AI-Powered[1] Entertainment-Oriented Activism: The Emerging Form of Political Participation in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

Digital activism is increasingly shaped by the convergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and entertainment media, yet existing theories of political participation remain inadequate to explain these emerging dynamics. This study proposes an AI-Powered Entertainment-Oriented Activism (AEA) framework, which reconceptualises digital activism across four interrelated dimensions: 1) AI Algorithmic Environment; 2) Networked Resource Mobilisation and Micro-Influencers; 3) Cultural Performance and Algorithmic Aesthetics; 4) Transnational Solidarity and Decentralisations. Given Indonesia's youthful demographics, vibrant protest culture, and expansive social media ecosystem, this study employs Indonesia as a case study, drawing primarily on literature analysis of academic sources, media archives, and digital traces. Empirical evidence from Indonesia validates the AEA framework, revealing how actors navigate algorithmic governance, leverage AI tools for communications, and transform political dissent into culturally resonant and entertaining forms. These findings also expose structural inequalities in digital visibility, the prevalence of symbolic participation, and ethical challenges surrounding algorithmic manipulation and AI-Powered content. By theorising these dynamics, the research advances discussions within digital activism, social policy, and development studies, demonstrating that AI and entertainment are not peripheral elements in contemporary Southeast Asian political participation patterns but are progressively becoming core components. Consequently, the AEA framework offers conceptual and theoretical contributions for analysing how algorithmic infrastructures and affective cultures jointly reshape activism in Global South nations.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Digital activism, Algorithmic, Political participation, Southeast Asia

Introduction

Digital political participation encompasses the use of information and communication technologies (ICT), social media and other digital tools to engage in political and civic life (Khasnabis et al., 2010). In a literature review commissioned by the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership, Șerban and Lüküslü (2024) describe "digital participation" or "e-participation" as an online form of participation that "involves the use of ICT, social media and other digital tools to enable young people

[1] In this article, "AI-Powered" refers to the combined effect of AI algorithmic mechanisms embedded in short video platforms (e.g., recommendation, visibility, and content curation) and AI creative technologies (AI-generated or AI-enhanced). When these two dimensions operate in tandem, they shape both the production and circulation of political content.

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to influence and engage with political and civic life". This form of participation expands beyond accessing political information online to include expressive activities such as sharing political content, organising campaigns, signing petitions, joining online forums, and even participating in digital governance through e-voting platforms (Uhlaner, 2015). Digital participation is rooted in a broader conception of political participation. Venus et al. (2025) define political participation as "any activity that shapes, affects, or involves the political sphere". van Deth's (2021) typology of political participation emphasises four features—activity, voluntariness, citizenship role and the political nature of the aim—and distinguishes between conventional activities (e.g., voting, party membership), unconventional/alternative activities (protests, strikes, petitions) and individualised activities (consumption choices reflecting ethical or political values). Digital participation intersects with all three categories: social media users use digital tools to follow conventional processes such as online voter registration; to engage in unconventional protests through hashtags, memes and online petitions; and to make individualised expressions of political identity through social media posts or consumer activism.

The contemporary discussion of digital political participation is grounded in the broader history of activism. Anderson and Herr (2007), in the *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*, define activism as "activism is characterised as a form of civic engagement that goes beyond conventional or routine politics". Brian Martin (2007) also highlights that activism ranges from door-to-door canvassing, rallies and protests to forms such as fasting or boycotts, and that activists are typically challengers seeking social goals rather than personal power. The term thus encompasses a wide repertoire—both non-violent and confrontational—aimed at social change. As digital technologies have evolved, the repertoire has expanded to include digital activism and online protests, where tactics such as virtual sit-ins, hacktivism, email campaigns and social-media mobilisation become integral parts of activist strategies (Fenton, 2016; Kırık et al., 2021).

In detail, digital activism can be understood as organised, collective action that employs digital media and online platforms to make claims on a target authority (Gerbaudo, 2012; Poell & Van Dijck, 2018). For example, practitioners also define a digital activism campaign as "an organised public effort making collective claims on a target authority in which civic initiators or their supporters use digital media (Edwards et al., 2013)." From this perspective, digital activism is inherently collective, aims to shape political outcomes, and relies on digital media as the central infrastructure (Earl et al., 2022).

Literature Review

Understanding how digital activism, AI, and entertainment-driven platforms reshape activism requires revisiting classic theories of social movements and situating them in today's digital and AI contexts. Resource mobilisation, political process, and new social movement theories were developed before the rise of AI; they emphasise, respectively, the importance of mobilising tangible resources (McCarthy & Zald, 1973), seizing political opportunities, and constructing collective identities through cultural expression (Flynn, 2021). Cyber-activism theory, by contrast, highlights the networked, individualised nature of online participation. Furthermore, AI-driven digital activism has evolved into an entertainment-centred mode of political expression in which algorithmic curation, affective humour and meme culture produce fleeting, playful and often incidental forms of participation that existing theories and affective publics cannot fully explain. To grapple with AI-driven "entertainmentization" in digital activism, one must weave together these lenses, acknowledging their complementarities and their limitations.

1. Revisiting Core Theories of Activism

Resource mobilisation theory emerged in the 1970s as a response to earlier theories that viewed social movements as irrational outbursts. It argues that protest emerges when groups mobilise resources—money, labour, skills, and media access—through formal organisations (Olson, 1971; Verba et al., 1993). McCarthy and Zald's (1973) influential work treats movement organisations as social enterprises that must constantly secure contributions, recruit members and manage their infrastructure. The theory recognises that grievances are ubiquitous; what differentiates successful movements is access to resources and the ability to mobilise them efficiently (McCarthy & Zald, 1973).

