

Digital Civic Participation and Youth Citizenship Practice: A Qualitative Study of Urban Communities in Bandung, West Java

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Abstract

This article examines how urban youth practice citizenship through digital civic participation in Bandung, West Java. The study is based on the argument that citizenship in contemporary urban settings is no longer expressed only through formal political participation, but also through everyday digital engagement, issue advocacy, community networking, and collaborative problem solving. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the research analyzes how young citizens interpret public issues, build civic awareness, and mobilize participation through social media platforms, community forums, and hybrid online-offline initiatives. The study involved 14 informants consisting of university students, youth community organizers, digital campaign volunteers, and local civic actors. Data were collected through interviews, observation, and document review. Based on the findings, three major patterns were identified. First, digital platforms expanded access to civic expression and enabled youth to engage with public concerns more quickly and interactively. Second, digital citizenship practice was strongest when online expression was connected with concrete collective action such as volunteering, discussion forums, and neighborhood initiatives. Third, youth participation still faced constraints related to misinformation, performative activism, unequal digital literacy, and limited institutional responsiveness. In this context, the article argues that digital civic participation should be understood as an evolving form of citizenship practice that combines rights, responsibilities, voice, and public collaboration. Accordingly, strengthening youth citizenship requires not only technological access but also civic literacy, democratic spaces, and responsive local institutions.

Keywords: *digital citizenship; youth participation; civic engagement; urban community; Bandung*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana pemuda perkotaan mempraktikkan kewargaan melalui partisipasi sipil digital di Kota Bandung, Jawa Barat. Kajian ini berangkat dari argumen bahwa kewargaan dalam konteks perkotaan kontemporer tidak lagi diekspresikan hanya melalui partisipasi politik formal, tetapi juga melalui keterlibatan digital sehari-hari, advokasi isu publik, jejaring komunitas, serta pemecahan masalah secara kolaboratif. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana warga muda memaknai isu publik, membangun kesadaran kewargaan, dan memobilisasi partisipasi melalui platform media sosial, forum komunitas, serta inisiatif hibrida daring-luring. Penelitian melibatkan 14 informan yang terdiri atas mahasiswa, penggerak komunitas pemuda, relawan kampanye digital, dan aktor sipil lokal. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan telaah dokumen. Berdasarkan temuan,

terdapat tiga pola utama. Pertama, platform digital memperluas akses terhadap ekspresi kewargaan dan memungkinkan pemuda terlibat dengan isu publik secara lebih cepat dan interaktif. Kedua, praktik kewargaan digital paling kuat ketika ekspresi daring terhubung dengan tindakan kolektif konkret seperti kerelawanan, forum diskusi, dan inisiatif lingkungan. Ketiga, partisipasi pemuda masih menghadapi kendala berupa misinformasi, aktivisme yang performatif, ketimpangan literasi digital, dan keterbatasan respons kelembagaan. Dalam konteks ini, artikel menegaskan bahwa partisipasi sipil digital merupakan bentuk praktik kewargaan yang terus berkembang dengan memadukan hak, tanggung jawab, suara, dan kolaborasi publik. Dengan demikian, penguatan kewargaan pemuda memerlukan bukan hanya akses teknologi, tetapi juga literasi sipil, ruang demokratis, dan institusi lokal yang responsif.

Kata kunci: kewargaan digital; partisipasi pemuda; keterlibatan sipil; komunitas perkotaan; Bandung

Pendahuluan

Citizenship has long been understood as a legal and political status that connects individuals to the state through rights, obligations, participation, and belonging (Marshall, 1950). Yet contemporary social change has broadened the meaning of citizenship beyond formal membership and periodic electoral participation. In urban societies shaped by digital communication, citizens increasingly express public concerns, negotiate identity, and mobilize collective action through online platforms. Based on this development, citizenship should be interpreted not only as a constitutional status but also as a lived practice that unfolds in everyday interactions, public discourse, and collaborative engagement with shared issues (Isin & Nielsen, 2008). Through this perspective, digital participation becomes an important arena for understanding how young people practice citizenship in the twenty-first century.

