

Mapping the Frontiers of Digital Political Activism: Insights from Bibliometric Analysis

Rosalina Woro Subektie¹, Mohammad Nurul Huda², Citra Safira³, Alita Sari⁴

¹Bachelor of Public Administration K. Rembang, Universitas Diponegoro, Indonesia. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6035-5671>, Email: rosalinaws@lecturer.undip.ac.id

²Bachelor of Public Administration K. Rembang, Universitas Diponegoro, Indonesia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5721-4251>, Email: mohammadnurulhuda@lecturer.undip.ac.id

³Department of Media and Communications, Universitas Diponegoro, Indonesia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3472-140X>, Email: citrasafira@live.undip.ac.id

⁴Bachelor of Public Administration K. Rembang, Universitas Diponegoro, Indonesia. Email: alitaita1604@gmail.com

Correspondence: Mohammad Nurul Huda, Bachelor of Public Administration K. Rembang, Universitas Diponegoro, Indonesia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5721-4251>, Email: mohammadnurulhuda@lecturer.undip.ac.id

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Abstract

Social media plays a crucial role in digital political landscapes, particularly as a platform for marginalized communities to express their views. It enables citizens to actively engage in political discussions, advocacy, and campaigns. Political activity in digital spaces facilitates mass mobilization and significantly accelerates policy discussions. Over time, this topic has attracted scholarly attention. This study conducts a comprehensive examination of the evolving landscapes of digital political activism, focusing on emerging trends and patterns. Using bibliometric analysis and the PRISMA framework, scientific articles were extracted from Scopus. The search was confined to the domain of digital political activism from 2000 to August 2025. Findings reveal that digital political activism has increasingly become a significant research domain. Scholars from developed countries have consistently contributed to this field. However, its development has been fragmented, following distinct trajectories with various clusters emerging within the topic of digital political activism. The governance of digital participation, the role of social media in digital political activism, identity politics, and civic engagement during crises that certain subjects have emerged as research hotspots, necessitating further exploration to address the gaps in the literature.

Keywords: advocacy policy, digital political activism, political participation, social media, bibliometric analysis, research hotspots

1. Introduction

The advancement of digital technology has reshaped political participation and given rise to digital political landscapes. The Internet and digital media make it possible to mobilize the masses and take political action. This has significantly changed the way protests and organized movements are carried out, as mobilization can be carried out quickly and information can spread widely (Phillips, 2024). Social media platforms have become essential tools for political activism (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023). They have become spaces for addressing social and political issues, forming broader movements, managing protests both online and offline, and shaping narratives that influence political and public issues (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023). Scholars argue that social media provides critical information to make political choices (Chibuwe, 2020; Chibuwe & Ureke, 2016; Mare, 2016, 2018; Mutsvairo & Sirks, 2015; Nyoka & Tembo, 2022).

In December 2024, the Indonesian government proposals to increase the value-added tax (VAT) from 11% to 12% sparked public discourse and widespread mobilization, both online and offline. Public reactions varied from criticism and advocacy to digital protests, reflecting the "no viral no justice" phenomenon, wherein topics garner attention solely if they achieve viral status (Aristyavani et al., 2025). The peak of the demonstrations occurred on December 19, 2024, attended by diverse societal groups, including workers, students, activists, civil organizations, and the K-pop community. K-pop fans, or commonly referred to as "K-poppers" used digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X (previously Twitter)

to plan advocacy events related to public policy and social issues. This demonstrates how K-poppers have transformed into agents of social change through focused and calculated digital initiatives (Leksmono & Maharani, 2022; Mulyana & Wahyuningroem, 2025). During this period, social media served not only as a space for expression but also as a platform for political mobilization.