Although resource mobilisation remains foundational, it was shaped in an era of industrial media and hierarchical organisations. It tends to privilege formal networks over loosely linked communities and sees resources as exogenous and tangible. The rise of social media platforms complicates this picture. In today's attention economy, visibility, algorithmic ranking and memetic creativity function as critical resources. Young activists often operate outside formal organisations, mobilising digital labour through hashtags, dance challenges or AI-generated videos. In other words, in the AI era, those resources include not only traditional funds and members but also visibility and cultural capital.

New social movement theory complements this by emphasising how shared identities and cultural narratives constitute a resource in their own right (Flynn, 2021). New social movement theory emerged in Europe in the 1980s to explain movements around post-material values—peace, feminism, environmentalism—among new middle classes. The scholars emphasise identity, symbolic expression and cultural meaning over material grievances, noting that contemporary movements are often horizontally organised, loosely structured and oriented toward lifestyle and cultural change (Buechler, 2015). These movements use media to construct collective identities and to fight for recognition (Flynn, 2021). This theory presciently recognises the importance of culture and identity in mobilisation. Yet, the theory was developed before the rise of AI technologies and algorithmic culture. It takes for granted the capacity of movements to produce and disseminate meanings, without analysing how platform recommendation algorithms or AI-Powered entertainment content filter and reshape cultural expressions. Moreover, new social movement theory assumes participants voluntarily choose identities; contemporary AI systems often *assign* identities through predictive profiling and micro-targeting, which can both empower and constrain activism.

On the other hand, political process theory centres on the idea that social movements are shaped by political opportunity structures—openings within the institutional political system, shifts in elite alignments or state repression (McCarthy & Zald, 1973; 1977). This is a commentary on "movement" from the top-down dimension. Movement success depends on strategic timing: movements take off when political opportunities expand and recede when authorities close space for dissent. Scholars such as Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam highlight how movement entrepreneurs must read changing contexts and employ framing strategies to seize opportunities. In the AI era, however, it needs to consider that political opportunities are increasingly mediated by platform policies, recommendation algorithms and content moderation rules. For instance, a movement's visibility may depend less on electoral cycles than on whether an algorithm surfaces its content. Political process theory remains useful for highlighting the structural environment, but it needs to broaden its conception of opportunity to include algorithmic governance and digital repression (Oancea, 2024; Hong et al., 2025). States can now close political space through subtle algorithmic interventions, shadow bans, targeted surveillance or the amplification of counter-frames that are not easily captured by conventional measures of openness (Ünver, 2024).

2. Digital Activism: From organisational structures to individual networks

Resource mobilisation and political process theories were developed in an era of formal organisations and hierarchical leadership. Cyber-activism shifts the focus toward networked individuals and leaderless movements (Wihbey, 2013). With the proliferation of the Internet, scholars have argued that digital tools enable "individualised collective action." Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2012) suggest that activism has shifted from identity-based membership organisations to networked individuals who coordinate via digital media. Digital tools allow people to organise "without organisations," lowering barriers to participation and enabling dynamic, often leaderless campaigns (Herasimenka, 2019).

Furthermore, online networks, highlighted by cyber-activism theory, provide the infrastructure for mobilising these resources efficiently, enabling activists to garner attention and support with minimal material investment (Wihbey, 2013). Social media lowers the cost of broadcasting, allows immediate feedback and fosters low-threshold participation (Hall et al., 2020). Academia also underscores the significance of these digital activities. It notes that digital platforms provide new spaces for youth to express political aspirations and organise activities, but also stresses that the phenomenon is often dismissed as "slacktivism" because of its low cost and perceived superficiality (Halimatusa'diyah, 2024). Scholars also find that many young people who engage in online activism also participate in offline protests and community organising, suggesting a reciprocal relationship between online and offline activism (Ibid, 2024). The study thus challenges the notion that meme-driven activism is inherently shallow; rather, digital campaigns may serve as gateways to sustained engagement. While scholarship foregrounds the role of digital networks, it underplays the role of AI as both content generator and circulation driver. Algorithmic mediation compresses exposure timelines and produces unpredictable cycles of surge, decay, and resurgence, challenging stable models of network diffusion.

3. The increasing role of AI technology in digital activism

Lastly, contemporary digital activism is increasingly shaped by AI technologies. First is the AI algorithm in online networks, which curates content, recommends posts and personalises user feeds (Maina, 2025; Taha & Abdallah, 2025). Online networks' algorithm is notable for its sophisticated recommendation system that matches diverse user interests, enabling content to go viral even when posted by accounts with few followers (Koç, 2023). The platform's algorithm does not rely on follower count or prior performance but instead uses user behaviour data to determine which videos appear on the "recommendation" page. This design lowers barriers to entry for activists and fosters unpredictable virality, encouraging creative experimentation and playful messaging. However, the algorithm's "black-box" nature and its addictive qualities raise concerns. A review observes that short video platforms (SVPs) advanced algorithm intensifies user engagement and personalisation, making it more addictive than other social media platforms; its opaqueness means that users experience content through personalised feeds that shape self-perception and behaviour (Ionescu & Licu, 2023). Scholars note that algorithmic curation can suppress content related to marginalised identities or controversial topics, creating "algorithmic privilege" and "algorithmic representational harm (Ibid, 2023)." As a result, while algorithms enable activists to reach broad audiences, they also risk reinforcing biases and limiting visibility for certain groups.

