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Constructing Digital Collectivity through Symbolic Participation: The Brave Pink and Hero Green Movement Following Indonesia's 2025 Labor Protests

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ABSTRACT: The rise of visual symbols on social media has transformed how individuals express solidarity and participate in digitally mediated movements. This study examines how the Brave Pink and Hero Green symbols that emerged following Indonesia's 2025 labor protests contributed to the construction of digital collectivity. Using a qualitative case study and netnographic approach, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with active social media users, a digital visual creator, a media scholar, and a journalist-activist, complemented by observations of symbolic participation on Instagram and X. The findings indicate that the symbols functioned as accessible entry points to digital activism through profile-picture changes, reposts, and other forms of visual circulation. Repeated exposure and reproduction enabled users to recognize shared concerns and develop a sense of affiliation without requiring formal organizational membership. The study further shows that visual symbols operated as a common communicative language through which individualized participation became collectively visible. However, symbolic participation did not necessarily develop into sustained activism, as engagement remained influenced by media momentum and public attention. This study contributes to digital activism scholarship by conceptualizing visual symbolic participation as a mechanism through which digital collectivity can emerge through shared recognition, affiliation, and networked participation without formal organizational structures.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital communication has fundamentally transformed how collective action emerges, develops, and spreads within contemporary societies. Unlike conventional social movements that depend on formal organizations, hierarchical leadership, and face-to-face mobilization, digitally networked movements increasingly rely on decentralized communication, personalized participation, and user-generated content distributed through social media platforms. The rapid expansion of platforms such as Instagram, X, and TikTok has enabled individuals not only to consume information but also to participate actively in constructing collective narratives, circulating political messages, and expressing solidarity through visual and symbolic practices. As a result, participation in contemporary social movements has become increasingly embedded within everyday digital communication.

The transformation of collective participation has shifted scholarly attention from organizational structures toward communicative practices that facilitate collective engagement. Previous studies have demonstrated that social media functions as an infrastructure for digital activism by enabling rapid information dissemination, hashtag campaigns, and online mobilization [1,2]. Research on connective action argues that digital technologies allow individuals to participate in collective action without relying on centralized organizations because participation is driven by personalized expressions that are easily shared through digital networks, a pattern also documented in decentralized mobilizations such as the Saudi women's right-to-drive campaign

and Myanmar's Spring Revolution [3,4]. Similarly, studies of affective publics emphasize that emotions expressed through digital communication contribute to the formation of collective engagement around social and political issues [5,6].

Within this broader transformation, visual communication has become increasingly significant. Images, illustrations, profile pictures, colors, and digital symbols are now frequently used to communicate political positions, express solidarity, and signal group affiliation. Compared with textual communication, visual symbols can rapidly circulate across multiple platforms, transcend linguistic barriers, and encourage widespread participation through imitation and reproduction. Comparable dynamics have been documented elsewhere, from the display of the Ukraine flag emoji as a low-cost marker of identity activism [7] to the circulation of protest imagery as a form of counter-visuality under authoritarian surveillance [8]. Consequently, symbolic participation has emerged as an important yet underexplored dimension of digital collective action.

This phenomenon became particularly visible following Indonesia's labor protests on 28 August 2025. After demonstrations occurred across several industrial regions, social media platforms were rapidly filled with visual expressions of solidarity. Thousands of users changed their profile pictures, reposted digital illustrations, applied visual filters, and shared solidarity posters incorporating two dominant symbols known as Brave Pink and Hero Green. According to the phenomenon described in this study, Brave Pink referred to the image of a woman standing before security forces while carrying the Indonesian flag, whereas Hero Green represented the green jacket associated with Affan Kurniawan, an online motorcycle taxi driver who died during the demonstrations. These symbols spread organically through users' participation rather than through formal organizational campaigns, gradually becoming recognizable markers of solidarity within digital spaces, consistent with earlier Indonesian cases in which digital activism emerged from decentralized, issue-driven online participation rather than institutional coordination [9,10].