The expansion of digital technology has transformed the conditions of civic engagement. Social media, messaging applications, online petitions, digital campaigns, and community platforms have widened opportunities for public expression and lowered the threshold for participation. Young people, in particular, are among the most active users of these technologies, making them central actors in the emergence of new forms of citizenship practice. In this context, youth participation is no longer confined to student councils, formal organizations, or electoral moments, but also appears in issue-based solidarity, neighborhood initiatives, and digital advocacy around education, environment, public services, and social justice (Bennett, 2008; Kahne et al., 2016). Accordingly, digital space has become an increasingly relevant site for citizenship learning and performance.

However, the relationship between digital participation and citizenship is not automatically democratic or substantive. On the one hand, digital platforms enable rapid communication, broaden networks, and facilitate public visibility for previously marginalized voices. On the other hand, digital environments are also shaped by misinformation, polarization, superficial engagement, and unequal access to civic

literacy. Thus, digital participation may produce meaningful civic action, but it may also encourage symbolic or performative activism that remains detached from sustained public responsibility (Loader et al., 2014). In this context, the study of citizenship must consider not only the presence of participation, but also the quality, direction, and public consequences of such participation.

For citizenship scholarship, this issue is significant because it challenges conventional distinctions between public and private, online and offline, or formal and informal participation. Contemporary citizens, especially youth, often move across these boundaries seamlessly. They may learn about a public issue through social media, discuss it in online groups, transform it into a volunteer activity, and then share the outcome digitally again. Through these cycles, citizenship practice becomes networked, hybrid, and relational. Based on this condition, scholars have argued that digital citizenship involves not merely technical competence, but ethical judgment, civic identity, critical media use, and democratic participation in digitally mediated environments (Mossberger et al., 2008; Choi, 2016). Thus, digital citizenship is not reducible to internet access alone.

Indonesia provides a relevant context for this discussion. The growth of internet use, smartphone penetration, and youth-led digital communities has reshaped the landscape of public engagement. Urban youth increasingly participate in issue-based campaigns, community-based volunteerism, mutual aid initiatives, and civic discussions through digital channels. At the same time, Indonesia has also faced challenges related to hoaxes, hate speech, algorithmic echo chambers, and uneven civic literacy. In this context, digital participation is both promising and problematic. It has expanded the public sphere while also generating new vulnerabilities for democratic life. Accordingly, understanding how youth interpret and practice citizenship in digital environments has become an important task for citizenship studies.

Bandung, West Java, offers a particularly relevant urban setting for this inquiry. As a city with a large student population, vibrant youth communities, and strong digital culture, Bandung presents a dynamic environment in which digital platforms and civic engagement often intersect. Youth communities in Bandung frequently organize online campaigns, educational discussions, volunteer coordination, and public advocacy connected to urban issues such as waste management, public space, disaster response, mental health, and inclusion. In this context, the city provides a useful case for observing how citizenship is enacted by young people through networked participation rather than only through institutional channels.

The concept of citizenship used in this article draws from both classical and contemporary approaches. Marshall's formulation emphasizes the development of civil, political, and social rights as a basis for democratic membership (Marshall, 1950). Meanwhile, newer perspectives argue that citizenship also emerges through acts, claims, and practices performed by citizens in relation to authority, community, and public life (Isin & Nielsen, 2008). This article also engages with civic participation scholarship,

which highlights the importance of youth involvement in public problem solving, democratic learning, and collective efficacy (Checkoway, 2011; Ekman & Amnå, 2012). Through these perspectives, digital participation can be seen as a medium through which youth exercise voice, build solidarity, and negotiate responsibility.

Several previous studies have shown that digital media can strengthen civic knowledge, support political discussion, and encourage participatory culture among young people (Jenkins et al., 2016; Kahne et al., 2016). On the other hand, scholars also warn that digital engagement may remain episodic, emotionally reactive, and highly vulnerable to manipulation when not supported by institutional trust and critical literacy (Loader et al., 2014; Choi, 2016). Thus, the analytical question is not simply whether youth participate digitally, but how such participation is translated into citizenship practice with social relevance and democratic substance.

This article argues that urban youth citizenship today must be examined through the interplay between digital communication, civic identity, and collective action. Based on this argument, digital civic participation is understood here as the set of activities through which youth express opinions, share information, deliberate issues, mobilize communities, and take action on public concerns using digital media and related social networks. In this context, the study asks: how do urban youth in Bandung practice citizenship through digital civic participation, what factors strengthen such participation, and what limitations remain?