Not only the algorithm, but also the latest iteration of AI technology and the absence of a robust regulatory framework for AI-based content, have created new opportunities and conditions for informal political participation among netizens. AI-Powered political entertainment content has consequently flourished on the region's online media platforms. It is worth noting that there is no fully consensus

definition of AI-Powered in existing research. Akter et al. (2023) argue that AI-Powered which refers to the use of artificial intelligence as a core driver in content creation, decision-making, and automation. Analyst Keenan (2024) holds a similar opinion, suggesting that AI-Powered refers to a technological tool for which AI serves as the driving force. Kumar et al. (2024) believe that AI-Powered technologies facilitate real-time content adaptation and audience-targeted messaging, restructuring communication strategies through algorithmically optimised content delivery. Software company Microblink (2023), for its part, considers AI-Powered to be technology or systems that incorporate AI capabilities to perform tasks or make decisions that would normally require human intelligence. By utilising advanced algorithms and machine learning techniques, AI-Powered systems can analyse massive amounts of data, recognise patterns and adapt their behaviour to continuously improve performance. Currently, furthermore, social media content creators are leveraging AI-generated or AI-enhanced technologies to produce virtual cute avatars, humorous memes, and parody videos. Their objectives range from self-amusement and audience mobilisation to shaping political narratives or even reshaping the images of political actors. Audiences' engagement with this AI-Powered political entertainment often originates from entertainment-oriented motivations rather than political agendas. With AI technology, online social media users can now engage through shorter-form, more entertainment-oriented content, thereby empowering digital political participation in the region once again. Combining the above information and the research object of this paper, this study chooses to define AI-Powered from the technical level, which as a technology incorporating AI-based functions, can not only provide driving force in user content creation, but also play an important role in the process of content dissemination through algorithmic optimisation.

A particularly striking case study is the protests that erupted in Indonesia in August 2025, sparked by lawmakers' votes to increase allowances and cut public spending. Protesters used SVPs to livestream clashes and organise. Alarmed by viral footage, the government summoned representatives of SVPs and other platforms and demanded tighter moderation (Swanston et al., 2025). SVPs then suspended the app's live-streaming feature across Indonesia (Reuters, 2025). Surprisingly, this did not completely curtail Indonesians' digital political participation, as they continued to use AI technologies on SVP to create entertaining renditions of photos, people, and events representative of the protests. This example, along with the current state of AI-Powered content creation on SVPs in Southeast Asia, indicates that while opaque, AI censorship policies and platform governance can hinder civic mobilisation, AI-Powered algorithms and technologies can also empower civic political participation in alternative ways.

4. The Entertainmentization of Politics in Digital Activism

Finally, although the academic community has taken note of the entanglement between entertainment and digital activism, systematic discussions are still inadequate. The dissemination of AI-Powered political entertainment content is not always for clear appeals, and the connection action model is insufficient to explain "incidental political effects" and "entertainment-oriented" Responding to the critical feature, AI-driven digital activism is often entertainment-driven, utilising memes, humour and popular culture to communicate political messages.

Firstly, affective and cultural studies recognise the centrality of humour, parody, and symbolic expression. For example, affective publics, performative activism, and memetics (Papacharissi, 2015; Thimsen, 2022; Chagas, 2023). These remain vital, yet AI intensifies its effect by engineering emotional cues and by blurring the line between entertainment and political expression; this is not something that

can be explained by raw emotional dynamics. As a result, participation often manifests as ephemeral, playful interaction rather than sustained commitment, complicating definitions of activism itself.

Other research indicates that content creators highlight how the SVP algorithm and virality logic encourage creators to blend entertainment with voice discontent and coordinate actions (Sinpeng, 2021; Lertchoosakul, 2023). The SVP's algorithm does not prioritise follower count but instead recommends content based on user interests, allowing lesser-known creators to reach broad audiences. This mechanism has enabled minority and marginalised groups to articulate political messages through seemingly light-hearted videos—an illustration of how platform design shapes the micro-politics of visibility (El Sayed & Notait, 2024). Scholars describe SVP as a "third space" where users negotiate identities and challenge mainstream stereotypes while facing both empowerment and harassment. The platform's emphasis on virality fosters playful activism, whereby satire, dance and memes become vehicles for resistance (Ibid, 2024).

Research gaps and theoretical Problems

Existing studies treat digital activism largely as a continuation of conventional protest, emphasising mobilisation and networked public spheres but giving little attention to how AI technologies and entertainment culture are reshaping collective action. Young activists now express dissent through memes, dance challenges and game-like interactions. While some scholars dismiss these practices as mere "slacktivism," others show that playful online engagement can lead to offline participation (Halimatusa' diyah, 2024), even though meme activism may encourage virtue signalling or oversimplify complex politics (Moskowitz, 2021). This debate exposes a theoretical gap: existing models rarely consider the temporal dynamics of entertainment-oriented activism—whether it builds sustained engagement or evaporates once a trend subsides. In the present context, where AI technologies are closely integrated with political content creation in SVP, this warrants even more attention.

A second lacuna concerns algorithmic governance. Platform algorithms filter what users see, curate identities and may inadvertently suppress dissent or amplify particular political actors. Yet dominant activism theories, which focus on collective identities and resource mobilisation, seldom integrate these technological mediators (Earl et al., 2022). Finally, the local context remains underexplored despite high digital penetration and recent mass protests. Local cultural norms and political structures shape how online and offline activism intersect, but comparative analyses are scarce. Region-specific research that integrates cultural, technological and political factors is therefore needed to understand the distinctive dynamics of AI- and entertainment-oriented activism.

Based on the above review, three interrelated problems emerge, which motivate this paper's theoretical exploration:

(1) Temporal extension: Does entertainment weaken or sustain political participation?
(2) AI-Powered political entertainment: What's the new logic of digital political participation?
(3) Contextual specificities: Does local entertainment-oriented activism carry particular significance?

Research Questions

To address the problems outlined above, this article poses two interrelated research questions:

1. How do AI and entertainment mechanisms reshape the political participation of netizens?
2. Are existing theoretical frameworks sufficient to explain the political participation within the context of AI and entertainment mechanisms, or is there a need for a new framework?

Research Objectives

1. To investigate how AI algorithms and entertainment-oriented formats influence the political participation of Southeast Asian netizens, identity formation and mobilisation.
2. To assess whether concepts like resource mobilisation, political opportunity structures and collective identity formation can account for algorithmic governance and entertainment logics.
3. To explore a theoretical model that integrates the temporal rhythms of viral content, the role of AI in curating political messages and the cultural specificities.

