of digital activism. Furthermore, the findings of this study reinforce the perspective of (2025) that Instagram functions as a medium for mobilization and political narratives among the younger generation, where visual content plays a crucial role in accelerating the coordination of decentralized collective action.

This finding confirms the important role of Instagram in Gen Z Digital Activism during the August–September 2025 demonstrations in Lampung. Digital Activism is no longer considered merely a symbolic act (slacktivism), but rather an interconnected system that encourages real and impactful civic participation. In this case, Instagram functions as: 1) a fast and flexible opinion-forming tool, 2) a means of decentralized action planning, and 3) a driver of mass mobilization. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the ideas of Joyce (2010) and (Brandtzaeg, Mainsah, & Følstad, 2012). The positive and significant relationship found in the quantitative analysis R Square 0,669 (66,9%) is explained by the qualitative results: Digital Activism is a trigger that transforms online awareness into coordinated support, discussion, and cooperation. This indicates that for Gen Z in Lampung, visual platforms have become strategic tools for building solidarity, increasing public understanding, and encouraging collective action based on high socio-political awareness.

This study has three main limitations. First, although the sample of 200 respondents is large, the results are still limited to Generation Z in Lampung, so they do not fully represent all of Indonesia. Second, the scope of the study only covers Instagram, without involving other platforms such as TikTok or WhatsApp, which also play a role in digital activism. Third, this study ignores external variables such as the influence of campus organizations on digital activism. Future research should expand the scope of platforms, increase the sample size, and test mediating variables digital literacy and moderating variables organizational membership for a more comprehensive understanding.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital activism by Generation Z on Instagram has a significant, positive influence on online citizen engagement, particularly during the August–September 2025 demonstrations in Lampung. Quantitatively, digital activism is a strong predictor of online civic engagement, indicating that Instagram is no longer merely a symbolic medium but has become an effective tool for genuine participation. Qualitative implications reinforce these findings through three key mechanisms: the transformation of slacktivism into coordinated collective discussion and action; the reinforcement of Joyce and Brandtzaeg's theoretical framework regarding the function of social media and forms of citizen engagement; and the strategic role of Instagram as a center for coordinating decentralized student movements. Practically, these findings confirm Instagram's potential as a strategic tool for encouraging political and social participation among young people. Governments, educational institutions, and civil society organizations are advised to build healthy digital discussion spaces and improve critical digital literacy so that Gen Z can sort information logically. The limitations of this study lie in its focus on platforms and regions; further studies are recommended to expand the scope of social media and examine other factors, such as digital literacy and organizational membership, as mediating and moderating variables.

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