Accordingly, this article aims to analyze three issues. First, it examines how digital platforms shape youth access to civic expression and issue engagement. Second, it explores how online participation is connected to offline citizenship practices such as volunteering, discussion forums, and neighborhood collaboration. Third, it identifies the main barriers that limit the democratic quality of youth participation in digital contexts. Through this discussion, the article contributes to the Journal of Citizenship by demonstrating that citizenship among urban youth is increasingly enacted through hybrid public practices in which digital communication, civic responsibility, and collective action are closely intertwined.

Metode

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore how urban youth practice citizenship through digital civic participation in Bandung, West Java. The research location was selected because Bandung represents an urban environment with active youth communities, strong digital culture, and a relatively high intensity of civic initiatives that combine online and offline participation. The study involved 14 informants consisting of university students, youth community organizers, digital campaign volunteers, neighborhood youth leaders, and local civic actors who had direct experience in public issue engagement through digital platforms. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation of selected community

discussions and youth initiatives, and documentation review of online campaign materials, community postings, and related civic communication content.

Data analysis followed an interactive qualitative model involving data condensation, thematic categorization, data display, and interpretive conclusion drawing to identify recurring patterns in civic expression, collective action, and participation barriers (Miles et al., 2014). Through this process, the analysis focused on how informants understood citizenship, how they used digital platforms in relation to public issues, and how online activities were translated into concrete civic practices. In this context, data validity was strengthened through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and cross-checking across informant categories to ensure interpretive consistency and credibility of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2014).

Hasil dan Diskusi

1. Digital Platforms as New Spaces of Youth Citizenship Expression

The first finding shows that digital platforms have become important spaces for youth citizenship expression in Bandung. Informants consistently described social media, messaging groups, and online discussion forums as the first point of contact with public issues. Through these platforms, young citizens encountered information about local problems, exchanged views, circulated campaign content, and responded quickly to emerging social concerns. Based on this pattern, digital participation should be understood as a meaningful entry point into citizenship practice rather than merely an extension of entertainment or personal communication. This finding is consistent with the argument that contemporary citizenship is increasingly enacted through mediated acts of visibility, voice, and claim-making in digital public spaces (Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Choi, 2016).

Digital platforms widened access to expression because they reduced formal barriers to participation. Many informants reported that they were more comfortable expressing opinions online before speaking in conventional public forums. This condition is particularly important for youth who may feel excluded from formal political spaces dominated by older actors, institutional language, or bureaucratic procedures. In this context, social media enabled participants to comment on environmental issues, public transport, mental health, education, and community welfare in ways that felt immediate and socially connected. Accordingly, citizenship practice among youth appeared more fluid and accessible in digital settings.

Based on the interviews, three specific features of digital space supported youth civic engagement. First, speed allowed issues to spread rapidly and generated quick collective awareness. Second, interactivity enabled discussion, feedback, and peer validation. Third, network reach made it possible for local concerns to gain broader attention beyond immediate neighborhoods. Through these features, young citizens were able to transform individual concern into shared public attention. This finding resonates with participatory culture scholarship, which emphasizes that digital environments support forms of

engagement based on circulation, connection, and collaborative production of meaning (Jenkins et al., 2016).

However, digital expression did not always reflect deep civic understanding. Some informants acknowledged that online engagement could become reactive, trend-based, or highly dependent on emotionally charged content. On the other hand, they also noted that such initial engagement often served as a gateway to learning more about an issue. Thus, digital participation contained both superficial and substantive possibilities. In this context, the difference depended largely on the availability of civic discussion, trusted information, and community norms that encouraged reflection rather than impulsive reaction. Accordingly, digital platforms should not be judged only by the visibility of participation, but by the extent to which they support sustained civic learning.

Another important point is that youth citizenship expression online was often issue-based rather than organization-based. Informants rarely defined their engagement in terms of loyalty to formal institutions. Instead, they became active when particular issues resonated with their values or everyday experiences, such as waste in public spaces, access to education, gender-based harassment, or support for vulnerable groups. This pattern reflects a broader shift in youth participation toward personalized, issue-oriented citizenship, in which public commitment is built through relevance and moral identification rather than only through institutional attachment (Bennett, 2008). In this context, digital media amplified this tendency by making issue discovery and participation more immediate.