Hypothesis

Building on the problem statement, this study posits that the convergence of AI and entertainment logics on SVPs has reconfigured the temporal, affective, and organisational foundations of digital activism. Accordingly, three interrelated hypotheses are proposed to guide the analysis and to ground the development of the AI-Powered Entertainment-Oriented Activism (AEA) framework.

First, digital platforms embedding AI algorithms, such as short-video platforms, are hypothesised to foster micro-level, expressive, and affective political acts that heighten visibility and awareness but seldom consolidate into durable collective mobilisation. While digital participation often coexists with offline protests, its sustainability and transformative potential remain temporally compressed and uncertain.

Second, existing theories of activism, emphasising resources, identity formation, and political opportunities, are insufficient to account for the algorithmic mediation and viral dissemination cycles distinctive to AI-Powered political content. These theoretical limitations justify the need for a new analytical model that integrates algorithmic governance, creative agency, and entertainment-based affective triggers. The proposed AEA framework thus seeks to address this gap by reconceptualising digital activism as an emergent assemblage of generative AI, platform algorithms, and cultural performance.

Finally, it is hypothesised that political regime type and cultural norms mediate these dynamics. In Southeast Asian contexts, AI-Powered entertainment content often functions as covert or symbolic dissent; in more open democratic settings, it tends to extend deliberation and public debate. Hence, the meaning, form, and efficacy of entertainment-oriented activism are expected to vary across socio-political environments.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative design combining documentary analysis, inductive model building, and reflexive verification. The methodological approach aims to develop and substantiate a theoretical framework: AI-Powered Entertainment-Oriented Activism (AEA), through systematic synthesis of existing knowledge and empirical illustration using Indonesian cases.

1. Documentary Analysis

This methodology involved an extensive documentary analysis, which integrated peer-reviewed academic literature, media reports, policy statements, and relevant digital materials. Documents were filtered through a three-step process:

1) Relevance requires a direct focus on political participation, activism, or digital mobilisation.
2) Authenticity, ensuring that sources originated from verifiable institutions or widely recognised news agencies.
3) Credibility, which involved cross-referencing claims and tracing citations.

Given the diversity of materials, the study employed a directed thematic approach rather than a strict content-coding protocol. The themes were derived from the research questions and organised around core analytical categories: actors, discourse, strategies, technological mediation and outcomes. Analysis proceeded through iterative reading, memo writing and pattern identification instead of line-by-line coding, consistent with interpretive qualitative synthesis. To strengthen transparency and analytic coherence, emerging interpretations were repeatedly reviewed, compared and refined across multiple rounds of reading and discussion.

2. Theoretical Model Building

This research also focused on inductive theory construction. Building on the documentary analysis, this study also adopts a regional lens (Southeast Asia) to compare and synthesise the "divergences" and "convergences" between theory and empirical reality. The regional perspective is essential because regional dynamics form the structural foundation of individual national environments. This step ensures that the proposed theoretical framework attains a degree of "universal" and can be meaningfully reapplied across regional studies. On this basis, through constructive theoretical interpretation and empirical reality check, the study develops a theoretical framework (AEA).

3. Reflexive Verification and Case Selection

To assess whether the AEA framework extends beyond conceptual speculation, this study employs a reflexive verification approach and applies Indonesia as an empirical case. Reflexivity requires researchers to maintain critical self-awareness regarding their positionality, biases and interpretive influence throughout the analytical process. Accordingly, the AEA framework is treated as a form of contextualised knowledge—one that is subject to empirical testing, refinement and iterative adjustment through practical application.

4. Reasons for Selecting the Case

Digital activism has flourished across the globe, but Southeast Asia provides a particularly vibrant context for studying its forms and impacts. The region is home to one of the world's largest youth populations, and young people spend extraordinary amounts of time online. Relevant data indicate that youths aged 16–24 in Southeast Asia spend around 7 more hours per day on the internet, with nearly 99.6 % of them actively using social networks (Halimatusa'diyah, 2024). On average, a young person in the region uses 7.4 different social media platforms each month, with maritime Southeast Asian states' (Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines) youths using around 8 platforms and those in Thailand and Indonesia using 7.5 and 7, respectively (Ibid, 2024).

Among them, Indonesia presents an especially compelling case for examining AI-Powered, entertainment-oriented activism in Southeast Asia. First, the country has witnessed a series of large-scale demonstrations between 2019 and 2025, where digital media played a decisive role in connecting online mobilisation with offline protests. Social media users were not passive observers but active participants, revealing how AI-Powered platforms link digital expression to street-level action.

Second, Indonesia's social, political, and cultural diversity makes it ideal for testing the AEA framework's adaptability across contexts. As the region's largest democracy, with complex governance structures and deep youth engagement, Indonesia embodies the tensions between state regulation and participatory innovation.

Third, Indonesia provides abundant and accessible data. The availability of open-source media coverage and visible digital traces, including hashtags, user-generated videos, and algorithmically mediated content, supports a rigorous and replicable document-based analysis.

Finally, the demographic profile of Indonesia reinforces its analytical importance. With one of the world's largest youth populations and high digital penetration, Indonesian youth have become central actors in hybrid online–offline activism, making the country an essential site for understanding how AI-Powered entertainment logics reshape participatory behaviour.

5. Ethical Statement

For ethical and practical considerations, this study refrains from disclosing specific names of social media platforms, political figures, and organisations mentioned in collected materials. The decision to anonymise such information aligns with standard qualitative research ethics, ensuring respect for the privacy, safety, and reputational integrity of all actors mentioned.

6. Methodological Limitations

As a theory-oriented and exploratory study, this research prioritises conceptual innovation over exhaustive empirical verification. The reliance on publicly available documents limits access to activists' lived experiences and evolving practices. Accordingly, interpretations are bounded by discursive visibility rather than direct observation. While reflexive verification enhances theoretical robustness, it cannot substitute for longitudinal or ethnographic immersion. Future studies may extend this model through mixed-method approaches, such as digital ethnography, computational social network analysis, or survey-based validation, to further test and refine the AEA framework.

