

Digital Communication Strategy of the Youth Social Movement

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examined youth digital activism practices on Instagram within a community-based environmental campaign, exploring how digital activism functions as both an information dissemination tool and a participatory communication practice that fosters environmental awareness, engagement, and collective action. Instagram was chosen as the research focus because it served as the campaign's primary platform for content dissemination, audience interaction, and visual storytelling, showing consistent activity and strong youth engagement throughout 2024.

Methods: Using an interpretive qualitative approach, data were collected through systematic observation of environmental campaign content on the Instagram account @trashranger.id during 2024, along with in-depth interviews. Key informants included campaign initiators and content managers; supporting informants were active youth followers engaged in online and offline activities; and expert informants comprised scholars in environmental communication and digital media studies. Data were analysed using Philip Lesly's communication planning model and Tracy's interpretive communication perspective.

Findings: Digital activism unfolded through structured stages--issue identification, communication policy formulation, program planning, message implementation, and evaluation based on audience responses. These practices facilitated a gradual process of youth engagement, moving from digital awareness toward discussion and tangible environmental action.

Originality: This study extends Middleton's communication strategy framework, as discussed by Cangara, to youth digital activism and environmental communication on Instagram. It develops a conceptual understanding of how communicator, message, media, audience, and effect operate within community-based digital activism, demonstrating how a communication strategy framework can explain the relationship between strategic communication practices, youth engagement, and participation in environmental activities within a digital media environment.

Keywords: Digital Communication Strategy, Youth Social Movement, Environmental Communication, Instagram.

Introduction

Environmental issues have become increasingly intertwined with the communication practices of contemporary youth, particularly through the growing use of digital and social media platforms. Environmental problems such as waste accumulation, pollution, and unsustainable consumption require not only technological and policy-based responses but also communication strategies capable of encouraging public awareness and participation. In this context, communication plays an important role in transforming environmental issues from abstract or distant concerns into issues that can be understood, discussed, and acted upon by communities. The development of digital media has further expanded the possibilities for environmental communication because information can be distributed rapidly, visual narratives can be presented attractively, and audiences can

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directly interact with organizations and social movements (Laksana & Abduh, 2023). Consequently, environmental communication is no longer limited to conventional campaigns, public meetings, or mass media but has increasingly developed through participatory digital environments.

Social media has become an important communication environment for young people because it enables users not only to receive information but also to participate in discussions, share messages, produce content, and become part of social causes. Research on youth environmental activism demonstrates that social media use is positively associated with participation in environmental issues, although the strength of this relationship may vary according to the stage and characteristics of a movement (Scherman et al., 2022). Similarly, (Boulianne & Ohme, 2022) found that social media plays a consistent role in youth environmental activism across several countries, while environmental concern alone does not necessarily translate directly into environmental action. These findings indicate that the presence of environmental information on social media is insufficient by itself. Communication needs to be strategically designed to connect environmental concerns with audience motivation, interaction, and participation.

The strategic dimension of communication becomes particularly important when environmental movements seek to involve young audiences. A communication strategy does not merely concern the dissemination of information but involves decisions regarding who communicates, what is communicated, which medium is used, to whom the communication is directed, and what effects are expected. Middleton, as cited in (Ahmad & Setyawati, 2024), conceptualizes communication strategy as the optimal combination of communication elements consisting of the communicator, message, channel or media, receiver, and effect to achieve communication objectives. This perspective positions communication strategy as an integrated process rather than as an isolated activity of message production. Accordingly, examining environmental communication through the elements of communicator, message, media, audience, and effect makes it possible to understand how a social movement organizes its communication practices to achieve particular forms of audience engagement (Abioye, 2026).

The communicator constitutes an important element because the credibility, identity, and positioning of the communication source can influence how environmental messages are received by audiences. In a digital environment, the communicator is not necessarily limited to an individual spokesperson. (Barbas & Tréré, 2024) suggest that a social movement, community, organization, or digital account can function as a collective communicator that constructs its identity through repeated communication practices. Environmental communication research has shown that social media activists can develop networked forms of collective action through personal narratives, visual communication, and community-oriented practices (Greijdanus et al., 2020). This development changes the traditional understanding of environmental advocacy because communication is increasingly constructed through continuous interaction between movement actors and their audiences rather than through one-way dissemination (Simões & Campos, 2016).