Although the diffusion of these symbols attracted widespread public participation, existing scholarship has primarily examined digital activism through the perspectives of hashtag activism, online mobilization, political participation, and networked communication. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding how visual symbols themselves function as communicative mechanisms for constructing digital collectivity. Existing studies frequently interpret digital symbols as representational artifacts or communication tools, while their capacity to produce social affiliation, collective belonging, and shared identity remains insufficiently explored. Consequently, important questions remain regarding how symbolic participation transforms individual acts of expression into collective social practices within digitally networked environments.

This study addresses this gap by examining the emergence and circulation of the Brave Pink and Hero Green symbols following Indonesia's 2025 labor protests. Rather than treating these symbols merely as visual representations, this research conceptualizes them as communicative resources through which users negotiate solidarity, construct collective identities, and sustain digital participation across social media platforms. Drawing upon Social Identity Theory and Connective Action Theory, the study explains how repeated symbolic practices contribute to the development of digital collectivity beyond conventional forms of organizational mobilization. The integration of these theoretical perspectives enables a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between symbolic communication, identity formation, and digitally mediated collective action.

The novelty of this research lies in three aspects. First, it shifts the analytical focus from hashtag-based activism toward visual symbolic participation as a central mechanism of collective action. Second, it extends discussions of digital activism by introducing digital collectivity as an analytical lens through which symbolic communication can be understood as a process of constructing collective belonging rather than merely expressing individual opinions. Third, this study integrates Social Identity Theory and Connective Action Theory to explain how symbolic participation simultaneously strengthens individual identification with a movement while facilitating decentralized participation within social media environments.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research question: how do the Brave Pink and Hero Green symbols function as mechanisms for constructing digital collectivity following Indonesia's 2025 labor protests? By addressing this question, the study contributes to communication scholarship by expanding current understandings of symbolic participation, digital activism, and collective identity in networked societies. Furthermore, the findings are expected to enrich discussions on how visual communication operates as an organizing mechanism within contemporary digital social movements.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Social Identity and Collective Belonging in Digital Spaces

Collective participation in digital environments cannot be understood solely through individual motivations; it also involves the construction of shared identities that connect individuals to broader communities. Social Identity Theory argues that individuals define themselves not only through personal characteristics but also through their membership in social groups [11,12]. Identification with a group creates a sense of belonging that shapes attitudes, emotional attachment, and collective behavior. Rather than emerging from formal organizational membership, collective identity in digital environments is increasingly constructed through communicative practices that repeatedly signal affiliation among participants, a pattern confirmed across multiple digitally mediated protests by a recent meta-analysis of social identification and collective action participation [13].

In social media contexts, symbolic expressions such as profile pictures, visual icons, hashtags, and digital narratives have become important resources for communicating collective identity. These symbols enable users to publicly position themselves within particular social causes while simultaneously recognizing others who share similar values. Quantitative work on self-defining hashtags similarly shows that collective identities can be measured as they emerge from overlapping, self-applied symbolic labels rather than from formal group rosters [14], while research on social identity leadership demonstrates that the way a movement's symbols and messages are framed on social media shapes whether users come to see themselves as part of a shared protestor identity [15]. Consequently, collective identity is not simply represented through symbols; rather, it is continuously negotiated through the repeated circulation, interpretation, and reproduction of symbolic content across digital platforms. This perspective provides an analytical foundation for understanding how the Brave Pink and Hero Green symbols may function as communicative markers through which users construct a shared sense of belonging following Indonesia's 2025 labor protests.

2.2 Connective Action and Personalized Digital Participation

The emergence of social media has transformed collective action from organization-centered mobilization into network-based participation. Bennett and Segerberg's [1] concept of connective action explains that digital participation increasingly occurs through personalized forms of engagement rather than through centralized organizations or formal membership. Individuals contribute to collective movements by adapting messages, sharing visual content, reposting information, or expressing personal experiences that can easily circulate within digital networks.

