From Street Protests to Digital Hashtags: The Repositioning of Indonesian Student Movement in 1998 and 2025 in Alan Touraine's Perspective

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Abstract. This article aims to analyze the repositioning of Indonesian student movements by comparing the 1998 reform movement with the 2025 digital student movement known through the hashtag *Indonesia Gelap* ("Dark Indonesia"). The discussion adopts Alain Touraine's theoretical framework, which includes four main components: collective identity, form of opposition, total vision for change, and strategies used. The 1998 student movement was a form of collective action emphasizing physical presence in public spaces through large-scale street demonstrations, with the primary demand being President Soeharto's resignation and a transition to a democratic system. Conversely, the 2025 student movement places greater emphasis on using social media to disseminate critical discourse toward the government, particularly on issues of transparency, social justice, and power inequality. This repositioning is examined through a qualitative literature study approach, analyzing both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data derives from social media and digital news, while secondary sources include scholarly journals, books, and academic studies. Several studies on student movements show a significant shift from conventional mobilization to social media-based activism, while retaining the core spirit of students as agents of social change. Despite differences in form and medium, both movements share a common essence of struggle. The similarity lies in their efforts to push for a more democratic, just, and participatory socio-political system.

Keywords: Alain Touraine', social movement theory, Indonesian student movement 1998, digital hashtag activism.

2 Introduction

Students are widely recognized as agents of change in national life. The dynamics of student movements in Indonesia have led to significant transformations in the country's social and political landscape. In 1998, students played a key role in overthrowing the authoritarian New Order regime. Their resistance to the government manifested in large-scale street demonstrations that gained wide media attention both domestically and internationally. Additionally, the Trisakti tragedy was a defining moment in the student protest movement. They made major demands to the government, particularly for total reform of the political system, including the resignation of President Soeharto.

By 2025, student protests re-emerged, although in different forms and with new strategies compared to the 1998 movement. Rather than relying solely on street demonstrations, students now utilize social media as a tool for mobilization and information dissemination. Hashtags like *Indonesia Gelap* became symbols of resistance against government policies perceived as harmful to the people, such as education budget cuts and controversial revisions to the Military Law. This digital activism demonstrates that students remain key actors in representing the voice of the people, albeit through different approaches than those of the past.

The shift in forms and strategies of student activism reflects the increasingly complex nature of social dynamics. This phenomenon can be analyzed using Alain Touraine's theory of new social movements. According to Touraine, social movements express the dominant conflicts within society and involve the struggle over control of meaning systems and collective identity. New social movements do not solely focus on economic or political issues but also on cultural and symbolic aspects that shape social structures.

Within Touraine's framework, the 1998 student movement can be understood as a struggle against authoritarian state domination that suppressed freedom and public participation. In contrast, the 2025 movement reflects new societal conflicts, emphasizing issues such as transparency, accountability, and civil rights. Students construct their identity and opposition to the government by using hashtags and social media as tools to promote their vision for change. The repositioning from street protests to digital hashtags shows how student movements have adapted to technological advances and shifts in socio-political interests.

This study aims to compare the characteristics of the 1998 and 2025 student movements, focusing on the transformation of tactics, identity, vision, and forms of resistance from physical protest to digital activism within the conceptual framework of Alain Touraine.

1.1   Alain Tourain's Social Movement Theory

Alain Touraine views social movements as collective struggles aimed at altering the course of history by controlling cultural and symbolic resources [Touraine, 2020]. Students, as social actors, play a crucial role in shaping meaning and directing social change. Touraine emphasizes the importance of the subject in social movements as an actor who is aware of their position and strives to challenge dominant structures. Social movements are forms of social action carried out by groups or organizations advocating for changes in society, usually focusing on social and political issues. They emerge as responses to perceived injustices and the desire to change existing policies. These movements can be understood as either organized or spontaneous collective processes aimed at promoting or resisting social, political, or economic change [Tilly & Wood, 2015].

According to [Castells, 2015], the stages of social movements include: 1) Emergence Stage: This is when awareness of a social issue begins to surface; 2) Coalescence Stage: At this stage, the movement grows and starts building networks with other organizations; 3) Action Stage: The movement develops a stronger structure and legal

recognition; and 4) Decline Stage: The movement's momentum begins to wane due to success, repression, cooptation, or stagnation.