The message is another central component of digital communication strategy. Environmental issues often involve complex scientific, social, economic, and behavioral dimensions. Therefore, environmental messages must be communicated in ways that are understandable and relevant to the intended audience. Social media provides opportunities for environmental movements to transform complex issues into visual stories, educational content, campaign messages, calls for participation, and

representations of collective action (Bergstrand & Whitham, 2022). Instagram is particularly relevant in this regard because its communication environment is strongly oriented toward visual content, allowing environmental actors to combine photographs, videos, captions, graphics, short-form videos, and interactive features. Recent research on Indonesian youth environmental activism demonstrates that Instagram Reels can facilitate environmental mobilization when content combines problem-oriented narratives, calls for community participation, emotional imagery, and visual storytelling (Febriana & Rosmilawati, 2024). This suggests that message strategy is closely connected to how environmental problems are framed and how audiences are invited to respond.

The media element is also increasingly significant because the characteristics of a digital platform influence how communication is produced, distributed, and interacted with. Instagram is not merely a technological channel for transmitting environmental information. It provides an interactive communication environment in which audiences can comment, share, respond, create user-generated content, and participate in digitally mediated communities. In this environment, communication becomes potentially multidirectional and participatory. Environmental campaigns can therefore use the platform not only to disseminate information but also to construct relationships with audiences and encourage forms of participation that may extend beyond the digital environment. Previous research supports the importance of social media as a communication environment for youth environmental engagement. (Scherman et al., 2022), for example, found a positive relationship between social media use and participation in environmental issues among young people in Chile, while (Boulianne & Ohme, 2022) demonstrated that online social networks are an important component of the mobilization process among young people across different national contexts. These studies indicate that digital media can contribute to environmental participation, but they also demonstrate that the relationship between communication and action is not automatic. Environmental concern, exposure to information, and social media use need to be connected with communication processes capable of motivating audiences toward particular forms of participation.

The distinction between online engagement and actual participation is particularly important in understanding environmental communication. Digital platforms make it relatively easy for users to interact with environmental content through likes, comments, shares, and other low-effort forms of engagement. However, these activities do not necessarily represent sustained participation in environmental movements. (Hersinta & Sofia, 2020), in their study of the SaveSharks Indonesia campaign, demonstrate that environmental social media activism may develop beyond online participation into offline forms of involvement, while also raising concerns about the possibility of superficial or 'slacktivist' participation. This distinction suggests that the effectiveness of environmental communication should not be understood only from the amount of digital interaction generated by a campaign. Instead, communication strategy needs to be examined in relation to how online communication can facilitate deeper forms of engagement and participation.

The audience element is therefore central to the analysis of digital communication strategy. Cortés-Ramos et al. (2021) explain that young people are not simply passive recipients of environmental information. They can function simultaneously as audiences, participants, content distributors, and contributors to social movements. Their participation can occur at different levels, ranging from consuming environmental information and interacting with campaign content to discussing environmental issues,

participating in community activities, and engaging in concrete environmental actions (Campos et al., 2018). Research on green influencers further demonstrates that engagement with sustainability-oriented social media personalities can be associated with both low-effort and high-effort environmental activism among young social media users (Knupfer et al., 2023). These findings reinforce the importance of examining how communication strategies create pathways from initial exposure to deeper audience involvement.

The effect element consequently provides an important dimension for assessing the strategic orientation of environmental communication. Within Middleton's framework, communication is ultimately directed toward achieving particular effects. In the context of youth environmental movements, these effects may involve increased environmental awareness, understanding of environmental issues, interaction with campaign content, willingness to discuss environmental problems, and participation in environmental activities (Wong, 2021). Therefore, the effect should not be narrowly interpreted as a short-term change in knowledge or attitude. It may also involve behavioral and participatory outcomes that indicate whether communication has succeeded in connecting digital interaction with social action.

Instagram provides an especially relevant context for examining this relationship because environmental movements can combine educational, persuasive, participatory, and visual communication practices within a single platform. Recent research on environmental communication on Instagram indicates that digital activism increasingly relies on personal and visual narratives and proactive communication practices to engage audiences in sustainability-related actions (San Cornelio et al., 2024a). Similarly, research on Greenpeace Indonesia's Global Climate Strike campaign demonstrates how Instagram can be used through sequential communication practices involving information dissemination, amplification of campaign messages, and audience engagement (Haugstad et al., 2021). These studies indicate that Instagram can serve as more than a channel for environmental information; it can become an important strategic space for constructing environmental narratives and mobilizing participation (Deumert & Mabandla, 2023).