Unlike traditional collective action, connective action emphasizes flexible participation in which digital platforms themselves facilitate coordination among dispersed individuals. Comparative cases illustrate how this logic operates across different political contexts: in Egypt, interactive socialization on social media has been shown to translate into offline collective action at the individual level [16]; in Saudi Arabia, decentralized personalized sharing sustained the right-to-drive movement in the absence of formal leadership [3]; and in Myanmar, connective and collective logics operated simultaneously during the Spring Revolution [4]. Visual symbols become particularly significant within this process because they provide simple yet powerful communicative resources that users can personalize while maintaining collective meaning. The widespread circulation of Brave Pink and Hero Green illustrates how personalized symbolic participation may generate collective visibility without requiring institutional leadership. Accordingly, connective action offers an appropriate framework for explaining how decentralized participation contributes to the emergence of digital collectivity.

2.3 Symbolic Participation as Digital Communication

Digital participation increasingly extends beyond textual interaction to include visual communication practices that express identity, solidarity, and political positioning. Images, illustrations, profile picture frames, colors, and visual icons have become integral components of political communication on social media because they communicate shared meanings rapidly across diverse audiences. Rather than functioning merely as aesthetic representations, digital symbols often operate as communicative resources that organize collective engagement by encouraging imitation, recognition, and emotional resonance. Penney's [17] study of the Facebook red equal-sign profile-picture campaign remains a foundational reference here, showing that changing a profile picture functions as a genuine, identity-building form of symbolic action rather than merely low-cost "slacktivism."

Symbolic participation therefore represents an important dimension of contemporary digital communication. Through repeated visual reproduction, symbols become recognizable markers of affiliation that enable individuals to participate in collective causes without direct organizational involvement, in the same way that displaying the Ukraine flag emoji became a portable,

low-barrier marker of identity activism during the 2022 Russian invasion [7]. In this study, Brave Pink and Hero Green are conceptualized not simply as visual artifacts but as symbolic communication practices through which solidarity is expressed, interpreted, and collectively reproduced within digitally networked environments. Examining symbolic participation in this way allows the study to move beyond discussions of hashtag activism toward a broader understanding of how visual communication contributes to collective action.

2.4 Digital Collectivity: Integrating Identity, Symbols, and Networked Participation

Digital collectivity refers to the emergence of collective belonging through ongoing communication, symbolic interaction, and networked participation within digital environments. Rather than viewing collective action as the outcome of organizational structures alone, this perspective recognizes that repeated symbolic practices, emotional engagement, and interpersonal interaction collectively produce shared meanings among dispersed individuals. Digital collectivity therefore emphasizes process rather than structure, highlighting how participation is continuously constructed through communication.

Drawing together the preceding theoretical perspectives, this study conceptualizes digital collectivity as the outcome of interactions between symbolic participation, social identity, and connective action. Social Identity Theory explains why individuals develop a sense of collective belonging, while Connective Action explains how decentralized participation spreads through digital networks. Symbolic participation functions as the communicative mechanism linking these processes by transforming visual symbols into shared markers of affiliation and solidarity. Accordingly, this framework enables the present study to examine how the Brave Pink and Hero Green symbols function not only as representations of solidarity but also as communicative mechanisms through which digital collectivity is constructed following Indonesia's 2025 labor protests.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study within a constructivist paradigm to examine how digital collectivity was constructed through symbolic participation following Indonesia's 2025 labor protests. A qualitative approach was selected because the research sought to understand how individuals interpreted, experienced, and assigned meaning to the Brave Pink and Hero Green symbols rather than to measure the frequency or magnitude of online participation. Since digital collectivity is socially constructed through communication and interaction, qualitative inquiry provided the flexibility required to capture participants' interpretations, motivations, and shared meanings within their natural digital environments.

The research adopted a case study design [18] because the Brave Pink and Hero Green phenomenon represents a distinctive socio-digital event situated within a specific political and cultural context. Rather than investigating digital activism in general, this study focused on understanding how a particular symbolic movement emerged, evolved, and generated collective identification following the 2025 labor protests. The case study approach therefore enabled an in-depth exploration of the interaction between visual communication, symbolic participation, and collective identity within a bounded contemporary case.