2. From Online Engagement to Offline Collective Action

The second finding indicates that digital civic participation became most meaningful when it was connected to concrete offline action. Informants emphasized that posting, sharing, or commenting was important, but insufficient if it did not lead to discussion, volunteering, donation, advocacy, or community initiatives. Through this perspective, youth did not necessarily reject digital expression; rather, they evaluated it through its capacity to generate real social contribution. This finding supports the view that citizenship is practiced through acts that connect communication with responsibility and public consequence (Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Checkoway, 2011).

Several participation pathways emerged from the data. Some informants used social media to recruit volunteers for neighborhood clean-up programs, educational mentoring, or donation drives. Others joined issue-based digital forums that later organized face-to-face discussions, workshops, or small advocacy meetings with local stakeholders. Based on these experiences, online spaces functioned as infrastructure for coordination rather than as the final destination of participation. Thus, digital media helped youth assemble networks, reduce logistical barriers, and build momentum for collective action.

This hybrid pattern is central for citizenship studies because it shows that digital participation can reinforce, rather than weaken, civic responsibility. On the other hand, the value of such participation depended on how communities structured engagement. Where digital communication was supported by clear goals, role distribution, and shared

norms, participation tended to move from expression toward collaboration. In this context, young people used digital tools not simply to speak, but to organize. Accordingly, the practical quality of citizenship increased when online engagement was embedded in community processes and social accountability.

The findings also suggest that digital participation supported civic learning. Informants reported that involvement in online discussions and collaborative initiatives improved their awareness of public issues, strengthened empathy toward affected groups, and increased confidence in communicating with others. Through repeated interaction, they learned how to verify information, frame arguments, and work with people from different backgrounds. This is significant because citizenship is not only about action but also about the development of dispositions such as responsibility, critical reflection, and solidarity (Biesta, 2011). Based on this perspective, digital civic participation contributed to citizenship education in informal and experiential ways.

The following table summarizes the main patterns identified in the study.

Table 1. Main Patterns of Digital Civic Participation among Urban Youth in Bandung

Dimension	Empirical Pattern	Citizenship Meaning
Access expression	to Youth use social media and group chats to discuss public issues	Digital space widens civic voice
Issue engagement	Participation centers on environment, education, welfare, and inclusion	Citizenship becomes issue-based and relevant
Collective transition	Online communication leads to volunteering, forums, and campaigns	Citizenship connects voice and action
Civic learning	Youth improve empathy, argumentation, and information checking	Participation builds democratic capacity
Structural barriers	Misinformation, performative activism, and weak institutional response remain	Digital citizenship requires support systems

Based on the table and interview data, the strongest forms of digital citizenship were those that combined three elements: issue awareness, community linkage, and tangible follow-up. For example, several youth initiatives began with social media postings about local waste problems but evolved into neighborhood action, educational content, and collaboration with community members. Through these sequences, citizenship practice was no longer limited to complaint or commentary. It became a form of shared problem solving. This confirms that participation acquires civic depth when individuals see themselves not only as observers of public issues but as co-actors in addressing them (Ekman & Amnå, 2012).

In this context, digital space also helped create a sense of belonging. Informants often described feeling more connected to their city or community after participating in issue-based networks. This suggests that citizenship practice can be strengthened when youth experience participation as relational and meaningful. Rather than engaging because of formal duty alone, they engaged because they felt part of a public. Accordingly, digital

participation can support citizenship when it nurtures collective identity and democratic attachment rather than isolated expression.

3. Limits of Digital Citizenship: Misinformation, Performative Activism, and Institutional Gaps

The third finding concerns the limitations of digital civic participation. Although digital platforms expanded voice and coordination, they also produced several problems that weakened the quality of citizenship practice. Informants frequently mentioned misinformation, selective exposure, emotional polarization, and the pressure to appear active without sustained commitment. Based on these findings, digital citizenship should not be romanticized. It develops within a communication environment that can support democratic engagement but can also distort it. This is consistent with scholarship showing that digital participation often exists alongside shallow engagement, unequal literacy, and fragmented public attention (Loader et al., 2014; Kahne et al., 2016).