Types of social movements are also classified based on the scope and target of change from *alternative movements* that target individual behavior to *transformative movements* aiming for systemic change. The core concepts in Alain Touraine's theory can be elaborated as follows: *First,* identity: In Touraine's theory, identity refers to a group's effort to define itself as a legitimate social actor advocating for transformation. In the context of the 1998 Indonesian student movement, collective identity was shaped by the awareness of the authoritarianism of the New Order regime and a shared goal among students. They referred to themselves as the "1998 Reform Generation". *Second*, opposition: This concept refers to the identification of the entity that the movement challenges. For the 1998 student movement, the opposition was President Soeharto and the New Order government which was viewed as authoritarian in exercising power.

Then, *third* totality: Totality refers to the envisioned social change that the movement aspires to and fights for. The 1998 student movement aimed for a complete overhaul of the state system, including the resignation of President Soeharto, a reconstruction of the political system, eradication of corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN), and strengthening of democratic institutions. And *fourth,* Strategy: refers to the methods used by the movement to achieve its goals. The 1998 movement's strategy included mass mobilization through street protests. They also built cross-sector alliances with human rights activists, religious leaders, and other social organizations to strengthen their movement. In summary, the 1998 movement focused on overthrowing an authoritarian regime, while the 2025 movement emphasizes policy transformation and accountability in the digital era. Thus, Touraine's theory effectively bridges the analysis of movements from two vastly different socio-technological eras.

1.2   The 1998 Indonesian Student Movement

In 1998, Indonesia's economic conditions deteriorated due to a severe economic crisis. The crisis sparked public dissatisfaction with the ruling government at the time. In several regions, massive demonstrations and riots led by students erupted, creating a highly unstable domestic situation. President Soeharto faced increasing political pressure from both within and outside the country. The situation reached its peak on May 12, 1998, when a large-scale student demonstration resulted in the deaths of four students, known as the Trisakti Tragedy. This incident ignited widespread student anger and demands for President Soeharto to resign from office. Nearly 15,000 demonstrators successfully occupied the parliament building (DPR/MPR).

In an attempt to maintain his leadership, President Soeharto formed a Reform Cabinet. However, on May 21, 1998, he officially announced his resignation, and Vice President B.J. Habibie assumed the presidency. Habibie's leadership marked the beginning of Indonesia's reform era. The 1998 student movement, widely known as the Reform Movement, had several significant impacts on the country. These included the fall of President Soeharto's regime, the opening of free speech, the separation of military and police roles from politics, the reduction of military seats in the parliament, and the enforcement of the rule of law. The 1998 student movement is a prime example of a transformative movement that successfully initiated democratic reform in Indonesia.

1.3   The 2025 Indonesian Student Movement: "Indonesia Gelap"

With advancements in information technology, social movements no longer occur solely in physical spaces but also in digital arenas (digital activism), which broaden their scope of influence and mobilization [Milan, 2015]. Following the 1998 student movement, a new wave of student activism emerge done that harnesses the power of digital media. Students' participation as agents of change increasingly relies on digital platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok rather than physical street protests. [Nugroho & Syarif, 2021] highlight the importance of digital activism as a new form of student political participation, despite ongoing challenges such as slacktivism. Collective action is now more often facilitated by digital media than by formal organizations.

In Indonesia, the digital movement is exemplified by the hashtag #Indonesia Gelap in 2025, which involves students and civil society in voicing protests against social injustice and the government's transparency crisis [Lim, 2020]. This digital movement successfully raised public awareness and created moral pressure on the government. Studies on social movements in the digital age explain that contemporary movements are hybrid in nature, combining physical and digital spaces as arenas of struggle [Gerbaudo, 2012]. They have also transformed from classical forms into more fluid, cross-sectoral, and often horizontal structures. [McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001] explain that movement dynamics depend heavily on the structure of political opportunities, the availability of mobilization networks, and the construction of collective identities.

The 2025 student movement utilizes digital media as a more practical alternative to mass mobilization in public spaces. While digital movements may not directly change political and social systems, they are effective in raising public awareness. Although their strategy differs from that of the 1998 movement, they share the same vision in fulfilling their role as agents of change who represent the people's voice in the pursuit of justice.