3.2 Research Context and Participants

The study focused on symbolic participation occurring on Instagram and X, two platforms that played central roles in disseminating the Brave Pink and Hero Green symbols after the labor protests. These platforms were selected because they facilitated rapid circulation of visual content, public interaction, and user-generated communication through reposts, profile images, visual posters, and discussion threads. Their algorithmic features also encouraged the widespread visibility and reproduction of symbolic content, making them particularly suitable for examining the formation of digital collectivity.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that each informant possessed direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation. The study involved four active social media users who had uploaded, shared, adopted, or interacted with the Brave Pink and Hero Green symbols during the post-protest period, complemented by a digital visual creator/designer, a media scholar, and a journalist-activist who each offered a distinct vantage point on the phenomenon. Rather than seeking statistical representation, participant selection was guided by information richness, allowing the research to capture diverse experiences, motivations, and interpretations regarding symbolic participation. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, indicated by recurring patterns and no substantial emergence of new analytical insights.

3.3 Data Collection

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of symbolic participation, this study combined semi-structured interviews with digital observation using a netnographic approach [19]. Semi-structured interviews [20] enabled participants to describe their motivations, emotional engagement, and interpretations regarding the use of Brave Pink and Hero Green while allowing flexibility to explore issues that emerged during the conversation.

Netnography complemented interview data by observing naturally occurring communication practices on Instagram and X. Rather than relying solely on participants' retrospective accounts, digital observation documented how symbols were circulated, reproduced, and interpreted within everyday online interactions. Observational materials included profile picture changes, visual posters, digital illustrations, captions, reposts, hashtags, and public interactions that reflected symbolic participation across the two platforms. The integration of interviews and netnographic observation enabled methodological triangulation, strengthening the credibility of the findings.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis in conjunction with the interactive analytical process proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña [21]. The analysis began with repeated reading of interview transcripts and observational materials to achieve familiarity with the dataset. Initial codes were then generated to identify recurring patterns related to symbolic participation, collective identity, solidarity, emotional engagement, and digital communication practices.

The coded data were subsequently organized into broader analytical themes that captured the underlying processes through which digital collectivity was constructed. Throughout the analysis, themes were continuously refined by comparing interview narratives with observational evidence obtained through netnography. The final themes were interpreted through the analytical lenses of Social Identity Theory and Connective Action Theory, allowing empirical findings to be connected with broader theoretical discussions concerning digital participation and collective identity.

3.5 Trustworthiness

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through methodological triangulation by integrating interview data, digital observation, and documentary evidence. Dependability was supported through systematic documentation of data collection and analytical decisions, enabling transparency throughout the research process. Confirmability was achieved by grounding interpretations in empirical evidence rather than researcher assumptions, while maintaining an audit trail of coding, theme development, and analytical reflection [22,23]. These strategies enhanced the overall trustworthiness of the study and increased confidence in the interpretation of digital collectivity as an emergent communicative process..

4. RESULTS

4.1 Symbolic Participation as an Accessible Entry Point to Digital Activism

The findings indicate that the Brave Pink and Hero Green symbols provided an accessible entry point for individuals who wished to express solidarity with the post-protest movement without necessarily participating in offline demonstrations. Participants described practices such as changing profile pictures, reposting visual content, and using hashtags as relatively simple forms of participation that could be incorporated into everyday social media activity. For N1, symbolic participation offered an accessible alternative for individuals who might not have the opportunity or capacity to participate directly in physical demonstrations.

This finding suggests that participation in digital activism does not necessarily begin with high-intensity political action. Instead, it can begin with low-barrier communicative practices through which individuals make their position publicly visible. The use of a profile picture or the redistribution of an illustration requires relatively little organizational coordination, yet it allows users to signal that they recognize and support an issue, operating as an initial form of engagement that connects personal expression with a broader network of public communication.

