

Critical Discourse Analysis of Pandawara Group's Environmental Communication on Social Media Platforms

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explain how The Pandawara Group constructs, disseminates, and negotiates environmental discourse through TikTok and YouTube content by analysing the language strategies and narrative structures they use in describing the environmental activist with the largest number of followers in Indonesia.

Methods: This study uses a qualitative approach with Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis. Teun A. van Dijk's discourse analysis was chosen because it can read texts, social cognition, and social context simultaneously. The Pandawara Group's YouTube and TikTok content analysed consists of videos announcing polluted locations, which serve as calls to action, documentation of clean-up activities in the field, and clarification posts when criticism or rejection arises from local government or communities.

Findings: The findings show that the Pandawara Group successfully portrays environmental issues as a shared moral obligation through inclusive language, persuasive calls to action, and visual before-and-after comparisons that encourage mass voluntary participation. Their rhetoric strategically shifts the conversation from blame to cooperation, allowing them to negotiate socio-political resistance and strengthen legitimacy in the digital public sphere.

Originality: This study addresses a gap in prior research, which largely treats collective-action narratives alone, by proposing a dual-narrative framework that combines collective mobilization with discursive resistance-clarification, analysed by van Dijk's three-level model. Extending connective action theory, it explains how non-institutional Gen Z activists negotiate legitimacy and manage socio-political backlash while sustaining mass participation.

Keywords: Environmental Communication, Social Media Activism, Discourse Analysis.

Introduction

The environmental crisis is one of the greatest challenges facing the world in the 21st century. Climate change, pollution, deforestation, and ecosystem degradation pose a serious threat to the sustainability of life on Earth. The climate crisis and coastal degradation show that the issue of waste is not merely an aesthetic problem, but part of a systemic risk that threatens ecological safety and public health. According to a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the average global temperature has increased by 1.1° C compared to pre-industrial times. This trend is expected to continue if no serious mitigation efforts are made ([Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022](#)). Indonesia, as an archipelagic country with high biodiversity, faces significant impacts from this crisis, ranging from flooding and sea level rise to urban pollution ([Peluso, 2018](#)). World Bank data from 2022 shows that around 60% of Indonesia's population lives in coastal areas, increasing their vulnerability to tidal flooding and coastal erosion. In addition, rapid urbanisation and weak waste management add to the complexity of environmental issues in urban areas. For example, Jakarta and Bandung

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often experience flooding due to a combination of high rainfall, narrowing of water catchment areas, and accumulation of waste in rivers.

Ecosystem damage caused by deforestation also poses a significant threat. The 2020 FAO report notes that Indonesia ranks high in the rate of tropical forest loss, which has a direct impact on the loss of biodiversity and carbon emissions. Air pollution in major cities such as Jakarta, which, according to IQAir in 2023, is among the worst in the world, shows that the environmental crisis has become a public health issue. Thus, the environmental crisis in Indonesia can no longer be viewed merely as a technical ecological issue, but also as a socio-political problem that requires a cross-sectoral and cross-actor approach, including reducing pollution in coastal and estuarine areas (IQAir, 2024).

Amidst these complex environmental issues, the Pandawara Group emerged, a group of young people from Bandung who cleaned up rivers, beaches, and public spaces, then shared their documentation through social media. This phenomenon is interesting because the Pandawara Group not only took concrete action but also built an effective digital narrative that mobilised public support. One of the narratives they promote is 'let's clean up the river together'. This narrative frames the environment as a shared responsibility, emphasising the value of cooperation that is rooted in Indonesian culture and changing the public's view that protecting the environment is not only the responsibility of the government, but also the moral responsibility of the entire community.

However, Pandawara's narrative is not always received positively. When they carried out a clean-up action at Sukaraja Beach in Lampung, accusations arose from some members of the community and the local government that Pandawara had embarrassed the local community and government by calling the beach the second-dirtiest beach in Indonesia. This criticism reflects socio-political resistance to the *naming and shaming* tactics used by Pandawara to emphasise that environmental issues are the responsibility of all human beings. Statements such as "*we don't want people to blame each other, because environmental issues are the responsibility of us all*" demonstrate Pandawara's rhetorical strategy to defuse accusations while maintaining the legitimacy of their movement.

Narratives of collective action and narratives of clarification form the complex discourse of Pandawara, showing how environmental communication works not only as a participatory invitation, but also as an arena for the struggle of environmental action movements, while also producing discourse that negotiates support and resistance from various social actors. This phenomenon is important to study because it shows that environmental communication in the digital age is an ideological practice that involves the construction of meaning, rhetorical strategies, and the reproduction of socio-cultural values.