Within the Indonesian context, the relationship between youth, social media, and environmental movements is increasingly relevant. Indonesian youth encounter environmental issues through digital platforms where environmental campaigns, community initiatives, and social movements communicate their causes. Research on Teens Go Green Indonesia, for example, shows that Instagram has been used as an important platform for disseminating information related to environmental activism among younger audiences (Prastika et al., 2023). More recent research on Indonesian environmental campaigns also indicates that visual storytelling and participatory content can contribute to digital engagement and encourage offline environmental initiatives (Febriana & Rosmilawati, 2024). These studies demonstrate that Indonesian environmental communication has increasingly incorporated social media into its mobilization practices. However, existing studies tend to focus on specific aspects of environmental activism, such as digital engagement, visual storytelling, online mobilization, environmental identity, or the relationship between social media use and participation as presented by Irannejad Bisafar et al. (2020). For example, studies of youth environmental activism have examined the association between social media and participation (Scherman et al., 2022), while other studies have examined the influence of green influencers on environmental activism (Knupfer et al., 2023) or the role of

Instagram narratives in constructing environmental identities and mobilizing audiences (San Cornelio et al., 2024b). Research on Indonesian environmental campaigns has similarly examined specific campaigns or organizations, including Greenpeace Indonesia and environmental youth communities (Laoera, 2023; Prastika et al., 2023). Although these studies provide important insights, there remains a need to examine environmental social movements through an integrated communication strategy framework that simultaneously considers the communicator, message, media, audience, and effect.

This research addresses that gap by examining the digital communication strategy of the youth social movement @trashranger.id. The study focuses on how communication is organized through five interconnected elements: communicator, message, media, audience, and effect. The communicator is examined through the role of Trash Ranger Indonesia as the initiator and manager of environmental communication. The message element focuses on environmental education, waste-related campaigns, and calls for participation. The media element focuses on Instagram as the primary digital communication platform. The audience element examines young people as the intended communication audience, while the effect element focuses on youth engagement and participation in environmental activities.

The selection of @trashranger.id as the research focus is relevant because youth-oriented environmental movements operate within a communication environment in which environmental messages must compete with diverse forms of digital content. The movement's communication practices therefore need to be understood not only in terms of what environmental information is presented but also in terms of how communication is strategically structured to attract attention, establish relevance, encourage interaction, and potentially translate digital engagement into participation. This perspective is important because the effectiveness of environmental communication cannot be separated from the relationship between the communicator, message, media, audience, and expected effects (Earl et al., 2017).

The study also responds to an important conceptual issue in contemporary environmental communication: the relationship between digital communication and collective participation. Digital platforms can expand the reach of environmental campaigns, but reach alone does not necessarily generate meaningful participation. Research has shown that social media may facilitate environmental activism, but its effects depend on contextual factors and the stage of mobilization (Scherman et al., 2022). Likewise, environmental concern does not automatically result in activism, making the communication process between concern and participation an important area of investigation (Boulianne & Ohme, 2022). Therefore, analyzing the communication strategy behind a youth environmental movement can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how digital communication is organized to support participation.

From a theoretical perspective, the use of Middleton's communication strategy framework, as presented by (San Cornelio et al., 2024b), provides an integrated analytical structure for examining this process. Rather than treating communicator, message, media, audience, and effect as separate variables, the framework allows them to be understood as interconnected components of a communication strategy. The communicator influences how messages are constructed; messages are adapted to the characteristics of the selected media; media characteristics shape audience interaction; and audience responses provide an indication of communication effects (Ilten & McInerney, 2019). Applying this framework to a youth environmental movement on Instagram therefore enables the study to examine how these elements operate within a contemporary digital

communication environment.

The theoretical relevance of this study lies in extending the application of a communication strategy framework to a community-based youth environmental movement operating primarily through social media (Hopke & Paris, 2021). Existing studies have demonstrated the role of Instagram and other social media platforms in environmental activism, but there is still room to examine these practices systematically through the integrated elements of communication strategy. The present study therefore does not position Instagram merely as a technological platform or digital activism space. Instead, Instagram is treated as part of a broader communication strategy in which the communicator, message, media, audience, and effects are interconnected in the process of encouraging environmental participation.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the digital communication strategy implemented by the youth social movement @trashranger.id in communicating environmental issues through Instagram. Specifically, the study examines how Trash Ranger Indonesia functions as a communicator, how environmental education and waste-related messages are constructed, how Instagram is utilized as a communication medium, how young audiences are engaged, and how communication contributes to youth involvement and participation in environmental activities. By focusing on these interconnected elements, the study seeks to provide a theoretically grounded understanding of how youth environmental movements organize digital communication to support public engagement and environmental participation.