The accessibility of these practices was also reflected in participants' understanding of why visual symbols spread rapidly. Rather than requiring users to produce original political content, existing symbols could be reproduced and adapted by individuals according to their own social media practices. The content creator/designer similarly emphasized that visual participation could encourage users to identify with a message and voluntarily adopt the symbol.

Therefore, the significance of Brave Pink and Hero Green lies not only in what the symbols represented, but also in their ability to lower the threshold of participation. The symbols enabled individuals to transform a personal social media action into a visible expression of solidarity, creating an initial connection between individual expression and collective communication.

4.2 From Symbolic Recognition to Collective Affiliation

The second finding concerns the relationship between symbolic participation and collective affiliation. The interviews indicate that users did not necessarily perceive themselves as members of a formal movement or organization. Instead, the symbols allowed them to recognize others who shared similar concerns. N1 described a sense of belonging to people who were concerned about the same issue, while another netizen account emphasized that using the symbol did not necessarily mean becoming a member of a particular group. Rather, it represented a shared concern.

This distinction is important for understanding digital collectivity. The findings do not indicate that symbolic participation automatically creates formal group membership. Instead, collectivity emerged through recognition and shared identification. Users could recognize the presence of others through the same visual markers without knowing them personally or belonging to the same organization.

From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, this suggests that collective identification in digital spaces can develop through symbolic markers of shared concern rather than through formal membership. The symbol functions as a visible cue through which individuals identify others as sharing a particular position or concern. The collective therefore becomes recognizable through communication practices rather than institutional boundaries.

The finding also indicates that digital collectivity is relatively fluid. Participants could simultaneously maintain their individual identities while expressing affiliation with a broader social concern. Thus, symbolic participation did not require individuals to abandon personal expression in favor of a unified organizational identity. Instead, it allowed individual users to publicly position themselves within a loosely connected collective.

4.3 Visual Symbols as a Common Language of Digital Solidarity

A third pattern emerging from the interviews concerns the communicative capacity of visual symbols. The content creator/designer described visual communication as functioning as a kind of common language, enabling people who did not personally know one another to feel connected through the same symbolic reference.

The media observer/academic similarly explained that a symbol can acquire shared meaning through repeated use and circulation. Once repeatedly reproduced by different users, the visual representation moves beyond its initial form and becomes associated with a broader social meaning.

These findings suggest that the communicative power of Brave Pink and Hero Green was not determined exclusively by the original meaning assigned to the images. Their meaning developed through collective circulation and recognition. As users repeatedly encountered, reproduced, and interacted with the symbols, the symbols became recognizable references for the issue surrounding the protests. This process can be conceptualized as a sequence moving from visual representation to repeated circulation, then to shared recognition, symbolic meaning, and finally collective affiliation.

The process demonstrates how visual communication can contribute to digital collectivity without requiring every participant to articulate the same message verbally. The symbol provides a condensed visual reference through which solidarity can be communicated quickly and publicly. Consequently, symbolic participation can be understood as more than the reproduction of visual content. It is a communicative process in which repeated symbolic practices contribute to the construction of shared meaning among dispersed social media users.

4.4 From Connective Participation to Digital Collectivity — and Its Limits

The fourth finding concerns the relationship between individualized participation and the emergence of collective visibility. The interviews suggest that Brave Pink and Hero Green circulated through decentralized participation rather than through a single formal organizational structure. Users could independently adopt, repost, or modify symbolic content while attaching their own interpretations to the broader issue.

The media observer/academic explained that the widespread visibility of the symbols could create a perception that individuals were not alone in their concerns. Meanwhile, the content creator/designer described a process in which users encountered the visual, found it relatable, and voluntarily participated by using or circulating the symbol.

This pattern corresponds with the logic of connective action. Participation does not require centralized coordination because individuals can contribute through personalized and easily reproducible communicative practices. The symbols therefore served as connective resources that allowed individual actions to become visible as part of a larger pattern of participation.

