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Does Social Media Selectively Transform the Protest Paradigm? Evidence from Online News and X Posts During Indonesia's 2025 Demonstrations

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Abstract

This study examines how the protest paradigm operates in Indonesia's hybrid media ecosystem by comparing online news coverage and social media posts during the August–September 2025 demonstrations. Using quantitative content analysis, this study analyzed 2,682 Detik.com news articles and 421 posts from the X account @barengwarga published between 25 August and 5 September 2025. The analysis focused on three dimensions: protest framing, sourcing patterns, and marginalization/legitimization devices, with differences between media types tested using chi-square analysis. The findings show that the protest paradigm is transformed selectively rather than uniformly. Riot and confrontation frames appeared at comparable levels in online news and social media, indicating the persistence of conflict-oriented protest representation. However, social media more frequently used spectacle and debate frames, foregrounded protesters' voices, highlighted police violence, and represented protests as peaceful. In contrast, online news relied more heavily on institutional sources and more often associated protesters with violence. These statistically significant differences indicate that social media do not fully overturn the protest paradigm but reconfigure it by shifting narrative authority and moral attribution. This study contributes to protest communication scholarship by offering empirical evidence from a Global South hybrid media context.

Keywords: Protest Paradigm; Hybrid Media; Online News; Social Media; News Framing; Legitimation; Marginalization.

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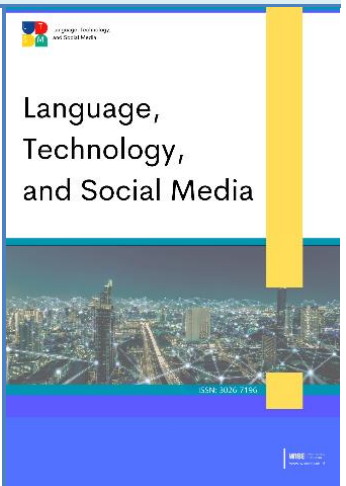
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INTRODUCTION

Between August and September 2025, large-scale demonstrations took place across multiple cities in Indonesia. This wave of protest was triggered by the accumulation of public dissatisfaction with government budgetary policies and the worsening economic situation. Unlike many earlier protest episodes that were more localized, the 2025 demonstrations spread across several provinces and cities and were accompanied by mass arrests, fatalities, and intense public debate. The protests also attracted widespread attention on digital platforms, where hashtags and user-generated content played an important role in mobilizing participants and circulating alternative narratives about the events.

The protests were recorded as one of the most significant protest mobilizations in the post-Reformasi period. Records from the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) and the Legal Aid Institute (LBH) show that at least 10 people died and 1,042 were reported injured, while the police detained 3,337 individuals over the course of the protests [1]. Additional documentation from a civil society Fact-Finding Commission (Komisi Pencari Fakta/KPF) reports that the total number of fatalities during the series of protest events reached 13 people. The KPF investigation was based on a comprehensive review of 115 police investigation files, thousands of open-source records, and interviews with 63 informants across eight provinces and eighteen cities [2]. These findings indicate that the protests were not confined to isolated incidents but instead represented a geographically widespread wave of mobilization accompanied by a significant escalation of conflict. The combination of casualties, large numbers of injuries, and thousands of detentions underscores the scale of state response and highlights why the protests have been widely regarded as one of the most significant episodes of protest mobilization in Indonesia's post-Reformasi political landscape.

These protests cannot be understood as isolated events but rather as the culmination of a series of collective mobilizations that developed gradually from early to mid-2024. Before reaching their peak in August 2025, public discontent had already been expressed through various earlier protests, including demonstrations by ride-hailing drivers, protests over minimum wages, and controversies surrounding political dynasties and Constitutional Court decisions on regional head nomination requirements. These mobilizations reflected the accumulation of social and political grievances that eventually converged into a broader wave of protest.

A notable aspect of these protests was the role of social media in shaping movement dynamics. Audiences no longer obtained information solely from mainstream media such as television, online news, and radio, but also from digital platforms that enabled the horizontal production and distribution of information. Hashtags such as #PeringatanDarurat, #KawalPutusanMK, #Indonesiadarurat, #Indonesiacemas, #ResetIndonesia, #TolakPolitikDinasti, #TolakRuuPilkada, and #ReformasiDikorupsi circulated widely among netizens, functioning both as tools of mobilization and as frames through which protest events were interpreted. In contrast to mainstream media (where information about protests is typically filtered through journalistic gatekeeping and institutional sources) social media enabled protest participants and supporters to document events directly, circulate eyewitness accounts, and construct alternative narratives about the protests. As a result, protest actors were no longer entirely dependent on mainstream media coverage to gain visibility but could actively shape how protest events were represented and interpreted in the public sphere.