Ultimately, the study is expected to contribute to the development of environmental communication and digital communication strategy scholarship by demonstrating the relevance of Middleton's communication strategy framework in analyzing contemporary youth social movements in digital environments. The study also seeks to provide a conceptual basis for understanding digital environmental communication not merely as a process of disseminating information but as an integrated strategic practice that connects communicators, messages, media, audiences, and communication effects. In this way, the research positions @trashranger.id as a relevant case for understanding how strategic communication operates within youth-oriented environmental movements and how digital communication can be organized to encourage meaningful environmental engagement and participation.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using a constructivist–interpretive paradigm to examine digital activism as a meaning-making communication practice shaped by actors, values, and interactional processes (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). A case study design was applied to allow an in-depth analysis of community-based environmental digital activism within its real-life context. Instagram was selected as the research site because it represents a dominant platform for youth communication and environmental campaigning, offering visual, narrative, and interactive affordances that are central to digital activism practices. The Instagram account @trashranger.id was chosen as the case unit due to its consistent and sustained use of digital campaigns throughout 2024, which reflected a mature phase of activism characterized by stable communication strategies, continuous audience engagement, and the integration of online messaging with offline environmental actions. The 2024 timeframe was methodologically significant because it provided sufficient and coherent data to observe patterns of message construction, participation appeals, and campaign continuity over time.

Data were collected through non-participant online observation and semi-structured interviews. The primary data consisted of environmental campaign content published on @trashranger.id during 2024, including visual posts, captions, hashtags, and participation appeals, which were purposively selected based on their relevance to environmental education, ecological concern, and collective action narratives. Interviews were conducted to contextualize and deepen the interpretation of content data. Key informants included campaign initiators and content managers responsible for planning and producing digital campaigns; supporting informants consisted of active youth followers who engaged in both online interactions and offline activities; and expert informants comprised scholars in environmental communication and digital media studies. Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures (Braun et al., 2022), focusing on identifying communication strategies, narrative patterns, and modes of participation. Interview data were used to support and clarify interpretations rather than to replace content analysis, ensuring methodological coherence and analytical focus.

Results

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital activism was implemented as an integrated and continuous communication practice through Instagram, functioning as the primary medium for environmental campaigning, audience interaction, and youth mobilization. The empirical data were derived from systematic observation of environmental campaign content published on the Instagram account @trashranger.id throughout 2024 and were contextualized through interviews with informants. Key informants consisted of campaign initiators and content managers who were directly responsible for planning and producing campaign messages. Supporting informants were active youth followers who engaged in online interactions and participated in offline environmental activities, while expert informants included scholars with expertise in environmental communication and digital media studies. This combination of data sources enabled a comprehensive understanding of digital activism as both a communicative and social process.

The analysis indicates that Instagram was strategically utilized to construct environmental messages that were educational, persuasive, and participatory. Fullam (2017) suggests that visual elements, narrative captions, hashtags, and calls to action were employed to build awareness, encourage reflection, and stimulate involvement in community-based environmental initiatives. Observational data revealed that Instagram functioned not merely as a dissemination channel but as a communicative space for issue articulation, identity construction, and action mobilization. This pattern was reinforced by informant explanations indicating that digital content was deliberately designed to connect environmental issues with the lived experiences of young audiences, thereby increasing message relevance and engagement.

The findings further show that digital activism practices followed a structured communication strategy consistent with Philip Lesly's communication planning model. Campaign content reflected an initial stage of issue analysis, in which environmental topics were selected based on their relevance to current social, political, and ecological contexts. Issues such as waste management, climate justice, renewable energy transition, and community participation were framed within local and national contexts to enhance audience proximity. For example, campaign posts addressing the issue of a just energy transition contextualized national policy targets within local developments, enabling audiences to understand abstract environmental goals through concrete regional cases.

Figure 1 illustrates how environmental issues were framed through visual and textual elements to emphasize contextual relevance and social implications.