In Indonesia, digital activism is crucial in driving social and political change, often triggering increased civic activities and political participation, both online and offline (Suwana, 2020). Its potential is an interesting topic to explore in various social movement contexts. A recent example includes public rejection of the value added tax (VAT) increase to 12%, where digital activism helped gather public opinion and organize protests. Social media platforms became the arena for civil society, especially the lower-middle class, to express their opinions using hashtags such as #TolakPPN12Persen and the bluebird symbol. Beyond online platforms, the public also took to the streets on Jalan Merdeka Barat, Jakarta, on December 19, 2024. The protest represented a repudiation of the tax increase, which Indonesian citizens perceived as an undue burden on the populace (Arman & Aziz, 2025). Similar to previous uprisings such as the Arab Spring, mobilization around the VAT problem demonstrates how internet engagement may lead to coordinated offline collective action. Worldwide examples such as #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, Fridays for Future, and #YoSoy132 ("I Am 132") show that internet activism now encompasses a wide range of political settings and issue domains, from identity-based fights to institutional responsibility (Balan & Dumitrica, 2024; Campos & Da Silva, 2024). Rather than implying a clear distinction between Western and non-Western democracies, these examples demonstrate how digital engagement occurs in various political situations, reflecting the distinctive grievances, resources, and civic cultures present in each. Taken together, these examples show that digital participation has evolved into a worldwide method of political activity influenced by various political circumstances, grievances, and civic traditions. This variability reflects not the level of democratic maturity but the many methods by which citizens incorporate digital tools into their argumentative repertoire.

Digital activism facilitates rapid advocacy and increases public participation despite restrictions and fear of censorship. Nyoka and Tembo (2022) highlighted that hashtag activism defines social movements and involves netizens in political-social issues. In today's digital era, activism encourages netizen participation in democratic practices, a political understanding, and awareness of political events (Dennis, 2019; Nyoka & Tembo, 2022). Social media plays an important role in political communication, with digital media emerging as a radical extension of the voices of marginalized communities. Digital activism embodies struggle and resilience capable of driving fundamental change in regimes, as seen in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. C. Moyo (2019) noted that social media has proven effective in facilitating global civil resistance (Moyo, 2019).

As technology reshapes current civic engagement, research on digital activism has expanded. Scholars have not only paid more attention to how digital platforms facilitate mass mobilization but also to the broader motivations, repertoires, and democratic ramifications of online activism (Almadheia et al., 2024; Zakaria, 2023). However, research on digital activism in the Global South encompasses a wide range of sociopolitical situations, some marked by censorship, vibrant youth-driven digital cultures, and infrastructural limits. This variability makes it challenging to capture overarching trends through traditional qualitative reviews. Bibliometric analysis is particularly beneficial in such circumstances because it systematically maps research production, identifies dominant themes, and offers highly variable results between countries, providing an analytical perspective of the subject that is otherwise extremely dispersed (Rachimoellah et al., 2024).

1.1 Research Questions and Objectives

The following research questions were formulated for the study:

RQ1: What is the annual growth of publications on digital political activism from 2000 to August 2025?

RQ2: Which publications are the most cited in the field of digital political activism?

RQ3: Which journals have contributed to the domain of digital political activism?

RQ4: What are the major thematic clusters of digital political activism, and how have they emerged and dissolved over time?

This study presents a comprehensive overview of digital political activism using bibliometric methods, selected for their suitability in mapping scholarly dynamics. The objectives of this study are as follows:

RG1: Identify publication patterns and trends in digital political activism.

RG2: Identify citations over time to assess contributions of previous work.

RG3: Identify productive journals to highlight key contributors.

RG3: Map emerging thematic clusters to understand critical issues in the field.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Democracy and Political Participation

The connection between democracy and political involvement is intricate and dynamic, shaped by historical developments, theoretical perspectives, and current challenges. In democratic regimes, political involvement is essential for enabling citizens to influence governance. Diverse conceptualizations of democracy, including liberal, redistributive, and authoritative models, promote distinct forms of participation. In liberal democracies, engagement in both conventional (e.g., voting) and unconventional (e.g., protests) activities is commonplace, whereas in more authoritarian regimes, political participation is generally more constrained (Cinar & Bulbul, 2022). Historically, political participation has been associated with the legitimacy of democratic institutions. However, in recent decades, there has been a significant decline in both traditional forms of political engagement, such as voting, and trust in political institutions (Parvin, 2018). This trend is alarming, as it jeopardizes the fundamental tenets of democratic administration, resulting in diminished allegiance to political parties and a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction with the political process (Kirbiš & Lubej, 2024). Theoretical frameworks, especially those based on participative, responsive, and deliberative democratic models, underscore the significance of active citizen involvement in sustaining a robust democratic system. Political participation is conventionally regarded as a means to enhance democratic legitimacy and promote accountability, with partisanship serving a vital function in stimulating engagement (Teorell, 2006). New modalities of involvement, including political consumerism and internet activism, are transforming public engagement with democracy, challenging conventional notions of participation and government. These emerging forms, while providing novel opportunities for participation, may simultaneously erode traditional democratic mechanisms and exacerbate disparities in political power (McCaffrie & Akram, 2014). Direct democratic participation, exemplified by referendums, has been shown to bolster democratic legitimacy. Nonetheless, it may also result in “democratic fatigue,” a paradox in which frequent involvement reduces overall interest (Kern & Hooghe, 2018). The connection between democracy and political involvement is influenced by historical transformations and developing theories, with new challenges arising from the decline of conventional participation and the rise of alternative engagement methods. Comprehending this dynamic is essential for sustaining vibrant, inclusive democracies.