Proposing an AI-Powered Entertainment-Oriented Activism Framework in the Southeast Asian Context

In Southeast Asia, AI functions both as a tool of governance and a stage for civic engagement. Governments deploy high-resolution surveillance and algorithmic information management to constrain public space and shape narratives. Meanwhile, digitally savvy netizens harness the same platforms for resistance, turning entertainment communities into vehicles for political expression. By mastering AI technologies and algorithmic preferences, these activists and SVP users transform entertainment networks into transnational communities that challenge the top-down control. This section unpacks the interplay between bottom-up and top-down dynamics, highlighting how entertainment, identity and solidarity coexist in an AI-Powered entertainment-oriented activism framework.

1. The Top-Down Algorithmic Governance

AI technologies are now integral to the way public and civic life is governed across Southeast Asia. High-resolution cameras, predictive policing software, risk-scoring tools and AI-Powered content moderation are used by some governments in the region for infrastructure management and security (Cina et al., 2025). Some of the Southeast Asian governments have coupled these technological tools with legislative frameworks to discipline digital spaces. The criticism opined that algorithmic governance decentralises authority into technical infrastructures; it reduces the discretionary power of human officials by embedding action-scripts into software so that authority is increasingly embedded in "underlying code," steering citizens' behaviours through opaque and unaccountable systems (Peeters & Schuilenburg, 2023).

For example, a comparative study of four Southeast Asian governments documents how they politicise vague definitions of "fake news" to justify digital repression (Sombatpoonsiri & Luong, 2022). The study identified four tactics—prosecution of internet users, coercion of service providers to remove content, expanded social media monitoring, and full internet shutdowns—which are deployed under the

pretext of combating disinformation (Ibid, 2022). By locking down fake news, authorities can criminalise dissent and legitimise algorithmic surveillance, creating a governance climate in which both law and machine manage public space (Vese, 2022). In this case, scholars pointed out that recent elections illustrate how such strategies are expanded through AI. Scholars reported that "buzzers"—bots, celebrity influencers and cyber-troopers—are now an organised industry that political actors employ to amplify themselves and undermine opponents through hate speech, historical revisionism and parody accounts (Tan & McIlvaney, 2025). These AI-driven tactics illustrate how top-down algorithmic governance is not only about surveillance but also about shaping public narratives through data and artificial media.

2. The Bottom-Up AI-Powered Resistance with Entertainment

Against this backdrop of algocratic repression, Southeast Asian activists increasingly mobilise bottom-up, culturally embedded strategies that appropriate the very infrastructures used to regulate them. Since the mid-2000s, the spread of smartphones and platformised communication has enabled digitally native youth to navigate restrictions by shifting platforms, exploiting trending functions, and leveraging the affordances of networked publics (Lim, 2023; Sastramidjaja, 2020). This adaptability reflects a broader pattern of algorithmic literacy, in which activists learn how recommendation systems, visibility metrics and remix cultures can be tactically repurposed to amplify dissent while minimising exposure to surveillance.

However, Southeast Asia's distinctiveness lies in the fusion of entertainment culture and political expression. Young citizens mobilise not merely through rational debate or formal protest, but frequently through humour, parody, aesthetic play, and fan-created content. Within this environment, entertainment is not the antithesis of politics, but a medium through which politics manifests. As Sastramidjaja (2020) observes, for digitally native youth, the digital sphere constitutes a space where identity, culture, and citizenship are simultaneously enacted. Fan culture epitomises this dynamic. Research on K-pop fan activism in Indonesia and Thailand (Andini & Akhni, 2021) demonstrates how fan culture equips young people with digital competencies, such as collaborative livestreaming, aesthetic creation, and cross-platform mobilisation, which naturally translate into political collective action. The emotional bonds, participatory ethos, and transnational networks of fandom culture enable political messages to circulate under the guise of entertainment, rendering interventions less confrontational yet resonant on a broad scale (Barnes, 2022). This phenomenon, often termed fan activism, blurs the boundaries between fiction and politics, allowing communities to transform symbolic worlds into pathways for civic participation.

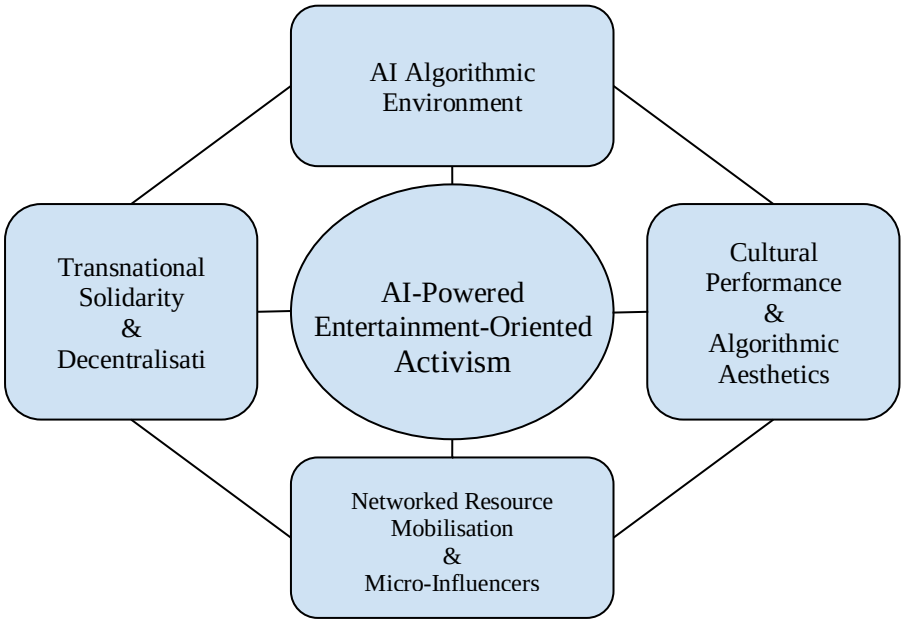
Across the region, similar dynamics shape how youth appropriate global cultural symbols. Entertainment creations, whether drawn from anime, gaming, local humour or pop aesthetics, are recontextualised as vehicles for critique, hope or solidarity. Their remixability renders them particularly suited to AI-Powered environments: generative tools enable users to rapidly stylise, exaggerate or repurpose symbols, while recommendation algorithms reward visually distinctive or emotionally resonant content. These symbols cease to be isolated protest markers, instead becoming algorithm-friendly carriers of dissent capable of crossing linguistic and national boundaries through AI-Powered viral dissemination. Crucially, entertainment-oriented activism also exploits the ambiguity inherent in cultural symbols. Humorous, playful, or fictional content often circumvents automated censorship systems more readily than explicit political statements, allowing critique to flow beneath the surface currents of platform governance frameworks. The result is a low-risk, high-visibility form of resistance where, even when offline mobilisation is constrained, emotion, humour, and shared cultural references sustain community-building.