However, the findings also reveal an important limitation. Symbolic participation did not necessarily translate into sustained activism or offline action. Both the media observer and activist/journalist perspectives highlighted the possibility that participation could remain at the level of profile-picture changes, reposts, or other symbolic expressions. The intensity of attention could also decline as the social media momentum surrounding the issue diminished, a pattern consistent with broader evidence that digital repression, platform fatigue, and shifting public attention constrain the durability of online mobilization more generally [24].

This distinction is crucial. The findings suggest that symbolic participation can facilitate digital collectivity without necessarily producing sustained collective mobilization. Brave Pink and Hero Green enabled individuals to become visible participants in a shared digital discourse, but the continuation of that collectivity depended on the persistence of public attention and engagement with the underlying issue.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Rethinking Symbolic Participation in Digital Activism

The findings extend existing understandings of digital activism by demonstrating that participation can occur through visual symbolic practices that do not require users to engage in conventional forms of political mobilization. The adoption of Brave Pink and Hero Green through profile pictures, reposts, and other visual practices functioned as a form of public positioning, allowing users to communicate solidarity without necessarily attending demonstrations, joining an organization, or producing extensive political discourse. This broadens the understanding of digital activism beyond hashtag campaigns and explicit calls for action: symbolic participation represents a lower-threshold form of engagement in which the act of displaying or circulating a symbol itself becomes communicative, and its significance lies not only in the amount of content produced but in its ability to make individual positions publicly recognizable.

At the same time, the findings caution against equating visibility with mobilization. The interviews indicate that symbolic participation may generate collective visibility and affiliation without necessarily producing sustained political action. This caution echoes broader evidence that digital movements face structural constraints — from algorithmic attention cycles to outright digital repression — that can suppress the translation of online visibility into durable offline outcomes [24]. Digital activism should therefore be understood as encompassing different intensities and forms of participation, ranging from symbolic expression to more sustained forms of engagement.

5.2 From Individual Expression to Collective Identity

The findings also contribute to Social Identity Theory by demonstrating how collective identification can emerge in the absence of formal group membership. Participants did not necessarily describe themselves as members of an organized movement; instead, they recognized a shared concern through the circulation of common symbols, a pattern consistent with meta-analytic evidence that online social identification reliably predicts participation in digitally mediated collective action even without face-to-face group contact [13]. This suggests that digital collective identity may be symbolically recognized rather than institutionally organized. The repeated visibility of Brave Pink and Hero Green allowed users to identify others who shared similar concerns, creating a perception of collective presence, with the symbols functioning as social cues through which individual users could locate themselves within a broader communicative environment.

The contribution here is a more fluid understanding of collective identity. Rather than requiring stable membership, digital collective identity may emerge through temporary symbolic affiliation, with individuals retaining their personal identities while simultaneously communicating alignment with a shared issue — a pattern that resonates with Indonesian evidence that youth political participation increasingly unfolds through loosely bounded digital and social networks rather than formal civic organizations [9].

5.3 Connective Action Through Visual Symbols

The findings further demonstrate how the logic of connective action can operate through visual rather than exclusively textual forms of personalized participation. Users could adopt the symbols independently and circulate them according to their own social media practices; the content creator/designer's observation that users could see, relate to, and voluntarily reproduce the visual illustrates how symbolic content can facilitate decentralized participation, a dynamic that parallels findings from other national contexts in which social media affordances enabled the construction of collective identity around a protest event without centralized coordination [25]. This expands the application of connective action by emphasizing the role of visual portability and reproducibility: a visual symbol can be detached from its original creator and reproduced by multiple users while retaining enough recognizable meaning to connect those individual acts of participation.

In the context of Brave Pink and Hero Green, therefore, connective action occurred not because users followed a single centralized instruction, but because the symbols provided a shared communicative resource that individuals could appropriate. The collective pattern emerged from the accumulation of these personalized acts.