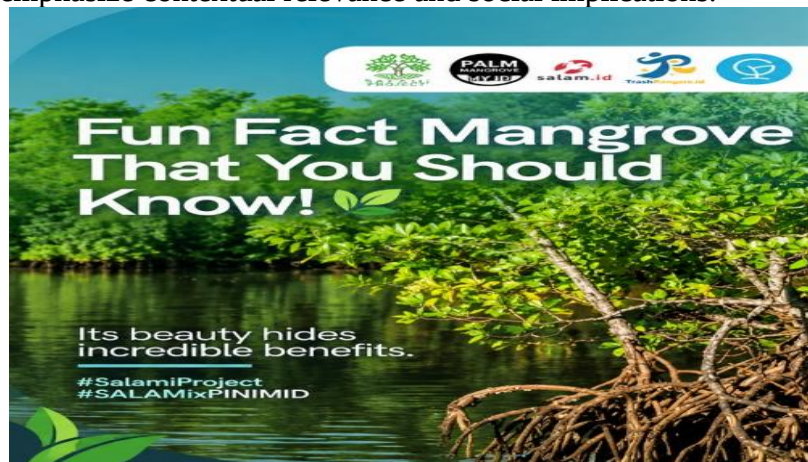


Figure 1. Visual representation of environmental issue framing in digital campaign content on just energy transition

(source: <https://www.instagram.com/trashranger.id/?hl=en>)

The formulation of communication policy was reflected in the consistent emphasis on inclusivity, environmental justice, and participatory engagement across campaign content. The narratives avoided moralistic or patronizing tones and instead invited audiences to perceive themselves as part of collective environmental solutions. Interview data, integrated with content analysis, indicated that this approach was intended to foster emotional connection and a sense of shared responsibility. Collaboration with external communities and organizations was also embedded within communication practices to enhance message credibility and broaden audience reach, demonstrating that digital activism was positioned as a collective rather than individual endeavor.

Programmatic planning was evident in the way environmental issues were translated into interconnected content series and campaign activities. Observational findings showed that posts were not presented as isolated messages but as part of sustained thematic narratives targeting young audiences, particularly Generation Z. Language style, visual aesthetics, and storytelling techniques were adapted to digital culture while maintaining substantive environmental messages. Informant accounts supported these observations by explaining that content planning emphasized narrative continuity and cross-sector collaboration to strengthen campaign coherence and impact. This planning process enabled digital activism to function as an ongoing communicative engagement rather than a series of disconnected messages.

During the implementation stage, campaign communication was carried out through a combination of static images, carousel posts, narrative captions, reflective prompts, and informational content related to environmental programs. The content linked environmental problems to everyday experiences, thereby reducing the distance between abstract ecological issues and audience realities. Campaigns addressing mangrove conservation, for instance, combined explanations of ecological functions with social impacts on coastal communities. Figure 2 presents an example of campaign implementation that integrated environmental education with community participation narratives.

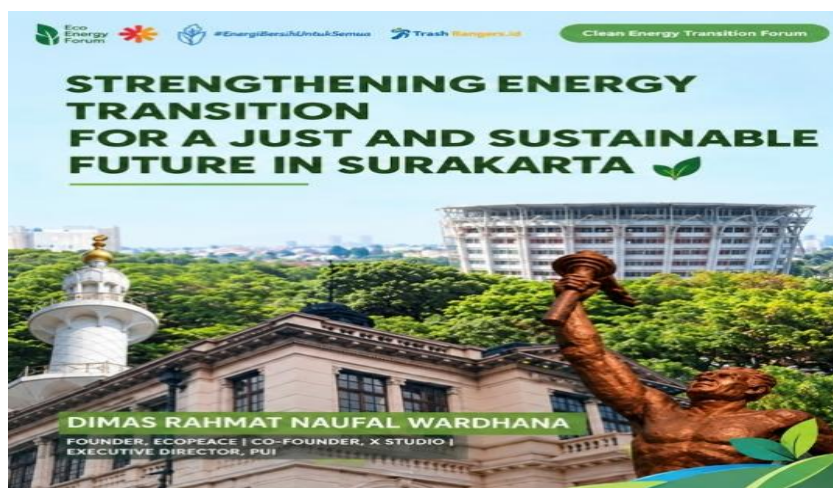


Figure 2. Implementation of environmental campaign communication on mangrove conservation (source: <https://www.instagram.com/trashranger.id/?hl=en>)

Audience interaction emerged as an integral component of the communication process. Observational data showed that responses in comment sections, direct messages, and participation in promoted activities were treated as part of ongoing dialogue rather than passive feedback. Informant explanations indicated that audience responses were continuously monitored to assess message relevance and resonance. Evaluation practices focused on qualitative indicators such as audience engagement, interpretive responses, and participation in offline activities rather than solely on quantitative metrics. Expert informants emphasized that in the context of digital activism, emotional engagement and social participation constituted meaningful indicators of communicative effectiveness.