In short, Southeast Asia's bottom-up, AI-Powered resistance movements are characterised not only by activists' ability to evade suppression, but also by their creative transformation of entertainment culture into political infrastructure. These practices demonstrate that AI-Powered activism in the region cannot be understood solely through the lens of repression and empowerment; instead, we must focus on the cultural, emotional, and symbolic resources mobilised by Southeast Asian youth in confronting increasingly algorithmic power structures.

3. Toward an AI-Powered Entertainment-Oriented Activism Framework

The characteristics outlined above, top-down algorithmic governance and bottom-up algorithmic resistance, and the entertainmentised forms of political expression, suggest that AI-Powered activism in Southeast Asia cannot be fully explained by classical theories such as resource mobilisation or political opportunity. While these theories emphasise organisational resources, framing and opportunities, AI-Powered activism introduces new dynamics: the role of algorithms in shaping visibility, the blending of cultural and political domains, and the transnational nature of digital networks. Building on the literature review of existing theories, which highlights personalised, networked mobilisation in digital environments, and on algocracy studies that examine the bureaucratic logic of algorithmic systems, this research proposes a new theoretical framework: AI-Powered Entertainment-Oriented Activism (AEA).

Figure 4.1 AI-Powered Entertainment-Oriented Activism Framework



Source: Drawn by the authors.

The AEA framework consists of four interconnected components:

1. AI Algorithmic Environment (Governance–Resistance Dialectic). Activism now operates within a *double algorithmic logic*: platforms and governments use AI to surveil, moderate, recommend and shape public discourse, while activists strategically engage with these algorithms, through trending hashtags, AI-generated content and cross-platform mobility, to maximise visibility and circumvent

repression. Understanding activism requires analysing how algorithmic governance structures opportunities and constraints, and how activists exploit algorithmic features to their advantage.

2. Networked Resource Mobilisation and Micro-Influencers. Traditional activism relies on formal organisations; AI-Powered entertainment-oriented activism depends on fluid, decentralised networks of micro-influencers, fan communities and viral creators. Activists leverage AI tools (e.g., machine translation, generative art, data analytics) to produce and disseminate content, often without central coordination. Meanwhile, cultural networks provide resources, affective bonds and digital literacy that translate into political participation.

3. Cultural Performance and Algorithmic Aesthetics. AI-Powered entertainment-oriented activism is deeply cultural; memes, humour and entertainment serve as frames that align with local values and circumvent censorship. Borrowing from performance theory, the framework emphasises that activists choreograph actions for algorithmic optimisation—livestreaming protests, using AI-generated art, and remixing popular culture to engage audiences. This resonates with Sastramidjaja's (2020) observation that digital youths see the digital sphere as a mode of identity performance and with fanactivism's fusion of fiction and politics.

4. Transnational Solidarity and Decentralisation in Identity Construction. AI-Powered entertainment-oriented activism fosters transnational solidarity by linking communities through shared entertainment cultures and identity formation. In Southeast Asia, digitally-savvy netizens see the digital sphere as a stage for performing citizenship; protests become spectacles populated by memes, pop songs and film gestures. The adoption of an anime pirate flag as a symbol of resistance in Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines shows how global pop culture provides a shared language of liberation. Rallying around such symbols, especially youth, builds transnational solidarity through mutual recognition and collective emotion. AI tools, from translation algorithms to recommendation systems, amplify these connections, allowing micro-influencers to cross linguistic and national boundaries and shape new identities without formal organisations.

Collectively, these four components form an integrated framework for understanding how AI-Powered entertainment-oriented activism redefines participation in contemporary Southeast Asia. While the framework provides a theoretical lens to conceptualise the hybrid logics of algorithmic governance, creative resistance, and entertainment-infused participation, its explanatory validity must be examined against real-world evidence. The next section, therefore, applies the AI-Powered Entertainment-Oriented Activism framework to empirical cases from Indonesia, using them as reflexive verification to assess how far these theoretical dimensions manifest in practice and interact in context.

Reflexive Verification: Assessing AEA through the Indonesian Cases

This section undertakes a reflexive verification of the AEA framework through empirical evidence from Indonesia. Rather than restating its conceptual premises, the focus here is to determine whether and how the dynamics proposed by the AEA—AI algorithmic governance and resistance, resource mobilisation, cultural performance and algorithmic aesthetics, as well as transnational solidarity and decentralisation—are reflected in Indonesia's recent experiences of digital activism. As the largest democracy and one of the most digitally connected societies in Southeast Asia, Indonesia offers a compelling terrain for testing the framework's analytical capacity. As illustrated in Figure 1, the AEA framework consists of four interrelated dimensions—*AI Algorithmic Environment, Networked Resource Mobilisation & Micro-Influencers, Cultural Performance & Algorithmic Aesthetics,* and *Transnational Solidarity & Decentralisation*. The following subsections examine each pillar in turn, drawing on documentary and media evidence from Indonesia to evaluate how these mechanisms manifest empirically.