Within the framework of environmental communication theory, ecological issues are understood as discursive constructions that are not neutral, but rather laden with values, ideologies, and power relations. Environmental communication is a dynamic and evolving field that plays a critical role in shaping public understanding and action on environmental issues. By integrating traditional media, digital technologies, and diverse cultural perspectives, researchers and practitioners can develop more effective communication strategies to promote sustainability and environmental stewardship (Choi et al., 2023). Effective environmental communication is crucial for influencing policy and decision-making processes. Studies highlight the importance of clear, accurate

communication to inform and engage stakeholders (Cori et al., 2019). The Pandawara Group represents a practice of digital environmental communication that emphasises informative, participatory, and ideological dimensions. Thus, this study positions the Pandawara narrative not merely as a viral phenomenon, but as part of a tradition of environmental communication studies that contributes to the global discourse on climate change.

This study focuses on how the Pandawara Group constructs environmental narratives using Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. This approach allows for analysis at three levels: the macro level, which is the global theme of the environmental crisis as a collective responsibility; the superstructure, which is the narrative flow consisting of problems, actions, impacts, and resistance; and the micro level, which is linguistic strategies, participatory diction choices, persuasive styles, and clarifying rhetoric. Through this framework, this study analyses how Pandawara builds public legitimacy, negotiates criticism, and utilises the cultural value of cooperation as a local narrative connected to the global issue of climate change.

The urgency of this research lies in three things. *First*, this study offers a novel empirical focus by centring on a non-institutional, Gen Z-led environmental movement, rather than the NGO- or government-driven campaigns that dominate prior environmental communication research, offering a new picture of how network citizens shape public opinion. *Second*, this research offers a theoretical novelty by combining narratives of collective action with narratives of clarification and resistance within a single analytical frame, a dual-narrative combination that has rarely been examined together in previous environmental communication studies. *Third*, applying Van Dijk's three-level Critical Discourse Analysis reveals the ideological dimensions hidden behind Pandawara's seemingly simple narrative, extending Critical Discourse Analysis theory to explain how grassroots digital activists negotiate legitimacy while managing socio-political resistance, a theoretical contribution not yet offered by prior studies on digital environmental activism in Indonesia.

Environmental communication studies essentially depart from the understanding that ecological issues are not neutral, but rather social constructs laden with ideology, values, and power relations. The media, in this case, plays a central role as an actor that shapes public perception of environmental issues. The environment presented in the media is not a reflection of objective reality, but rather a construction influenced by economic and political interests, editorial policies, and the logic of news reporting (Hansen, 2019). Environmental communication is not only about disseminating information on ecosystem degradation or climate change but also involves the production of discourse that determines how these issues are understood and how the public is encouraged to respond. Frame environmental communication is a deliberative process in which citizens and other actors collectively construct shared understandings of environmental governance challenges, negotiating problem definitions, responsibilities, and solutions (Erbaugh et al., 2024).

In recent developments, environmental communication research emphasises the importance of a narrative approach. Narratives are considered more effective in conveying complex issues such as climate change because they can touch on the emotional and moral dimensions of the public. Narratives that emphasise the values of togetherness and moral responsibility are more easily accepted by the public than statistical data alone. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Pandawara Group, which emphasises the values of cooperation and public participation as the core of its

communication. Through the simple slogan "*let's clean up the river together*," Pandawara not only conveys an ecological message but also builds emotional bonds that motivate the community to participate.

The Pandawara phenomenon cannot be separated from the framework of digital social movements. Digital activism has changed the patterns of community mobilisation over the past two decades. In Southeast Asia, social media-based activism can be a catalyst for socio-political change, including on environmental issues (Luong & Vu, 2025). Social media enables social movements to spread messages quickly, build solidarity networks across regions, and mobilise participation without having to rely on formal institutions. In Indonesia, social media facilitates the emergence of *networked* movements, movements that are connected through digital networks and can develop organically (Jalli, 2025). However, this form of mobilisation is also shown to be vulnerable to algorithmic visibility instability, in which platform virality pressures push activists toward simplified narratives that are more easily accepted by the public but risk ignoring the root of structural problems. Pandawara presents a similar dynamic: the success of widespread public mobilisation through social media is accompanied by the risk of obscuring structural inequalities, such as weak waste management regulations or the dominance of the single-use plastics industry.