5.4 Toward a Symbolic Model of Digital Collectivity

Taken together, the findings suggest that digital collectivity in this case emerged through five interconnected stages: a visual symbol becomes available and recognizable; individuals engage in symbolic participation by adopting, reproducing, or circulating it; repeated exposure generates recognition and affiliation among users who share similar concerns; this recognition fosters emotional and collective solidarity; and networked participation makes individual acts visible as part of a broader pattern, ultimately constituting digital collectivity.

The first stage occurs when a visual representation becomes available as a recognizable symbol. The second occurs when individuals adopt, reproduce, or circulate the symbol. Repeated exposure then enables recognition among users who share similar concerns. This recognition can generate a sense of solidarity and collective presence, while networked circulation makes individual participation visible as part of a broader pattern.

The model therefore conceptualizes digital collectivity not as simply the accumulation of users performing the same action, but as a communicative process through which symbols connect individual expressions to shared recognition and networked participation. This is particularly relevant to the Brave Pink and Hero Green case because the interviews indicate that users did not necessarily need to know one another or belong to a formal organization to experience a sense of collective presence. The symbols operated as common visual references through which dispersed individuals could recognize a shared concern.

5.5 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to digital activism scholarship by positioning symbolic participation as a mechanism through which digital collectivity can emerge. Social Identity Theory explains the role of recognition and affiliation, while Connective Action explains how individualized participation can circulate through decentralized networks. Symbolic participation connects these perspectives by demonstrating how a visual marker can simultaneously facilitate individual expression and collective recognition.

The findings also suggest that digital collectivity should not automatically be interpreted as sustained collective mobilization. The interviews indicate that symbolic participation may be temporary and closely connected to the intensity of public attention. This distinction provides a more nuanced understanding of digital activism by separating collective visibility and affiliation from long-term mobilization, and it aligns with cross-national evidence on the cultural and structural dynamics that shape whether digitally mediated civic engagement is sustained or transient [10].

Practically, the findings demonstrate the communicative potential of visual symbols in digitally mediated social movements. Symbols that are visually recognizable, easily reproduced, and sufficiently open to personal interpretation can lower participation barriers and allow individuals to communicate solidarity within their everyday social media practices. However, the findings also suggest that symbolic visibility alone may not be sufficient to sustain collective engagement. Continued participation depends on whether the underlying issue remains relevant and whether symbolic engagement develops into deeper forms of civic or political involvement.

6. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the Brave Pink and Hero Green symbols functioned as mechanisms for constructing digital collectivity following Indonesia's 2025 labor protests. The findings show that symbolic participation lowered the threshold for entry into digital activism, allowed users to recognize and affiliate with others who shared similar concerns without formal organizational membership, operated as a common visual language that condensed solidarity into a rapidly circulating form, and produced collective visibility through decentralized, connective participation while remaining vulnerable to the volatility of media attention. Integrating Social Identity Theory and Connective Action Theory, the study proposes a symbolic model of digital collectivity in which visual symbols move from initial circulation to shared recognition, affiliation, and networked participation.

The study contributes to communication scholarship by repositioning visual symbols as communicative mechanisms in their own right, rather than as incidental artifacts of hashtag-based activism, and by showing that digital collectivity can emerge without formal organizational structures. These findings carry practical implications for activists, designers, and communication practitioners seeking to build accessible, low-barrier entry points into civic participation, while also cautioning that symbolic visibility does not by itself guarantee sustained mobilization.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. As a qualitative case study of a single, context-specific phenomenon, the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable, and the relatively small number of informants, though sufficient for thematic saturation, cannot capture the full diversity of participants involved in the movement. Future research could employ large-scale computational analysis of symbol circulation across platforms, comparative case studies across countries, or longitudinal designs to examine whether and how symbolic participation evolves into sustained forms of civic and political engagement over time.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of this study, data collection, analysis and interpretation of findings, and preparation of the manuscript, and have approved the final version for publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical principles of research and academic integrity were observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants prior to data collection.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The interview and observational data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to participant confidentiality but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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