1. AI Algorithmic Governance and Resistance

(1) State-Sponsored Algorithmic Governance

Yatun Sastramidjaja and Wijayanto's (2022) work records an increase in organised digital campaigns in Indonesia since 2019. These campaigns use networks of "buzzers" and automated bots that amplify government-aligned messages while limiting the visibility of opposing views. A report from *Inside Indonesia* describes these so-called cyber troops as loosely coordinated groups of paid influencers and bots that help shape trending topics and can target critics (Wijayanto & Berenschot, 2021). The report further indicated that during debates over reforms to the Corruption Eradication Commission and the passage of the Omnibus Law on Job Creation, such networks boosted pro-government narratives and presented protesters as disorderly. It shows a case that Communication for the "New Normal" COVID-19 policies was also outsourced to these networks, leading them to emphasise economic recovery and public reassurance (Ibid, 2021). Observer warns that these digital manipulations of propaganda and suppression of dissent may shape information flows, discourage dissent and reduce the space for open debate (Margiansyah, 2025).

(2) Algorithmic Resistance

Despite disparities in resources, people in Indonesia have used social media algorithms to develop online activist activities. Jalli's (2025) research notes that activists across Southeast Asia engage in "trend-jacking" and meme creation to leverage the recommendation systems of popular short video platforms. She points out that a particular hashtag opposing a job creation law became a focal point on Indonesian social media, and content opposing the law reached millions, reflecting concerns over labour rights and environmental protection. In addition, digital activism has facilitated coordination of offline mobilisation, contributing to the maintenance of democratic norms (Pratama et al., 2025). Furthermore, reporting from Indonesian media describes how critics employed social media tags to challenge official narratives, while organised online campaigns responded with negative messaging, including slander, 'trolling' and 'doxxing' (Sastramidjaja et al., 2021). These observations illustrate a dynamic in which institutional actors and activists employ similar algorithmic strategies, making digital platforms a space for contestation. This emphasis on managing information flows differs from traditional activism theories that focus primarily on structural opportunities and resource mobilisation.

These cases collectively confirm the *AI Algorithmic Environment* dimension of the AEA framework (Figure 1), illustrating that algorithmic governance and resistance form a dialectical dynamic in which both state and civic actors use platform recommendation systems to shape public discourse.

2. Decentralised Resource Mobilisation Through Micro-Influencers

A core element of the AEA framework is that resource mobilisation in AI-Powered activism arises not from large organisations but from decentralised individuals. Evidence from Indonesia is consistent with this observation.

During a presidential election, an SVP became an important medium for political messaging. An academic work notes that the platform's algorithm highlights content based on engagement rather than follower count, which enables ordinary users to gain significant visibility (Jalli et al., 2025). According to Jalli et al. (2025), one leading presidential campaign leveraged this environment by incorporating AI tools into its outreach. These AI tools allowed both supporters and opponents to produce memes, parody videos and customised images aligned with campaign themes, resulting in millions of unique pieces of content within weeks (Pinatih et al., 2024). Well-known entertainers also

lent their online profiles to the campaign, illustrating how established public figures can further extend reach. Despite these celebrity endorsements, much of the momentum originated from everyday users who remixed and shared content, demonstrating how peer-to-peer activism feeds the recommendation system. Separate digital protests against a labour law and a youth-oriented movement expressing political and economic grievances likewise relied on dispersed digital influencers (Pranata & Riyanta, 2025). Sastramidjaja et al. (2021) have also noted that organised online networks have enlisted influencers to shape public narratives.

Collectively, these examples suggest that digital activism in Indonesia functions through a wide base of individual contributors, supporting AEA's second pillar. In contrast to traditional activism that depends on organisational capacity, AI-Powered activism is grounded in networked individuals whose combined efforts influence algorithmic visibility.

3. Algorithmic Aesthetics and The Cultural Performance of Activism

Section III noted that AI-Powered entertainment-oriented activism often relies on algorithmic aesthetics—memes, popular music, filters and AI-generated visuals—that align with platform recommendation systems and resonate culturally. Examples from Indonesia illustrate this trend.

Kułaga's (2024) work report on a widely used SVP explains that its algorithm promotes emotionally engaging and visually rich content, which tends to reward playful, meme-like posts over substantive discussions. During the most recent presidential election in Indonesia, one candidate's campaign sought to soften his image through viral videos depicting light-hearted activities such as dancing and interacting with pets, encouraging viewers to perceive him as more relatable (Sihombing, 2024). This prompted supporters of presidential candidates to use AI tools to create personalised avatars and memes, enhancing engagement. The same AI-created content could also be used by opponents, for example, during an offline protest in February 2025, where thousands of students gathered around Jakarta's National Monument Park, they held posters featuring reimagined AI versions of a politician's image to voice their opposition (Lau & Nugroho, 2025). Jalli et al. (2025) caution that this emphasis on entertainment can dilute complex issues by simplifying political discourse into shareable fragments and creating echo chambers. Engagement often occurs through liking, sharing or commenting, rather than through deeper deliberation (Ibid, 2025).

By foregrounding style, humour and imitation, algorithmic aesthetics integrate activism into pop-culture practices. This aligns with AEA's third pillar, suggesting that activism becomes a cultural performance shaped by AI technologies and platform design. Traditional theories that prioritise rational debate and collective identity may not fully account for this performative aspect. The Indonesian case indicates that algorithmic aesthetics can expand participation yet reduce depth: AI-generated memes and viral dances draw a wider range of participants but risk turning activism into digital entertainment.