In addition to the framework of social movements, media framing studies are important to consider. Framing serves to determine which aspects of reality are highlighted and how they are interpreted by the public. Focusing on how media frames environmental issues and how the public perceives and responds to these issues (Hansen, 2019). Media framing of environmental issues can exhibit ideological polarization, particularly in contentious policy contexts (Chang, 2025). Boykoff and Oonk assert that crisis- or error-based framing can elicit a rapid response from the public because it evokes a sense of urgency. However, this type of framing also carries the risk of political resistance, especially when the framing is perceived as attacking certain actors (Luedecke & T. Boykoff, 2017). In the case of Pandawara, the use of the term 'the second dirtiest beach in Indonesia' was an effective form of shock framing that attracted attention but also sparked controversy at the local level. The local government and some members of the community felt humiliated by this label, so the response was not only supportive but also resistant. In other words, the Pandawara framing served a dual purpose: it amplified the environmental issue while also triggering a socio-political debate about how the issue was raised.

It is also important to understand that effective framing is often linked to local cultural values. Olausson puts forward the concept of cultural proximity, which explains how messages linked to local cultural values are more easily accepted by the public (Olausson & Berglez, 2018). In the Indonesian context, the narrative of cooperation used by Pandawara has strong resonance because it is in line with deeply rooted cultural values. The call to collectively clean rivers and beaches is not only an environmental practice, but also a representation of the cultural identity of Indonesian society. This explains why Pandawara's narrative was able to create widespread solidarity in the digital space. However, this resonance also has its limitations when the narrative is perceived as a criticism of the identity or pride of the local community, as was the case with Sukaraja Beach in Lampung.

The dimension of environmental justice is another crucial aspect in this literature review. Environmental issues cannot be separated from the uneven distribution of risks and responsibilities (Agyeman et al., 2016). Marginalised groups, especially coastal

communities or urban poor communities, often bear the heaviest burden of pollution and ecological degradation. The narrative of shared responsibility promoted by Pandawara is indeed effective in building solidarity. Still, it also has the potential to obscure the structural injustices that prevent the ecological burden from being shared fairly. Similar findings were also revealed by Temper, who, through mapping protests against energy projects, showed the importance of linking collective narratives with structural advocacy so that movements do not stop at symbolism or momentary actions (Temper et al., 2018).

Criticism of the homogenisation of narratives within the environmental movement should also be noted. The narrative of 'togetherness' emphasised by Pandawara can create public solidarity. Still, it also risks obscuring the role of dominant actors who are more responsible for the environmental crisis, such as the disposable plastics industry or weak waste management policies. Boykoff, in a previous study, also warned that communication strategies based on sensationalism or virality risk sacrificing a deeper understanding of the root causes of the problem. Pandawara thus demonstrates ambivalence: on the one hand, it has succeeded in mobilising the public to care about the environment, but on the other hand, it still faces challenges in connecting digital mobilisation with sustainable structural policy advocacy.

Overall, this literature review shows that the Pandawara phenomenon can be understood through several theoretical lenses. *First*, environmental communication emphasises discourse construction as an arena of ideology and power relations, where narratives play an important role in conveying complex issues such as climate change. *Second*, the digital social movement explains how social media-based activism can mobilise broad public participation, although it still faces the risk of issue homogenisation. *Third*, media framing shows that the way issues are packaged will influence public acceptance, where shock framing can be effective but controversial. *Fourth*, environmental justice theory reminds us that collective solidarity must be balanced with an awareness of the uneven distribution of risks and responsibilities.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, as it is capable of reading the relationship between text, social cognition, and social context simultaneously. Van Dijk's approach is often compared with other CDA frameworks, such as those by Fairclough and Wodak. While there are convergences in their focus on power and ideology, Van Dijk's emphasis on the cognitive dimension sets his approach apart (Abdel-Raheem, 2020). This approach was chosen to reveal the language strategies, narrative structures, and ideologies that shape the construction of environmental discourse in Pandawara Group's digital content, as reflected in the analysis of the macro, super, and micro structures of discourse. The selection of the Pandawara Group as the research subject was based on empirical considerations that they are Gen Z environmental activists with the largest number of followers in Indonesia, making them representative of how young people produce and disseminate environmental discourse in the digital public sphere. Pandawara's TikTok and YouTube content, ranging from announcements of the dirtiest locations as a call to action, documentation of clean-up activities, to clarification posts when facing criticism, provide rich data for analysing how discourse is constructed, negotiated, and maintained through language, visuals, and participatory communication practices. The unit of analysis for this study is presented in Table 1, which outlines three categories of data together with their sources and collection methods.