2   Method

This study uses a qualitative library research approach. According to Sunarti, qualitative research aims to deeply understand social phenomena by emphasizing the interpretation of data collected from various sources, including literature, historical documents, and collective narratives [Sunarti, 2022]. In this context, the 1998 student movement is not merely understood as a series of mass actions, but as a form of articulated identity, opposition, and strategy reflecting a collective struggle for systemic change. Furthermore, the library research method is deemed suitable for analyzing social movements as it allows researchers to trace historical trajectories, discourse construction, and representations of movements through various written sources such as books, academic journals, mass media archives, and digital documentation. Setiawati states that library research is highly effective in socio-historical studies because it

provides a critical synthesis of various academic and empirical perspectives [Setiawati, 2023].

To support the success of this research, several data sources were used. Primary data comes from news reports related to the 1998 student movement and social media, while secondary data comes from journal articles and books relevant to Alain Touraine's social movement theory, as well as previous research on the 1998 student movement. These primary and secondary sources were used to analyze the changing forms and patterns of student movements across generations, as well as how social structures and digital dynamics influence the direction of their struggles.

The data analysis technique used in this study is content analysis, which involves examining the content of collected sources to discover patterns, meanings, and social constructions in the 1998 and 2025 student movements according to the four main concepts in Alain Touraine's theory: identity, opposition, totality, and strategy. The analysis seeks to understand and explain hidden meanings and the transformation from the physical nature of the 1998 student movement to the more digital-oriented 2025 student movement.

The data analysis process in this study involves three stages:
1. Data Reduction: Conducted by selecting information relevant to Alain Touraine's theoretical focus.
2. Data Presentation: Organized by categorizing data according to the four main concepts in Touraine's theory.
3. Conclusion Drawing: Performed by constructing interpretations based on the relationship between the data and Touraine's social movement theory.

To ensure data validity, source triangulation was used comparing data from various types of documents (news, academic articles, and student archives) to provide a comprehensive and holistic picture of the phenomenon. Additionally, cross-reading was conducted with contemporary studies that examine social movements from critical theory, political sociology, and mass communication perspectives.

3   Results and Discussion

3.1   Movement Identity: From Political Agents to Critical Netizens

Within Alain Touraine's theoretical framework, movement identity serves as the foundational element reflecting collective awareness and the social position of movement actors. The 1998 student movement exhibited a strong and cohesive identity as agents of change representing the voice of the people. Students identified themselves as representatives of the public fighting for democracy and challenging the authoritarian New Order regime. This identity was shaped by their physical involvement on the ground, direct experiences of state repression, and intercampus solidarity that forged a community of struggle.

In contrast, the 2025 student movement, which emerged through hashtags like *#IndonesiaGelap* and *#KaburAjaDulu*, reflects a more fluid and individualistic yet value oriented digital identity. The identity of the movement is no longer constructed through physical actions but through narratives that spread virally on social media.

According to Milan (2015), digital activism enables connected action, where participant engagement is more personal yet still connected through shared issues. Thus, the identity of the 2025 student movement is more flexible and based on value affiliations rather than organizational structures.

3.2 Opposition: From Authoritarianism to Digital Oligarchy

The element of opposition in Touraine's theory refers to the primary adversary of the movement. The 1998 movement clearly opposed the New Order government and President Soeharto, who were seen as symbols of authoritarian, repressive, and corrupt power. This opposition was direct and tangible state power that limited democracy, triggered an economic crisis, and practiced systemic corruption and collusion.

Meanwhile, the 2025 movement no longer targets a single figure or centralized structure, but rather a system perceived as nontransparent, digitally manipulative, and unresponsive to sociopolitical crises (such as economic inequality, criminalization of activists, or public data corruption). This indicates that opposition in digital movements is more symbolic and multipolar compared to the 1998 student movement. In this context, the concept of enemy in Touraine's theory has expanded. Opposition is no longer limited to political rulers but also includes algorithmic systems, biased mainstream media, or structurally discriminatory policies hidden behind the digital interface.

3.3 Totality of Change: Political Reform and the Democratization of Information

The 1998 movement aimed for a total transformation from authoritarian rule toward democracy. The movement called for fundamental changes in the political, legal, and economic structures. As a result, its demands were substantial: President Soeharto's resignation, the formation of a new government, and the eradication of corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN).

In contrast, the 2025 student movement emphasizes issues related to making the system more transparent and open. Topics such as data leaks, disinformation, digital control over public opinion, and electoral manipulation are at the forefront. The 2025 movement advocates for justice, particularly the right to information, digital fairness, and strengthening open government ethics.

Although the orientation of change in the 2025 movement is not as radical as in 1998, both share the same spirit of social transformation. However, digital movements often face challenges in maintaining continuity of agenda and intensity of mobilization.