2.2 ICTs and Political Participation

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have significantly transformed political participation by improving accessibility, engagement, and the variety of participation techniques (Huda & Amin, 2023). The electronic participatory budgeting (ePB) platform is a notable ICT tool that enhances political decision-making by enabling citizen involvement in multiple stages of the policy cycle, including information dissemination, opinion sharing, and decision-making (Iasulaitis et al., 2019). Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have been pivotal in political campaigns and civic engagement, facilitating political discussions, protest mobilization, and participation in political debates via online forums and blogs (Theocharis et al., 2023). Mobile participation (mPart) tools are also essential, providing mobile Internet access for information retrieval, opinion surveys, and real-time political discourse (Wimmer et al., 2013). Furthermore, e-participation technologies enable citizens to actively participate in political decision-making processes, encompassing platforms that promote online civic engagement and enhance democratic involvement. Online civic discourse and media multiplexity—where individuals engage in political discussions across multiple digital platforms—exhibit a positive correlation with heightened online political participation, suggesting that ICTs enhance civic engagement (Hsieh & Li, 2014).

Digital voting systems further illustrate the capacity of ICTs to expand political engagement beyond conventional voting methods, presenting novel opportunities for international voting procedures. Interactive communication technologies—such as online petitions, content creation tools, and blogs—particularly appeal to younger populations, offering accessible avenues for political and civic engagement (Collin, 2015). These ICT tools collectively enhance political engagement by making it more participatory, accessible, and responsive to citizens' needs. Nonetheless, obstacles such as the digital divide and inequitable access continue to pose substantial impediments to the complete actualization of ICTs in political participation.

2.3 Digital Political Activism

Digital political activism has significantly influenced global political involvement, affecting the way citizens participate in political processes and embracing social change. Through digital technology, including social media platforms, e-participation tools, and mobile technologies, digital activism has enhanced the visibility and political influence of marginalized groups. Nonetheless, its efficacy beyond prominent movements, such as Black Lives Matter, remains limited. A major obstacle for these groups is their dependence on cellphones for internet connectivity, which may impede their capacity to fully participate in digital activism (J. George & Leidner, 2018). Digital activism includes various behaviors such as clicktivism, e-funding, digital petitions, and hacktivism, which are examined from the perspectives of participants,

social movement organizations, and the targeted individuals or institutions (J. J. George & Leidner, 2019). Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have become vital instruments for political discourse, facilitating grassroots movements, especially youth engagement and international movements such as the Arab Spring. These platforms enable activists to coordinate protests, disseminate information, and mobilize citizens around political issues, especially in repressive contexts (Kim & Lim, 2019). The influence of digital activism is often exaggerated, particularly in oppressive political environments where social media's capacity to drive substantial political change is constrained, as evidenced in nations such as Zimbabwe (Chitanana & Mutsvairo, 2019). Notwithstanding these obstacles, the emergence of digital activism has revolutionized the public sphere by introducing novel forms of activism that are amplified and recursive, facilitating a more interconnected and worldwide flow of political ideas (Pecourt Gracia, 2015). Media portrayals frequently depict digital activism as a potent instrument for grassroots empowerment. However, maintaining mobilization and realizing substantive political change remains challenging, as the political rhetoric surrounding these technologies occasionally implies (Balan & Dumitrica, 2024).