The findings also reveal distinct patterns of youth participation facilitated through digital activism. Engagement was observed to develop gradually, beginning with exposure to educational content, followed by involvement in discussions and capacity-building activities such as webinars, and culminating in participation in offline environmental actions. Content that connected global environmental issues to local contexts was particularly effective in stimulating discussion and critical reflection among young audiences as suggested by Mariita (2025) in the context of Kenyan people. Figure 3 illustrates participation-oriented campaign communication that encouraged audiences to move beyond symbolic interaction toward active involvement.



Figure 3. Participation-based environmental campaign communication encouraging youth engagement (source: <https://www.instagram.com/trashranger.id/?hl=en>)

Digital activism practices further contributed to the formation of collective identity among participating youth. Consistent narratives positioned young people as agents of change, emphasizing values of care, learning, and collective action. Visual representations and shared experiences documented through campaign content reinforced this identity, enabling participants to perceive themselves as part of a broader environmental community rather than as isolated social media users. Informant interpretations indicated that participation in both online and offline activities strengthened feelings of belonging and collective commitment.

Finally, the results demonstrate a clear transition from digital awareness to tangible social action. Digital content functioned as an entry point for awareness-building, which then evolved into discussion, skill development, and real-world engagement. Actions were framed as accessible and scalable, ranging from individual behavioral changes to collective community initiatives. This approach emphasized that meaningful environmental action does not necessarily require large-scale mobilization but can be realized through sustained, locally grounded practices. Overall, the findings indicate that digital activism, when strategically managed through participatory communication practices, can facilitate the transformation of youth engagement from symbolic online interaction into sustained collective environmental action.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the digital communication strategy implemented by @trashranger.id cannot be understood merely as the dissemination of environmental information through Instagram. Rather, the findings demonstrate that communication functions as an organized process that connects the communicator, message, media, audience, and intended effects. This finding is consistent with recent research showing that social media has become an important environment for environmental communication in which activists combine informational, visual, and participatory practices to engage audiences in environmental issues ([San Cornelio et al., 2024b](#)). In the context of youth environmental movements, digital communication therefore provides opportunities to connect environmental awareness with forms of audience participation.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to the discussion of digital participation by demonstrating that online engagement should not automatically be interpreted as superficial participation. Previous research on youth environmental activism has shown that social media use can be positively associated with participation in environmental issues, although the relationship may vary according to the stage and context of a movement ([Scherman et al., 2022](#)). The findings of this study similarly indicate that activities such as viewing, responding to, sharing, and interacting with environmental content can become part of a broader communication process when they are connected to opportunities for participation. Thus, digital engagement should be examined in relation to the communication strategy that surrounds it rather than being evaluated solely through visible interaction metrics.

The findings also demonstrate the relevance of Middleton's communication strategy framework, as discussed by Cangara, for analyzing digital communication practices within a youth environmental movement. The framework emphasizes the interconnected elements of communicator, message, media, audience, and effect. In this study, Trash Ranger Indonesia functions as the communicator responsible for managing environmental communication; environmental education, waste-related campaigns, and

calls for participation constitute the central messages; Instagram functions as the primary communication medium; young people represent the target audience; and youth engagement and participation in environmental activities constitute the intended communication effects. This integrated perspective provides a systematic way of understanding how digital communication is strategically organized within a community-based environmental movement.

The communicator element is important because environmental communication on social media is influenced by how a movement presents its identity, purpose, and credibility. Research on environmental activists on Instagram has demonstrated that digital environmental communication increasingly involves personal and collective narratives through which activists construct relationships with their audiences and communities (San Cornelio et al., 2024b). Similarly, research on Indonesian environmental activism shows that social media can be used by environmental actors to construct networks, communicate environmental concerns, and expand public engagement (Laoera, 2023). In the case of @trashranger.id, the communicator element is therefore not limited to the production of content but involves the movement's role in establishing environmental messages and creating opportunities for youth participation.