Table 1. Research unit analysis

No	Unit Analysis Category	Description of Analysis Unit	Data Source	Collection Method
1	Pandawara Group Digital Content	Videos, captions, and public comments related to environmental clean-up activities.	Pandawara Group TikTok and YouTube content.	Online ethnography, documentation, content recording.
2	Online media coverage of Pandawara	Media coverage and narratives framing Pandawara's actions in a socio-political context.	News videos from YouTube, Kompas.com, and other online media.	Documentation and tracing of news coverage.
3	Digital Audience Response	Comments and forms of public participation in Pandawara's actions.	Public comments on TikTok and YouTube.	Observation of digital interactions.

Note: The data consists of three types of TikTok and YouTube content originating from digital environmental communication activities carried out by Pandawara Group.

The use of Teun A. van Dijk's critical discourse analysis was chosen because this model allows researchers to examine texts not only as linguistic structures, but also as social practices that operate within power relations. In the context of the Pandawara Group, this approach helps explain how they frame environmental issues as a collective moral responsibility, how they mobilise volunteers through participatory rhetoric, and how they negotiate resistance from local governments or the public through language strategies and visual representations. The analysis process was carried out through a reading of the macrostructure to find the global meaning of the discourse, the superstructure to see the organisational framework of the message, and the microstructure to unravel the semantic, syntactic, stylistic, and rhetorical elements that appear in Pandawara's digital content. Data was obtained through online ethnography, documentation of TikTok and YouTube content, and online media coverage, then validated through triangulation of sources between digital content, media reports, and literature reviews, resulting in a deep understanding of the practices of environmental discourse production by grassroots actors in the social media space.

Results

The Pandawara Group phenomenon in the realm of environmental communication demonstrates how digital discourse practices can shape public understanding of ecological issues through strategic linguistic, visual, and narrative constructions. From a critical discourse analysis perspective, discourse is not merely a representation of reality, but a social act that produces, reinforces, or negotiates power relations within society. Pandawara operates in this context by utilising social media platforms to raise environmental cleanliness issues through the production of content that strategically combines educational, emotional, and persuasive elements. They not only display images of polluted areas, but also articulate these issues as moral, structural, and collective problems. As illustrated in [Figure 1](#), this discourse analysis process moves from the macrostructure, the global environmental crisis as a collective concern, to the

superstructure, comprising problem identification, action, impact, and negotiation, and finally to the microstructure, the language strategies and underlying dimensions of power and ideology that together shape Pandawara's environmental communication on digital platforms.

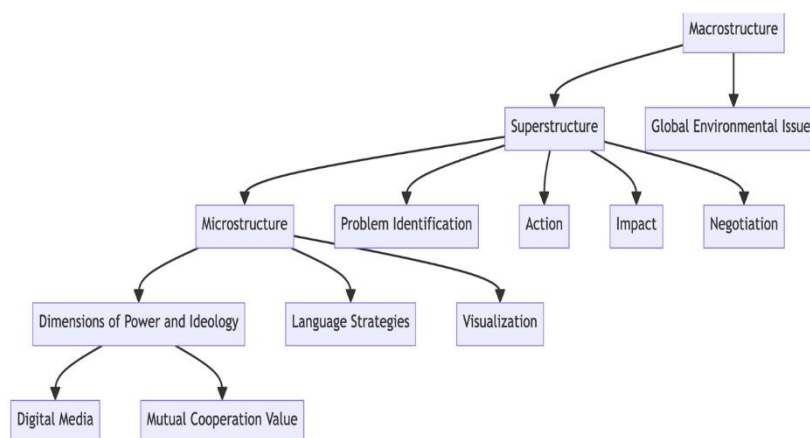


Figure 1. Discourse analysis of environmental communication of the Pandawara Group's approach to digital platforms (source: Processed by Researchers).

The narrative constructed by Pandawara is unique, particularly in the way they identify and interpret environmental issues as a multidimensional crisis. When they show polluted rivers, beaches, or public areas, these representations not only display the factual conditions, but also create a moral framework that environmental damage is the result of a collective failure to protect our shared living space. Environmental communication strategies that emphasise ecovisualisation have proven effective in triggering changes in attitudes and actions, as extreme visualisations can evoke emotional responses and a sense of urgency. The depiction of the extreme conditions of the Citarum River and other coastal areas documented in Pandawara's content can be understood as an effort to create moral resonance that positions environmental issues not only as technical problems but also as ethical ones.