Digital platforms, particularly social media, are essential for linking citizens, especially young, through emotional and solidarity networks that enhance collective identities and promote political engagement (Campos & Da Silva, 2024). These platforms have facilitated enhanced access to political communication, empowering individuals to participate in both online and offline political activities. For example, the #YoSoy132 ('I am 132') movement emerged as a student-led protest against political manipulation and media bias during the 2012 presidential election in Mexico (Rocha et al., 2017). Digital activism has demonstrated significant efficacy in mobilizing varied groups, reducing participation barriers, and empowering marginalized communities to achieve visibility and voice, notwithstanding challenges like the digital divide, which impacts individuals lacking reliable technological access (Schradie, 2018). The worldwide influence of digital activism is apparent in its capacity to internationalize activist networks, fostering collaboration across borders and enhancing global civil society (Romero, 2014). Social media's impact on political engagement differs across various political contexts, with nations like Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China demonstrating significant correlations between social media usage and both online and offline political participation (Chen et al., 2016).

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study constitutes a literature review, wherein bibliometric analysis methods were meticulously employed to address the research questions and fulfil the research objectives. It is imperative to emphasize that bibliometric analysis is a quantitative approach utilized to assess and scrutinize scientific literature (Santoso et al., 2024; Santoso & Sajida, 2025). The existing literature shows that the bibliometric analysis method has two main objectives, performance analysis and scientific mapping analysis. Performance analysis aims to evaluate the productivity and impact of research based on quantitative data, including contributions from authors, journals, institutions, and countries (Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). Scientific mapping focuses on identifying conceptual patterns in graphical map visualizations of the relationships between concepts through the co-occurrence of keywords (Muñoz-Leiva et al., 2012). To achieve these objectives, several bibliometric indicators are commonly employed, such as the total number of publications, the most cited documents, co-occurrence networks, and thematic evolution (Hamid & Huda, 2025; Sajida, 2025). These analytical approaches provide a comprehensive understanding of the knowledge structure, research trends, and emerging trends within a specific domain. Additionally, bibliometric analysis offers numerous advantages. For instance, it can identify core themes and research gaps, thereby guiding future research directions (Riaman et al., 2022; Saputro et al., 2023). These benefits are realized through two primary mechanisms. First, bibliometric analysis enhances the understanding of network structures through graphical representations (Solomon, 2015). Second, it facilitates the measurement of scientific productivity and identification of trends within specific research fields (Koo & Lin, 2023).

3.2 Data Collection and Procedure

During the data collection phase, we established a data mining framework by delineating the inclusion and exclusion criteria. We adhered to the Preferential Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to enhance the credibility of the article development process. The PRISMA framework serves as a standard reference in literature review research, guiding the selection and analysis of included publications and ensuring the objective quality of the results (Baidya & Saha, 2024). Initially, we defined the scope of digital political activism from 2000 to August 2025. Subsequently, we selected Scopus as the academic database to mine papers published on this specific topic as it employs a stringent selection process for scientific content, overseen by an independent Content Selection and Advisory Board, which ensures that only high-quality data are indexed (Baas et al., 2020). Finally, we formulated keywords to facilitate the literature search process as follows: ("digital activism" OR "digital participation" OR "political activism") AND ("public sector" OR "government").

During the initial phase of our literature search, we applied the keyword formula within the document search interface

provided by Scopus, which resulted in 634 documents. By applying the "year of publication" filter, spanning 2000 to August 2025, we refined the results to 609 articles. We then implemented inclusion and exclusion criteria by applying a document-type filter that encompassed journals and conference papers, narrowing the selection to 390 items. Further refinement was achieved by restricting the search to publications in English, reducing the number of papers to 363. The most relevant papers were subsequently downloaded in the BibTeX and CSV formats for further analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

A total of 387 bibliometric datasets were successfully retrieved from the Scopus database and subsequently analyzed using various machine learning tools, including the RStudio bibliometric package, VOSviewer, and Microsoft Excel. The RStudio bibliometric package employs Biblioshiny, a web-based application, as a bibliometric data-analysis tool. Biblioshiny offers an intuitive graphical interface that enables users to perform comprehensive bibliometric analyses, without requiring extensive programming expertise. It is a powerful and user-friendly tool that provides extensive analytical capabilities and robust visualization options (Farooq, 2024; Ribeiro et al., 2022). This tool is particularly beneficial for researchers aiming to explore publication trends, assess research performance, and map collaboration networks within their respective fields of study. The analysis techniques employed included sources analysis, citation analysis, conceptual structure and thematic analysis.