4. Transnational Solidarity and Entertainment Cultures

Reports on transnational solidarity in Southeast Asia show that protest movements sometimes draw on symbols from popular media rather than local politics. One example concerns the adoption of a pirate flag from a widely known Japanese comic series. Journalistic accounts explain that, ahead of a national holiday, Indonesians displayed this emblem alongside official flags as a way of expressing dissatisfaction with government policies (Guzman, 2025). The symbol had originally been used by truck drivers protesting transportation reforms; it then spread through social networks and became a wider sign of discontent. A sociologist interviewed by a major news outlet notes that the flag's appeal lies in its low barrier to participation and its ability to resonate across age and class boundaries, giving marginalised groups a sense of community (Renaldi & Salim, 2025). Observers suggest that themes of

the series—centred on resistance against oppression and inequality—also encourage supporters to draw parallels between comics and real-world grievances (Guzman, 2025).

Coverage by international media indicates that the symbol was not limited to Indonesia; similar flags have appeared at demonstrations in other countries, from Kathmandu to European capitals (The Week, 2025). Commentators view this as part of a broader trend in which younger activists adopt characters and motifs from entertainment to create what one article calls a "reshaping the cultural vocabulary of dissent" (Ibid, 2025). The Indonesian case illustrates how such symbols can become powerful protest tools precisely because they are culturally ambiguous, making them harder for authorities to suppress. Beyond symbols, research by Andini and Akhni (2021) found that popular culture such as K-pop fan culture also influences youth participation in Southeast Asia. K-pop culture in Indonesia and Thailand has fostered transnational solidarity and political action among youth, providing them with the digital skills needed to engage in action on real-life issues in the era of media convergence.

These examples fit with the AEA framework's fourth element, which posits that transnational solidarity builds on shared entertainment cultures rather than formal organisations. This stems not only from the "information density" enabled by AI algorithmic mechanisms, but also from its "emotional density." Whether activists adopting pirate flags from Japanese manga as protest symbols or Indonesian K-pop fans engaging in digital solidarity actions with international fans, these movements leverage the emotional drive of global fan communities. By disseminating content through algorithmically curated platforms, they strengthen cross-border connections. Emotional resonance and entertainment value have become catalysts for contemporary digital activism in Southeast Asia, transcending rational persuasion and audience mobilisation. Political issues are repackaged as entertainment content, employing humour, satire, and sensory appeal to spark sharing and action among netizens across Southeast Asia and globally. This blurs the boundaries between audiences and activists across different nations and regions. Southeast Asian citizens resynthesize, share, or interact with AI-Powered political content—practices collectively forming a fragmented yet highly contagious form of political participation that tangentially elevates digital political participation among Southeast Asian citizens. These cases demonstrate that AI-Powered entertainment-oriented activism can operate transnationally within cultural spaces where the boundaries between fans or cultural audiences and dissidents are blurred, creating an inclusive rather than confrontational avenue for expressing discontent.

Conclusion

This study proposes an AI-Powered entertainment-oriented activism (AEA) framework to elucidate how artificial intelligence, entertainment culture, and digital participation converge to reshape digital activism in Southeast Asia. Using Indonesia as a case study, it addresses two core issues: whether existing theories adequately account for this transformation, and how AI technologies and entertainment mechanisms specifically influence digital activism. Empirical analysis confirms that AEA's four interrelated pillars, AI algorithmic governance and resistance, decentralised resource mobilisation through micro-influencers, culturally performative expressions shaped by algorithmic aesthetics, and transnational solidarity grounded in entertainment culture, collectively capture the evolving dynamics of political participation within an AI-Powered environment.

Evidence from Indonesia corroborates each component of this framework. The duality of state-led algorithmic control and citizen algorithmic resistance validates AEA's first dimension, revealing activism as an adaptive negotiation within the digital infrastructure of power. The rise of micro-influencers demonstrates that agency in the AI era is decentralised, peer-driven, and algorithmically

sustained, thereby reconfiguring resource mobilisation beyond formal organisational frameworks. The performative aesthetics manifested through humour, parody, and AI-created visuals underscore a trend towards increasingly emotionalised and expressive participation, transforming dissent into an algorithmic game. Finally, transnational fan communities and pop-cultural resources demonstrate how entertainment-oriented activism transcends borders, generating shared protest affective symbols.

The findings substantiate the research hypothesis, confirming that AI-Powered activism constitutes not a straightforward extension of earlier digital engagement models, but rather an innovative mobilisation paradigm. It emerges from algorithmic feedback loops rather than structural opportunities, from emotional resonance rather than ideological cohesion, and from participatory creativity rather than institutional coordination. These dynamics necessitate a shift from rationalist models of collective action towards an understanding of activism that is affective, performative, and technologically mediated.

Concurrently, the Indonesian case reveals structural and ethical limitations of AEA. Algorithmic hierarchies exacerbate inequalities in visibility and influence, while entertainment-oriented participation risks devolving into symbolic or fragmentary expression. Reliance on AI-Powered content introduces novel forms of opacity, bias, and manipulation, necessitating dual critical reflection on the political economy of digital infrastructure and digital activism. These limitations suggest that AI-Powered entertainment-oriented activism should be situated within broader discourses on digital capitalism, platform governance, and the affective public sphere.

By elucidating how AI reshapes the logics of mobilisation, affect, and communication, this study advances academic discourse in social policy and development in three respects. First, it reconceptualises activism as a socio-technical phenomenon where agents are constrained by algorithmic design and entertainment functions. Second, it demonstrates that in semi-authoritarian regimes like Indonesia, AI-Powered entertainment content can function both as a vehicle for dissent and a mechanism of control—highlighting the policy implications of digital governance and digital literacy. Third, it constructs a theoretical integration model linking media studies, political sociology, and development studies, providing a framework for analysing emerging forms of participation in the Global South.

In summary, the AEA framework offers a timely and illuminating perspective for understanding the transformation of digital activism under conditions of AI algorithmic mediation and cultural convergence. Future research may extend this work through comparative analyses of Southeast Asian contexts, quantitative examinations of algorithmic trends, and deeper explorations of how AI-Powered content interacts with governance, identity formation, and civic agency within evolving media ecosystems.

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