The effectiveness of Pandawara in generating public attention cannot be separated from the dynamics of contemporary social media, especially short video-based platforms such as TikTok. TikTok's algorithm tends to reinforce content that is visually appealing, emotionally engaging, and easy to interpret, creating fertile ground for environmental campaigns oriented towards rapid mobilisation. TikTok's algorithm and short-video format provide the structural conditions that enable environmental content to go viral and trigger public participation within a short period of time. The phenomenon of Pandawara's viral messages can be understood within this framework, where their effectiveness stems from the intersection of strong communication strategies and the technological structure of social media that facilitates the widespread dissemination of messages.

Pandawara also utilises an inclusive and accessible style of language. Diction such as 'yuk', 'bareng-bareng' (let's go together), or other light-hearted invitations are linguistic strategies that enable environmental messages to reach a wider audience. This style of communication is characteristic of the younger generation and has proven effective in bridging serious issues with a non-intimidating delivery. This informal and relatable language style increases public engagement and involvement in social campaigns. This strategy has a psychological effect of creating a sense of closeness between the communicator and the audience, thereby strengthening the likelihood that the message will be received positively.

The successful public mobilisation carried out by Pandawara also shows how digital platforms can function as tools for coordinating large-scale social action. The participation of thousands of volunteers in the clean-up activities organised by Pandawara is proof that digital discourse can lead to physical action. This pattern of offline mobilisation through online campaigns reflects a form of ‘connective action’, a pattern of social participation that does not require a formal organisational structure but is made possible by digital technology that mediates coordination and collective identity. Pandawara demonstrates how collective action can grow from a combination of persuasive content, moral resonance, and the use of content distribution algorithms.

However, this success cannot be separated from the dynamics of political discourse. When their actions went viral, several local authorities criticised Pandawara for embarrassing the government or exposing weaknesses in environmental management. This phenomenon reflects how environmental issues often become a symbolic battleground between the state and civil society groups. These narrative conflicts between the government and civil society reflect the dynamics of discourse production, in which each party seeks to control representations of fault, responsibility, and legitimacy. Pandawara's response, which emphasised a non-confrontational stance, demonstrated a careful discursive strategy to maintain their moral legitimacy while avoiding polarisation.

In addition, Pandawara's discourse analysis involves understanding the relationship between local discourse and global structures. The theme of environmental sustainability is a global issue influenced by international political dynamics regarding climate change, resource management, and environmental justice. Environmental campaigns that emerge at the local level, such as Pandawara's, can contribute to the global agenda when they mobilise public opinion and create cross-border discussions on ecological values and ethics. Pandawara indirectly participates in this trend by expanding the conversation on the ecological crisis through social media and mainstream media publications.

In a microstructural context, the before-and-after visualisations often used by Pandawara are one of the most effective rhetorical techniques in environmental campaigns. Visual comparisons play an important role in increasing perceptions of urgency and efficacy, that is, the belief that collective action can bring about real change. By showing piles of rubbish before clean-up and clean scenery afterwards, Pandawara not only evokes emotion, but also builds a narrative that change is not only possible but can be sustained through continued participation.

Ideologically, Pandawara's content promotes the value of collectivism, which is in line with the culture of cooperation in Indonesia. However, this value also resonates with the global theoretical framework of environmental citizenship, which emphasises the role of citizens in maintaining ecological sustainability through active participation and a sense of moral responsibility. Thus, Pandawara can be understood as an actor that practises a form of digital ecological citizenship combining advocacy, education, and mobilisation.

The Pandawara Group phenomenon must also be viewed in the context of the transformation of digital media culture, which is characterised by the speed of message distribution, the algorithmisation of content exposure, and changes in patterns of public information consumption. TikTok's algorithm appears to create new discursive spaces for environmental issues, especially among younger audiences. The computational mechanisms that govern content visibility reinforce messages that are emotionally or visually relevant, so that ecological campaigns featuring extreme images tend to go viral more easily.

Finally, a comprehensive analysis of Pandawara's discourse shows that they are not merely a social media phenomenon, but part of a new architecture of global environmental communication. They combine rhetorical strategies, visual aesthetics, moral narratives, digital mobilisation, and political manoeuvring into a single form of complex communication practice. In an era of global environmental crisis, this kind of approach has significant potential to build ecological awareness and drive social change.