VosViewer is a software tool developed for the construction and visualization of bibliometric networks. As highlighted by Li and Wei (2022), VosViewer facilitates the creation of network visualizations, including citations, bibliographic coupling, co-citations, and co-authorship networks. The software is highly regarded by experts and scholars in the fields of scientometrics and domain analysis due to its robust capabilities in processing literature data and its ongoing enhancements. The analytical technique employed was a co-occurrence map.

4. Results

4.1 Annual Scientific Production

The annual scholarly output of digital political activism increased at a rate of 8.67% per year, as illustrated in Figure 1. This trend can be delineated into three distinct growth phases, each reflecting the evolving dynamics of global technological and political developments. The initial phase (2000–2010) was marked by a relatively low and fluctuating number of publications, indicative of the nascent stage of academic interest in this subject. The year 2010 represented a pivotal transition point for Web 2.0 and social media platforms, which profoundly transformed global political activities (Lyons, 2016). The emergence of political movements such as the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, underscored the consolidation of digital media's role within the political sphere (Sandoval-Almazan & Ramon Gil-Garcia, 2014; Yaqub & Silova, 2015). The second phase (2011–2018) exhibited increasing consistency in publications, alongside the strengthening influence of new media technologies, particularly social media, on global political activism. Social media was instrumental in organizing protests and fostering larger ecological movements, leading to the emergence of terms such as "Twitter Revolution" and "slacktivism" (Olcese, 2014). The third phase (2018–present) has been characterized by significant changes with several distinct periods, indicating an intensification of academic discourse. For instance, political momentum in Ethiopia serves as an example, where social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, facilitated the organization of a grassroots political movement that successfully advocated for governmental reform (Woldearegay, 2024).

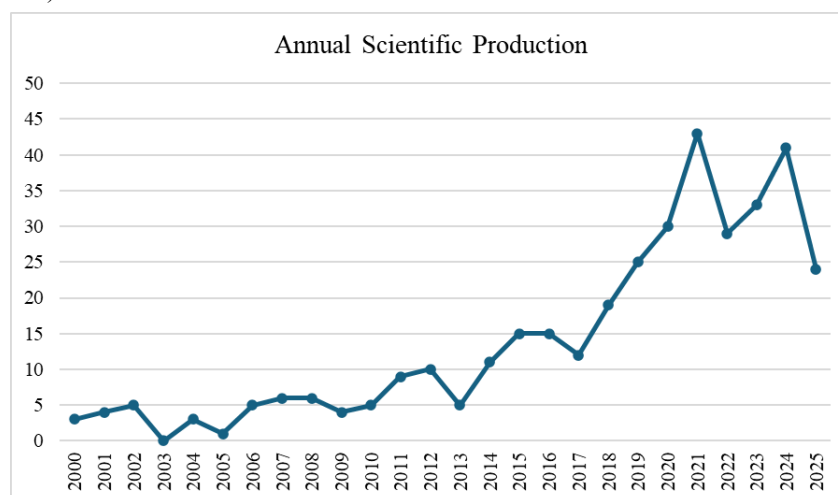


Figure 1. Annual scientific production

4.2 Most Relevant Resources

Research on digital political activism is distributed across various sources, as illustrated in Table 1. It is important to emphasize that digital political activism discusses the advancement of local democracy, civic participation, and social advocacy in the implementation of government governance, which utilizes the technological communication layer (Toumaras, 2025). In the context of political participation, the development of social media—including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram—provides a transformative medium that enables citizens to actively engage in political discussions, advocacy, and campaigns (Maly, 2019; Ofei et al., 2024). Thus, studies on this topic are highly multidisciplinary, discussing important topics, including political communication, political participation, information technology, and public policy.