The message element further demonstrates that environmental communication requires more than simply presenting information about environmental problems. The findings indicate that environmental education, waste-related campaigns, and calls for participation are interconnected within the communication practices of @trashranger.id. This finding is consistent with research on Instagram-based environmental activism showing that visual and narrative strategies can transform environmental problems into accessible and actionable messages (San Cornelio et al., 2024b). Research on Indonesian youth environmental activism also found that problem-oriented narratives, emotional imagery, and representations of community participation can strengthen digital engagement and encourage offline environmental activities (Febriana & Rosmilawati, 2024). Thus, the effectiveness of environmental messages is related not only to the information conveyed but also to how the message provides meaning and pathways for audience participation.

Instagram functions as more than a technological channel in this communication process. Its visual and interactive features create an environment in which environmental messages can be presented, circulated, interpreted, and responded to by audiences. Previous research on Greenpeace Indonesia's Global Climate Strike campaign demonstrates that Instagram can support environmental activism through communication practices involving information dissemination, message amplification, and audience engagement (Aminulloh et al., 2024). Likewise, research on Indonesian youth environmental communities has shown that Instagram can function as a medium for environmental activism directed toward younger audiences (Prastika et al., 2023). These findings support the interpretation that Instagram should be viewed as a strategic communication environment rather than merely a passive distribution channel.

The audience element is particularly significant because young people are not positioned solely as recipients of environmental information. They may simultaneously function as viewers, participants, message amplifiers, and members of an environmental community. Previous research demonstrates that young people have increasingly incorporated social media into their environmental activism and participatory practices (Scherman et al., 2022). The present study extends this understanding by showing how audience engagement can be considered within an integrated communication strategy in

which the communicator deliberately constructs messages and uses Instagram to create opportunities for youth involvement. The effect element provides a further explanation of how communication strategy is connected to participation. The findings indicate that communication can facilitate a progression from environmental awareness and interaction toward participation in environmental activities. This interpretation is supported by research demonstrating that social media can contribute to environmental mobilization when digital content provides narratives, emotional appeals, and opportunities for community participation (Febriana & Rosmilawati, 2024). However, the relationship between social media communication and environmental action should not be understood as automatic (Scherman et al., 2022) demonstrate that the relationship between social media use and environmental participation can change according to the stage of activism. Therefore, the effect of communication should be understood as a process rather than as a direct and immediate causal outcome.

The findings also contribute to the discussion of collective identity in digital environmental movements. Recent research on youth digital activism in Indonesia demonstrates that interactive and inclusive communication practices can contribute to the formation of collective identity around environmental issues (Ahmad & Setyawati, 2024). Similarly, research on young environmental activists on Instagram shows that digital communication can construct identities around values such as collective action, ethics of care, climate optimism, and environmental responsibility (San Cornelio et al., 2024a). These findings provide support for understanding youth participation in environmental communication not only as an individual response to information (Sainz & Hanna, 2023), but also as a process through which individuals can recognize themselves as part of a broader environmental community (Daly, 2022).

An important theoretical implication of this study is therefore the application of Middleton's communication strategy framework to a contemporary digital environmental movement. Existing studies have examined environmental activism through concepts such as digital mobilization, visual storytelling, social media engagement, and environmental communication (Febriana & Rosmilawati, 2024; San Cornelio et al., 2024a). However, this study approaches the phenomenon through the interconnected elements of communicator, message, media, audience, and effect. The contribution lies not in claiming that Instagram itself represents a new form of environmental activism, but in demonstrating the analytical value of examining how the different components of communication strategy operate together within a youth-oriented environmental movement.

This perspective also strengthens the theoretical understanding of digital communication strategy by positioning audience participation as an outcome that is connected to the preceding communication elements. The communicator determines the strategic orientation of communication, messages provide the substantive and symbolic content, Instagram provides the communication environment, audiences interpret and respond to the messages, and the resulting effects can be observed through forms of engagement and participation. The five elements should therefore be interpreted as interconnected components rather than independent categories. This provides a theoretical basis for examining how community-based environmental movements organize communication within digital environments.

This study has several limitations and weaknesses that should be considered when interpreting its findings. *First*, the study focuses on a single case, namely @trashranger.id, which enables an in-depth examination of its digital communication strategy but limits

the transferability of the findings to other youth social movements, environmental organizations, or community-based campaigns. Environmental movements may differ in organizational structure, communication objectives, resources, audience characteristics, and forms of participation. Therefore, the communication strategy identified in this study should not be assumed to represent all youth environmental movements.