Discussion

The representation of environmental issues in Pandawara's digital narrative not only presents a visually apparent ecological reality but also constructs a layered discourse structure that connects text, visuals, social cognition, and public communication practices in a context laden with power relations, consistent with broader trends in environmental communication scholarship that foreground the role of language, narrative, and visualisation in shaping ecological awareness (Halffman, 2019). In this case, Pandawara's work shows how environmental issues are constructed as a collective crisis that requires multi-stakeholder participation. This perspective is in line with Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis approach, in which the representation of an issue is not only a linguistic product but also a discursive strategy to influence the way the public understands the actors, responsibilities, and root causes of an event. The structure of Pandawara's content, which moves from problem exposition, calls to action, documentation of results, to ethical clarification, forms a consistent pattern of representation. In this way, the visualisation of dirty rivers or beaches becomes a critical tool that questions the weak environmental governance in several regions.

From an environmental communication perspective, social media is a cultural arena that mediates how the public forms perceptions about the urgency of the ecological crisis (Hansen, 2019). TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram are not only mediums for disseminating information, but also spaces where audiences respond, evaluate, and participate in environmental discourse (Roshandel Arbatani et al., 2016; Seyfi et al., 2023; Tran, 2025). Platforms such as TikTok provide the structural conditions that enable environmental content to go viral and trigger rapid public participation (Abbas et al., 2022). Citizen posts can transform local issues into national or global issues, increasing pressure on governments and stakeholders. Research shows that digital narratives that combine personal experiences, visual data, and local cultural values can significantly increase ecological awareness (Amangeldi et al., 2024; Zamaletdinova & Gayazova, 2025). It is in this context that Pandawara has successfully leveraged the reach of social media to bridge the gap between the ecological experiences of local communities and broader public attention.

The use of before-and-after visuals in Pandawara content is an effective representation strategy. Visualising drastic changes creates the impression that concrete collective action can have a significant impact in a short period of time. Research shows that visual content with high emotional intensity and direct calls to action effectively increases public participation in pro-environmental actions (Pang, 2018; Peiró-Signes et al., 2025). This finding is reinforced by evidence that visual representations play a central role in shaping public opinion on environmental risks, particularly when extreme imagery evokes heightened emotional response and a sense of urgency (Altinay & Williams, 2019; Salazar et al., 2022). For example, the narrative '1.000 people needed in Lampung' not only conveys information but also creates an emotional experience that drives solidarity.

The call to action not only went viral but also emphasised that collaboration can bring about real change.

However, critical analysis shows that there is a risk of depoliticisation in social media-based environmental narratives. When all parties are placed in the same position of shared responsibility, structural root causes such as weak waste management policies, the dominance of the single-use plastics industry, and inequalities in access to public services can be obscured (Lartigue et al., 2021). This concept of environmental issue homogenisation is reinforced by environmental justice analysis, which asserts that the distribution of ecological risks is never equal, but rather places a greater burden on vulnerable groups (Agyeman et al., 2016). Pandawara emphasises narratives of togetherness and solidarity, but these narratives have the potential to obscure the fact that the pollution they highlight is often a consequence of structural injustice, for example, in coastal communities that are directly affected by poor waste management policies.

This risk of homogenisation is also evident in the strategy of using terms such as 'dirtiest beach', which aims to create a shock effect to attract public attention. Such shock effects are indeed effective in increasing the visibility of issues. Still, they can also trigger social and political resistance, especially from local governments who feel that their region has been humiliated. This phenomenon highlights the limitations of framing that emphasises sensationalism over a deep understanding of the root causes of the problem. Thus, the tension between the need to viralise an issue and the need to maintain social sensitivity presents a challenge for contemporary environmental communication.

On the other hand, Pandawara's success in mobilising thousands of volunteers demonstrates a phenomenon known in theory as digital ecological citizenship, which is a form of ecological citizenship in which social media becomes a platform for organising place-based environmental resistance against dominant development narratives and constructing collective identity around environmental defence (Alam, 2020). This pattern of offline mobilisation catalysed through online campaigns reflects a form of connective action, a mode of participation that does not require a formal organisational structure but is made possible by digital technology that mediates coordination and collective identity (Gonzalez-Mohino et al., 2023). This concept explains how citizens can actively engage in global environmental advocacy even though the issues being addressed are local in nature. Through the lens of social constructivism (Seyfi et al., 2023), it can be understood that Pandawara's environmental narrative is shaped by the interaction between personal experiences, a culture of cooperation, and algorithmic distribution logic. This is consistent with Jiang et al.'s findings on how power relations in networked societies shift from centralised authority to social pressure dynamics emerging from digital spaces (Jiang et al., 2025).