Misinformation was identified as one of the most serious barriers. Informants described how public issues could be easily reframed through inaccurate content, dramatic headlines, or misleading visual narratives. In this context, youth who lacked critical verification skills were vulnerable to amplifying problematic information even when motivated by civic concern. Thus, digital access without critical literacy did not automatically strengthen citizenship. On the other hand, some informants reported that participating in trusted communities helped them learn verification habits and become more cautious in sharing content. Accordingly, digital citizenship requires interpretive competence as much as expressive opportunity.

Performative activism was another recurring concern. Several participants observed that online campaigns often attracted short bursts of visibility but little long-term engagement. Sharing content, changing profile pictures, or using trending hashtags sometimes created the appearance of participation without deeper commitment to the issue. Based on this pattern, the challenge is not that symbolic action is entirely meaningless, but that it may stop at visibility and fail to generate responsibility. In this context, youth themselves often recognized the difference between expressive solidarity and sustained civic work. Thus, performative activism became both a limitation and a reflective theme within youth participation.

A further limitation involved institutional responsiveness. Some informants felt that youth voices circulated actively online but rarely received meaningful response from local institutions. When public input did not lead to dialogue, feedback, or collaboration, motivation sometimes declined. This issue is important because citizenship depends not only on active citizens but also on institutions willing to hear, recognize, and engage them (Marshall, 1950; Biesta, 2011). Through this lens, digital participation cannot be assessed solely at the level of citizen initiative. It must also be evaluated in relation to the openness of governance structures. Accordingly, responsive institutions are necessary to convert civic energy into democratic impact.

Digital inequality also remained visible. Although Bandung is relatively well connected, not all youth had the same level of access, confidence, or literacy in using digital tools for public purposes. Some participants were comfortable debating issues and organizing content, while others engaged only passively or sporadically. In this context, digital citizenship reflected broader inequalities in education, social capital, and communication skills. Based on this finding, citizenship development requires support beyond platform availability. It needs educational and community processes that build confidence, judgment, and collaborative capacity.

Taken together, the study identifies four key findings. First, digital platforms expanded access to civic voice and issue awareness among urban youth. Second, digital participation became more substantive when linked to offline collective action. Third, civic learning emerged through issue-based engagement and community interaction. Fourth, the democratic quality of participation was constrained by misinformation, performative activism, uneven literacy, and limited institutional response. Thus, digital citizenship among youth in Bandung should be understood as a promising but unfinished practice that depends on both citizen competence and supportive public structures.

In this context, the article contributes to citizenship studies by showing that youth citizenship today is enacted through hybrid practices where voice, technology, community, and responsibility intersect. Digital participation is not a separate realm from citizenship; it is one of the main environments in which citizenship is currently learned and practiced. On the other hand, its democratic value cannot be assumed automatically. Accordingly, citizenship education, community facilitation, and institutional openness remain essential for ensuring that digital civic participation becomes a substantive part of democratic life rather than a fleeting culture of visibility.

Kesimpulan

This article concludes that digital civic participation has become an important form of youth citizenship practice in Bandung, West Java. Based on the findings, digital platforms expand access to public expression, accelerate issue awareness, and help young citizens connect with wider civic networks. However, the most meaningful forms of citizenship did not stop at online visibility. They emerged when digital engagement was translated into discussion, volunteering, collaborative initiatives, and concrete contributions to public life. In this context, youth citizenship should be understood as a hybrid practice that combines digital communication, civic learning, collective responsibility, and place-based action. The article therefore contributes to the Journal of Citizenship by emphasizing that contemporary citizenship among urban youth is not declining, but changing in form, medium, and rhythm.

Accordingly, the study affirms that strengthening youth citizenship in digital society requires more than internet access or platform participation. It requires critical digital literacy, democratic communication ethics, supportive civic communities, and

institutions that are responsive to youth voices. Future policy and educational practice should therefore prioritize digital civic education, community-based participation programs, collaborative forums between youth and local institutions, and sustained mechanisms for transforming online engagement into public problem solving. In this way, digital participation can become a more substantive and durable pathway for democratic citizenship.

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