Table 1. Most relevant sources

Sources	Articles
Lecture Notes in Computer Science	7
ACM International Conference Proceeding Series	6
Government Information Quarterly	5
PLOS ONE	4
Global Public Health	3
Information Communication and Society	3
Information Polity	3
NATURE	3
New Media and Society	3
Proceedings of the European Conference on e-Government, ECEG	3

4.3 Most Cited Documents

Bibliometric analysis serves as a quantitative measure of a study's impact. The positive implications of a study are often determined by its number of citations, as shown in Table 2. For example, Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006) explored the influence of female politicians on young women's interest in political engagement. The distinctiveness of this study led to 388 citations. Similarly, MacKinnon (2008) examined the role of the internet and blog-based platforms in enhancing political activism among Chinese activists. The innovative perspective provided by this study has been referenced in 259 subsequent studies. Pearce and Kendzior (2012) investigated the use of digital media by governments to enforce networked authoritarianism, revealing how governments effectively curtailed social media users from supporting political protests (Pearce & Kendzior, 2012). Despite being published several years ago, these articles offer foundational insights into the evolution of digital political activism research. This underscores the significant contribution of existing literature to subsequent publications, highlighting the substantial academic interest in digital political activism.

Table 2. Most cited documents

Authors	Total Citations	TC per Year	Normalized TC
Schuler et al. (2002)	434	18.08	4.09
Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006)	388	19.40	3.36
MacKinnon (2008)	261	14.50	3.67
Pearce and Kendzior (2012)	158	11.29	5.51
Zavattaro et al. (2015)	153	13.91	4.31
Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia (2014)	152	12.67	3.28
Ortmann (2015)	144	13.09	4.06
Williams et al. (2014)	144	12.00	3.11
Lawless and Fox (2001)	94	3.76	2.44
Ting (2020)	93	15.50	7.48
Yuan et al. (2023)	84	28.00	12.60

4.4 Co-Occurrence Analysis

Co-occurrence analysis elucidates the structure of scientific knowledge and constructs scientific maps, as illustrated in Figure 2. In a keyword co-occurrence map, the size of each circle reflects the frequency of keyword occurrence within a given concept. Specifically, a larger circle denotes a higher frequency of vocabulary in that domain. In the analysis of keyword co-occurrence maps, nodes symbolize concepts, whereas lines represent their interconnections. The proximity of keywords to a node indicates a greater degree of relationship among concepts. Moreover, the thickness and brevity of the lines signify the strength of the relationships between words.

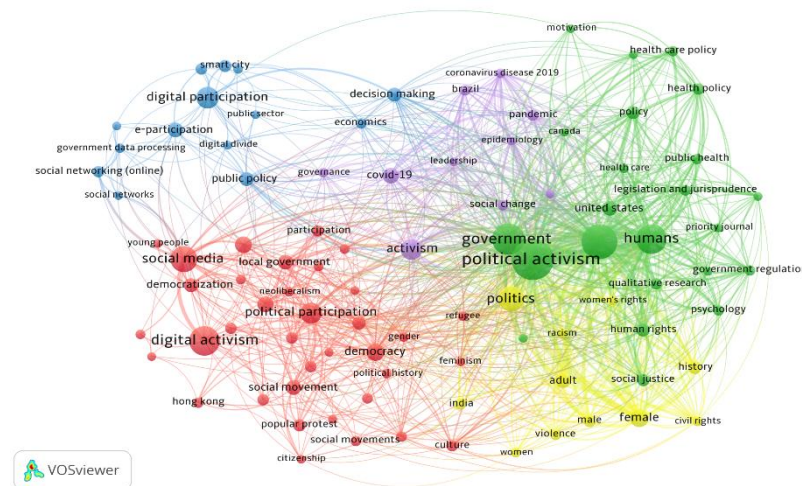


Figure 2. Co-occurrence analysis

The blue cluster highlights the governance of digital participation. During this period, researchers concentrated on the institutional delivery of protests and mass mobilization. This focus facilitated the emergence of digital governance as a pivotal concept in defining governance that is mediated by digital platforms. Digital platforms function as both technical and organizational tools (Neto & Chiarini, 2021), producing and disseminating news that enhances political participation (Zhang & Pérez-Tornero, 2022). These mechanisms enable citizens to engage with the government, fostering "open governance", wherein the rules, processes, and delivery of protests become more transparent.