However, the success of Pandawara should not be interpreted simplistically. When everyone is positioned as an actor with equal ecological responsibility, this has the potential to obscure the structures of inequality that are at the root of the problem. The single-use plastics industry, weak enforcement of environmental laws, and inadequate waste management infrastructure are structural factors that play a far more significant role (Bansal et al., 2024). Without criticism of these factors, environmental campaigns risk falling into individualistic moralism that only encourages small actions such as 'do not litter' without advocating for more fundamental policy changes.

In the context of local politics, the government's resistance to negative labels such as 'dirtiest beach' shows that environmental communication is always intertwined with identity politics and regional image. Environmental narratives do not only talk about

waste or pollution but also touch on the collective pride of a region (Luedecke & T. Boykoff, 2017). When Pandawara highlights the poor condition of a region, the government sees it not only as environmental criticism, but also as a threat to its political legitimacy and governance credibility (Kim & Cooke, 2018). Thus, environmental action becomes a political act that can disrupt the stability of the local government's image, triggering a defensive response.

Pandawara's credibility is reinforced by their social identity, which is closely aligned with the younger generation. Studies show that perceptions of authenticity, honesty, and emotional closeness are central factors in the effectiveness of environmental campaigns (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2024; Leggett & Davies, 2025; Limpah & Ferdianto, 2025; Okuah et al., 2019; Orzan, 2025; Saleh, 2024; Samadi & Colaco, 2024). This is consistent with evidence that Generation Z's exposure to sustainability-oriented social media content is a strong antecedent of their own advocacy behaviour, making young audiences more likely to actively promote environmental causes online (Confetto et al., 2023). Pandawara presents itself as part of a community directly involved in the action, not as distant celebrities. This self-representation creates trustworthiness that makes their message widely accepted. However, visual-based campaigns and virality carry the risk of public fatigue and volatility of attention (Deb et al., 2023). Therefore, the sustainability of environmental messages requires long-term strategies that go beyond viral content.

As is characteristic of digital social movements in general, Pandawara activism exhibits hybridity: combining online activities that utilise social media algorithms with offline activities such as cleaning up locations. This pattern is in line with the FridaysForFuture movement, which uses digital networks as a means of coordinating and amplifying environmental issues (Scherman et al., 2022; Terren & Soler-i-Martí, 2021). Instagram and TikTok serve as affective spaces that enable the formation of emotional closeness, a sense of belonging, and the actualisation of an environmentally friendly lifestyle (San Cornelio et al., 2024a, 2024b). This informal and relatable communication style further increases public engagement and involvement in social campaigns (San Cornelio et al., 2024b). Platform-specific analysis of TikTok content further shows that the type of message and social actor involved shapes the level of audience engagement with environmental posts (Dubey et al., 2025). Through comment, duet, and stitch features, the public can experience the field directly, thereby increasing their self-efficacy to get involved in the action. Research shows that environmental conversations on social media tend to be more pro-environment and less polarized (Dubey et al., 2024), making it a communicative ecosystem conducive to the development of environmental movements such as Pandawara.

However, the logic of virality that underpins social media also encourages a process of simplification that can obscure the complexity of issues. Issues that are not easily visualised or lack dramatic elements are likely to receive less attention, even if they are highly urgent (Jalli, 2025). This is reinforced by evidence that TikTok's algorithm creates new discursive spaces for environmental issues, particularly among younger audiences (Sun et al., 2024). Algorithmic curation further reinforces this pattern by systematically privileging content that is visually striking or emotionally charged, thereby framing which aspects of the climate crisis gain visibility online (Loupessis & Intahchomphoo, 2025). This makes digital activism prone to what is known as selective environmentalism, which is the tendency to only highlight issues that are easy to viralise and respond to emotionally, while other structural issues are marginalised.

Ethically, Pandawara's narrative faces various challenges. Accusations of embarrassing the local government show that spatial representation cannot be separated from power relations and moral responsibility. Digital activism requires moral legitimacy through the presentation of accurate data, framing that is sensitive to the local context, and collaborative calls that do not stigmatise certain parties. As an environmental influencer, Pandawara must maintain transparency, especially in potential paid collaborations, so as not to raise suspicions of covert promotional bias (Fernández-Gómez & Quintas-Fraufe, 2025; Rosário & Boechat, 2024). Authenticity is a crucial element because inauthentic messages can cause distrust and obscure the ecological values being promoted. Furthermore, performative activism is a threat that needs to be anticipated when campaigns only highlight awareness without producing real behavioural change (Sousa et al., 2025).