Second, the study focuses primarily on Instagram as the digital communication platform. This platform-specific focus limits the study's ability to explain how communication strategies may operate across platforms with different affordances and audience characteristics. Recent research demonstrates that Indonesian environmental movements also use platforms such as TikTok to reach younger audiences and facilitate environmental campaigning (Aminulloh et al., 2024). Consequently, communication practices identified on Instagram may not operate in the same manner on TikTok, X, YouTube, or other digital platforms. This is supported by the study from Fernández Planells (2016), Lievrouw & Loader (2020), and Saroj et al. (2026). *Third*, the qualitative nature of the study creates a potential limitation related to researcher interpretation. The analysis of communication content and interview data requires interpretive judgment, meaning that different researchers may emphasize different dimensions of the same communication practices. Although systematic observation, interviews, and theoretical analysis were used to strengthen the credibility of the findings, qualitative interpretation cannot completely eliminate researcher subjectivity.

Future studies could strengthen this area through multiple coders, intercoder comparison, or mixed-method designs combining qualitative interpretation with quantitative engagement data. *Fourth*, this study does not quantitatively establish a causal relationship between Instagram communication and changes in young people's environmental attitudes or behavior. The identification of youth engagement and participation as communication effects is based on qualitative evidence rather than experimental or longitudinal measurement.

Therefore, the findings should not be interpreted as demonstrating that Instagram communication directly causes environmental behavioral change. This limitation is important because previous research indicates that the relationship between social media use and environmental participation can be dynamic and dependent on contextual factors (Scherman et al., 2022). *Fifth*, the study examines communication practices within a particular period and therefore does not fully capture changes in platform algorithms, audience preferences, content trends, or organizational strategies over a longer period. Digital communication environments are highly dynamic, and changes in platform functionality may influence how environmental messages reach and engage audiences as suggested by Selander & Jarvenpaa (2016) and Melgaço & Monaghan (2018). Longitudinal research would therefore be useful for examining whether the communication strategy identified in this study remains consistent or changes in response to transformations in the digital environment.

These limitations do not invalidate the findings but define the scope within which they should be interpreted. Future research could address these weaknesses through comparative studies involving several environmental movements, cross-platform research, longitudinal observation, and mixed-method approaches. Such studies could further examine whether the five elements of Middleton's communication strategy framework operate similarly across different environmental movements, platforms, and audience groups.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that the digital communication strategy of @trashranger.id operates through the interconnected elements of communicator, message, media, audience, and effect. The findings suggest that digital communication can provide a strategic pathway through which environmental information is transformed into opportunities for youth engagement and participation. Rather than treating Instagram as merely a platform for disseminating environmental information, this study demonstrates its role as a strategic communication environment in which environmental messages are constructed, circulated, interpreted, and connected to participation. The theoretical contribution of the study lies in demonstrating the applicability of Middleton's communication strategy framework to the analysis of youth-oriented environmental communication in a digital context, while the limitations identified above provide directions for further theoretical and empirical development.

Conclusion

This study concludes that youth digital activism conducted through Instagram operates as a structured and value-oriented communication practice rather than merely a technology-driven activity. The findings demonstrate that digital activism, when managed through systematic communication planning, is capable of facilitating a gradual process of engagement that connects environmental awareness, collective identity formation, and participation in real social action. These results answer the research objectives by showing that communication strategies play a central role in transforming symbolic online engagement into sustained community-based environmental action. The implications of this study suggest that digital activism holds significant transformative potential for youth social movements when communication is dialogical, inclusive, and integrated with offline practices, thereby strengthening long-term engagement and commitment. This research also contributes theoretically by reinforcing the relevance of communication planning models and interpretive communication perspectives in explaining digital activism dynamics. Future studies are recommended to broaden the scope of analysis by examining multiple communities, comparing different social media platforms, and integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to further develop theoretical frameworks and assess the sustainability and broader social impact of youth digital activism.

Authors' Contributions and Responsibilities

Afifah Nurul Mardhiyyah contributed to the conception and design of the study, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and preparation of the original manuscript. Tita Melia Milyane contributed to the conceptual development of the study, methodological guidance, supervision, interpretation and discussion of the findings, as well as critical review and revision of the manuscript. Both authors contributed substantially to the development of the study, reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript, and take responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this study, including any financial, personal, or other relationships with individuals or organizations that could influence the research process or the interpretation of the findings.

Generative AI Statement

The authors used OpenAI (ChatGPT) as an AI-assisted tool during manuscript preparation to support language refinement, improve readability, and enhance the organization and clarity of the text. All AI-assisted outputs were critically reviewed, verified, and edited by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, interpretation, and final content of the manuscript.

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