The red cluster focuses on the role of social media in digital political activism. This phase marked a steady rise in publications, driven by the pivotal influence of social media in facilitating uprisings and democratization initiatives, exemplified by the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street. The associations between the red cluster and the blue and green/yellow clusters underscore the crucial function of social media as a conduit, linking digital governance to broader issues of democracy, rights, and social justice.

The third cluster is characterized by intensification and diversification, evident in the expansion of the green and yellow clusters. These clusters stressed the identity politics in digital political activism. Identity serves as a marker that differentiates one group from another, influencing how communities articulate opinions, express collective identity, and mass mobilization (Ansar & Maitra, 2024). Identity politics facilitates groups to amplify their voices, form new digital alliances, and build solidarity across networks. Consequently, identity-based political activity has emerged as a crucial determinant of social dynamics in digital spaces. This development confirms that formal political participation has evolved into a broader struggle for recognition, equality and group rights.

Finally, the purple cluster underscores civic engagement during crises. The covid-19 pandemic has necessitated the rapid adaptation of governmental decision-making processes (Shaw et al., 2020). This global crisis catalyzed the development of a novel governance model characterized by increased flexibility, openness, and reliance on data. Gao and Yu (2020) highlight three critical stages of public governance in the context of health emergency management: using ICT to establish more transparent information mechanisms, emergency preparedness for informed decision-making, and the implementation of effective and controlled governance.

4.5 Thematic Evolution

Thematic evolution seeks to systematically identify and map the conceptual structure of a field of knowledge, tracking the thematic evolution of keyword changes for each theme over time (Figure 3). Phase 1 was characterized by fundamental themes such as activism, civil society, nationalism, e-democracy, and politics, emphasizing the exploration of conceptualizations of democracy and civil society. During this phase, research focused on normative and theoretical approaches, highlighting digital space as a novel arena for political participation and social advocacy. In the Phase 2 period, the research focus shifted to empirical analysis, including political activism, social media, e-participation, and participation, instead of only impacting the theoretical approach of digital democracy, as in Phase 1. This transition signifies a paradigm shift, indicating that social media serves as a bridge between political activism networks and citizen participation (Sobré-Denton, 2016; Valenzuela et al., 2016). Consequently, this phase emphasizes the role of social media for political mobilization, public issue advocacy, and strengthening participatory democracy. As research advances, the thematic convergence of the discourse on e-participation and social media culminates in the phenomenon of digital activism in Phase Three. This progression demonstrates the maturation of this field in comprehending how digital tools and platforms are employed for advocacy, political mobilization and social change.