Another ethical dimension relates to the potential contradiction between environmental messages and content production practices. Digital content production has its own carbon footprint, whether using devices, servers, or the energy consumption of digital platforms (Fernández-Gómez & Quintas-Fraufe, 2025). Awareness of this paradox is important so that environmental campaigns do not fall into ethical inconsistency. Furthermore, excessive environmental narratives can trigger eco-anxiety, particularly among younger generations (Rosário & Boechat, 2024), which may ultimately reduce their interest in engaging in concrete actions.

In the context of the movement's development, Pandawara needs to move towards more structured and institutionalised advocacy so that the impact it has does not depend solely on virality. This transformation can be achieved through strategic partnerships with the government, the private sector, educational institutions and civil society organisations (Ermolaeva et al., 2020). If, in the early stages of the movement, they were an expression of moral solidarity, the next stage must lead to the formation of an environmental advocacy network that has the political power to influence policy. Thus, Pandawara's activism can evolve from merely responding to environmental conditions to systemic transformation efforts in national environmental governance.

Although this analysis provides an in-depth understanding of the construction of environmental discourse in Pandawara's digital narrative, this study has limitations that need to be considered as an academic reflection. This study focuses on critical discourse analysis and therefore does not include quantitative approaches, such as social network analysis (SNA) or sentiment analysis, which could strengthen our understanding of interaction patterns, audience clusters, or the dynamics of digital conversations surrounding the issues raised by Pandawara. Thus, the description of the environmental communication ecosystem in the digital space is still qualitative and focused on structure and representation, rather than on the intensity or connectivity patterns of public participation. Another limitation is the lack of comparative analysis with other digital environmental movements in Indonesia or globally, so that the research findings cannot yet be directly positioned within the broader literature on digital environmental activism (Baran & Stoltenberg, 2023).

Furthermore, this study has not explored in depth how the public interprets Pandawara's messages in their daily lives, including the possibility of resistance, misinterpretation, or digital fatigue towards intense environmental campaigns. Without data on public reception, the analysis of message effectiveness and communication impact can only be concluded based on surface-level indicators of participation, such as the number of volunteers or the virality of content. Furthermore, although the analysis

has discussed the risks of depoliticisation and homogenisation of environmental issues, this study has not empirically evaluated how Pandawara's narrative influences public understanding of the structural roots of environmental problems. This limitation is important because without an evaluation of long-term effects, it is difficult to determine the extent to which this digital narrative drives systemic change or only produces a momentary mobilisation effect.

Finally, this research was conducted in a specific time frame when the Pandawara issue was at the peak of public attention. The rapidly changing dynamics of social media mean that the validity of the findings is highly dependent on the temporal context. Changes in algorithms, shifts in audience preferences, and the emergence of new issues can alter the way Pandawara produces content or influence the way the public responds to their messages. Therefore, generalising the findings for the long term must be done with caution.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Pandawara Group's digital activism effectively demonstrates how environmental influencers construct discourse and mobilise public participation through social media, where a problem-action-impact narrative structure, combined with participatory diction and before-after visualisation, frames local waste issues as an urgent glocal ecological crisis while exposing the tension between moral solidarity and structural inequality in environmental governance. Theoretically, these findings extend Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis framework by showing how macrostructure, superstructure, and microstrategy interact within networked media spaces to shape power relations, representation, and legitimacy, thereby enriching the study of digital environmental communication, environmental justice, and ecological citizenship. Practically, the findings recommend that environmental campaigns should not rely solely on virality and moral appeals, but should also be linked to policy advocacy, institutional collaboration, and the strengthening of community governance, so that the benefits of digital mobilisation reach broader society rather than remaining confined to symbolic online participation. Future research is recommended to pursue cross-platform comparative studies, audience reception analysis, and mixed approaches combining discourse analysis with digital ethnography or network analysis, particularly to examine the long-term impact of such movements on behavioural change and policy response.

Authors' Contributions and Responsibilities

Both authors were involved in the conception and design of this research. All authors participated in the data analysis and interpretation, contributed to the discussion of the findings, and took full responsibility for the content of the manuscript. The final version has been read and approved by both authors.

Conflict of Interest

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial, personal, or other relationships with other people or organisations related to the material discussed in the manuscript.

Generative AI Statement

The authors used Claude (Anthropic) to assist with manuscript drafting and revision, structural reorganisation, and reference identification and verification during the

preparation of this article. All outputs were reviewed and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content, analysis, and conclusion. The language quality of the final manuscript was independently verified through a professional English Language Editing service, in accordance with the journal's requirements.

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