3.4 Strategy: From Streets to Hashtags

Strategy refers to the methods or tactics used by movements to achieve their goals. The 1998 student movement relied on direct strategies such as mass demonstrations, occupying the DPR/MPR building, street speeches, and class strikes. These strategies

created significant political pressure and turned public spaces into battlefields of student resistance.

Conversely, the 2025 student movement employs social media-based strategies by pushing their issues into trending topics. Various platforms used visual campaigns (memes, digital posters), online petitions, and viral actions on TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram. These strategies are not physically confrontational but relying on psychological and reputational pressure against Indonesia's political elites.

Touraine (2000) stated that in postindustrial societies, the form of struggle shifts from mass structures to symbolic structures. This explains why the 2025 movement appears quieter in physical terms compared to the student movement of the past, but far more volatile in the digital discourse arena. "Social movements do not always require physical dominance, but rather the production of meaning that disrupts dominant value systems" [Touraine, 2000].

3.5   The Shift in the Arena of Resistance: From Physical Action to Digital Space

The transformation of the resistance space is a key aspect in analyzing the evolution of student movements. "Social movements have transformed from rigid organizational hierarchies to fluid, personalized networks of connected action" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2020). In 1998, the action space centered around campuses, streets, and parliament. By 2025, this space had shifted to social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. Digital spaces allow rapid, broad, and viral articulation of movement messages while introducing new dynamics: algorithms as battlefields, echo chambers as challenges, and the potential for cyber repression unlike the physical repression of the New Order era.

The impact of this shift is the emergence of more flexible yet more fragile forms of mass mobilization. Digital movements are vulnerable to disinformation, hashtag hijacking, and a lack of strong physical coordination. Nevertheless, the digital sphere has become the main arena of symbolic and narrative contestation in the era of digital democracy.
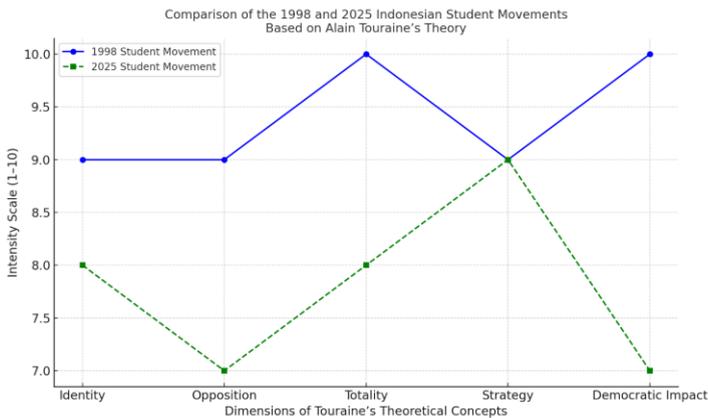

Fig 1. Chart comparing the 1998 and 2025 student movements

4   Conclusion

This study shows that both the 1998 and 2025 student movements are concrete manifestations of social movements as conceptualized by Alain Touraine, based on four core concepts: identity, opposition, totality, and strategy. Despite differences in medium and form, both movements voiced collective aspirations for socio political change in Indonesia.

The 1998 student movement operated in the physical realm through mass action in public spaces, occupying political institutions, and directly confronting the ruling regime. Its identity was shaped by collective experiences in the streets, with opposition explicitly directed at the New Order regime and the total goal was a transition toward a democratic system. The strategy employed structural mobilization that had a significant impact on Indonesia's political system.

In contrast, the 2025 student movement emerged in the digital space. Its identity was shaped by networks of shared values and fluid online participation; its opposition was directed at a system deemed non-transparent and manipulative; while its strategy focused on digital mobilization through social media. Although this movement does not directly change policies, it has succeeded in raising critical public awareness, expanding informal political participation, and pressuring political elites through public digital discourse.

Thus, Alain Touraine's theory remains relevant in explaining the dynamics of social movements across two vastly different contexts: the era of student activism through physical mass mobilization, and the era of digital media–driven social movements.

The comparison between the 1998 and 2025 student movements demonstrates that both history and technology serve as crucial arenas in the struggle for democracy. Amid the post-industrial wave and the digitalization of politics, student social movements continue to be a critical force in safeguarding the direction of the nation using different methods, yet upholding the same spirit: the pursuit of justice, transparency, and social change.

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