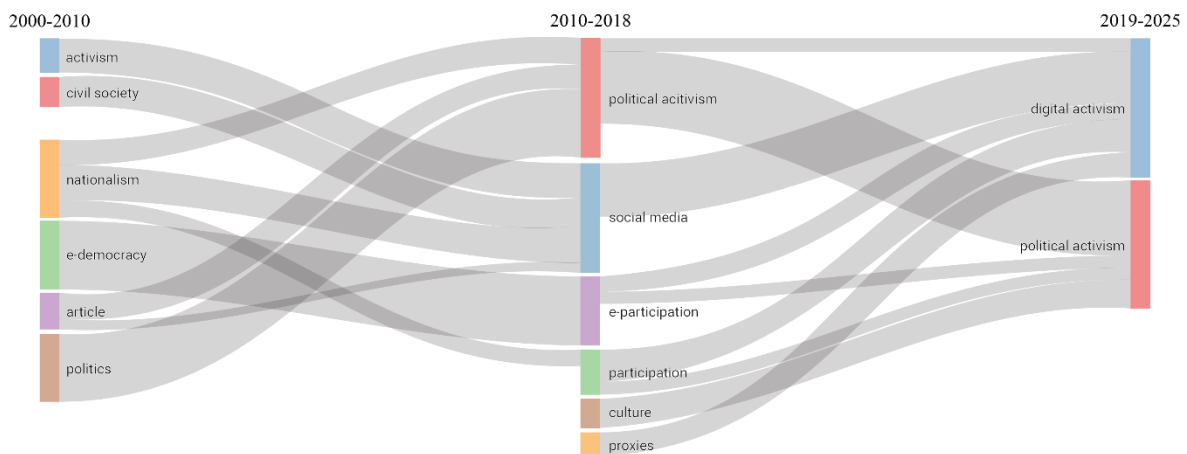


Figure 3. Thematic evolution

5. Discussion

The bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview and intellectual structure of digital political activism by identifying the most influential authors and sources, mapping the annual scientific production, visualizing co-occurrence networks, showing the distribution of research hotspot areas, and tracing thematic evolution from 2000 to August 2025. Publications in this area have grown steadily, as shown in Figure 1. Academic attention to the relationship between ICT, social media, and mass mobilization has intensified, driven by efforts to reshape political participation and public discourse through technological developments (Aligwe & Nwafor, 2016). Social media platforms have become essential tools for increasing citizen participation, disseminating information, shaping public discourse, and mobilizing action (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023). Online citizen participation, often referred to as slacktivism, constitutes a form of community engagement that is facilitated through social media platforms (Mulyono et al., 2022). While frequently characterized as symbolic participation, slacktivism serves a significant function as an entry point to enhance political and social consciousness within the digital realm. Moreover, social media offers a venue for marginalized groups that may be underrepresented in traditional public forums to articulate their perspectives and interests. For instance, social media enables these groups to contribute to public discourse and construct alternative narratives that challenge prevailing social and political paradigms (Asimakopoulous et al., 2025). Open access to social media has been highlighted as an opportunity for citizens to shape narratives and influence political discourse (Hodzi & Zihnioğlu, 2024). These platforms also provide information to support political decision-making (Chibuwe, 2020; Chibuwe & Ureke, 2016; Mare, 2018; Nyoka & Tembo, 2022).

Initially, scholars focused on the potential of ICTs to strengthen democratic governance and citizen participation (Rattanaseevee et al., 2024). Early research emphasized how digital tools could enhance transparency, enabling citizens to monitor government activities and hold leaders accountable. Over time, attention shifted toward understanding the nuances of “collective action”, where individual narratives drive engagement, often through emotionally charged content and “politainment” (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023). While seemingly neutral, social media algorithms can harbor bias, exacerbating political polarization and creating unequal visibility (Claud, 2024). The spread of misinformation, political polarization, and the rise of “clicktivism” (fake engagement) have increasingly become central concerns in recent research (Jovanovic & Stankovic, 2024). Furthermore, existing literature remains limited in explaining how social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are used for political activities (Newnham & Bell, 2012). These gaps continue to encourage scholars to produce new scientific insights, contributing to the growth of the field. These contributions have helped the field grow aggressively and form new thematic areas, as reflected in the co-occurrence analysis, as shown in Figure 2. The field has undergone critical developments, divided into three distinct time periods, as shown in Figure 3.

Despite its promise, research in this area faces challenges related to the limited structure of intellectual exchange, fragmented understanding, and lack of cohesion. Scholars often pursue individual trajectories, resulting in isolated publications and a non-convergent knowledge structure. While leading scholars have characterized digital political activism as a new and promising research topic, “there is still no clear and consistent understanding of this concept.” Future research is urgently needed to redefine and re-conceptualize digital political activism.

6. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights by offering a comprehensive overview and intellectual structure of the field of

digital political activism. Analysis techniques—including source analysis, citation analysis, authorship analysis, thematic analysis, and co-occurrence maps—successfully addressed the research questions and achieved the objectives of this study. The findings can serve as foundational data for future research, especially for scholars interested in digital political activism. Additionally, greater attention to contextual analysis is recommended. The practical implications extend to policymakers, who must ensure more responsive approaches to managing citizens' opinions, voices, and protests on social media.

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Authors contributions

RWS was responsible for the conceptualisation, writing the original draft, writing the review and editing, supervision, funding acquisition, and formal analysis. MNH was responsible for writing the original draft, writing the review and editing, methodology, visualisation, data curation, and formal analysis. CS was responsible for writing the original draft, writing the review and editing, formal analysis, and project administration. AS was responsible for writing the original draft and project administration. All the authors have read and approved the final manuscript. In this paragraph, the authors also explain any special agreements concerning authorship, such as if authors contributed equally to the study.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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