The relationship between media and social movements has long been understood as mutually dependent [3]. Social movements require media to obtain visibility, legitimacy, and public support, while media use protest events as news sources that attract audience attention. Protest actions provide events, conflict, and narratives that are considered newsworthy, whereas movements rely on media exposure to communicate grievances and mobilize broader participation. This mutual dependence has led scholars to describe media and movements as interacting systems in which each relies on the other to achieve its goals [3]. However, this relationship has never been neutral. Media do not merely reflect the reality of protest but also shape how movements are understood through issue selection, source choices, and patterns of representation [3], [4]. Consequently, media representation plays a crucial role in determining whether a movement is perceived as a legitimate democratic expression or as a disturbance to social order [5]. The rise of social media has further complicated this relationship, as movement actors and audiences are no longer entirely dependent on mainstream media as the primary intermediary through which protest events become visible in the public sphere.

In communication literature, this relationship is often explained through the concept of the protest paradigm. This paradigm refers to a pattern of media representation that tends to delegitimize social movements by emphasizing conflict, violence, deviance, and disruption of order, while limiting space for the substantive demands of the movement [4], [6]. As a result, the public more often perceives protest as a conflictual event rather than as a legitimate expression of political or social demands. Four main frames commonly identified within this paradigm are riot (violence and deviance), confrontation (conflict with authorities), spectacle (dramatization and sensationalism), and debate (substantive demands). The first three frames tend to marginalize movements, whereas the debate frame provides space for legitimizing protest demands.

Media often portray protests that challenge the status quo through narratives emphasizing disruption, conflict, and spectacle, thereby obscuring the substantive demands of movements [7], [8]. This pattern is understood as a result of news production routines and the structural relationship between media and power institutions. Media coverage is typically characterized by reliance on official sources, emphasis on dramatic aspects, and the use of episodic narratives that direct attention to events rather than underlying issues [9], [10]. When the perspective of authorities becomes the dominant frame in news coverage, protests are more easily positioned as threats to social order, thereby reducing the legitimacy of movements in the public eye [11].

Do mainstream media and social media develop similar framing patterns in covering protest, or does social media introduce a different logic of representation? If mainstream media, due to news values and journalistic routines, tend to emphasize conflict and confrontation, social media may provide greater space for debate, protest demands, and the perspectives of demonstrators. To examine this issue, this study directly compares protest representation in mainstream online media and social media during the 2025 protest wave. These questions are relevant because social media function not only as channels of distribution but also as spaces of meaning production involving movement actors and audiences.

The emergence of social media introduces the possibility of change to the basic assumptions of the protest paradigm. Social media open the possibility of alternative hypotheses regarding the classical protest paradigm because digital communication structures provide greater autonomy for social movement actors. In the conventional media era, protest visibility depended heavily on mainstream media. In the digital era, however, demonstrators are able to produce, distribute, and

control their own narratives through various digital platforms. This transformation involves not only social movement actors but also the audience. In a digital ecosystem, audiences no longer obtain information from a single source, but from a combination of mainstream media, social media, and citizen media.

A number of studies have examined whether the protest paradigm still applies in the era of social media. The literature shows several patterns. The first pattern suggests that social media may produce representations different from traditional media. Harlow and Johnson found that mainstream media continue to follow delegitimizing patterns by emphasizing spectacle, citing official sources, and disparaging demonstrators, while citizen media and social media tend to legitimize protest and act as commentators and even participants in protest events [9]. Similar findings appear in cross-national studies [12]. This argument is reinforced by Aharoni, who identifies a shift from the traditional protest paradigm toward a new form emphasizing rhetorical and visual proximity to demonstrators [13].

The second pattern reflects a mixed configuration of legitimacy and delegitimization. Lev-On shows that although protest framing in the digital era tends to emphasize protesters' goals, methods, and demands, power asymmetries in information production persist because institutions retain greater resources and capacity to shape the public agenda than protest movements [14]. As a result, social media do not fully replace the old paradigm, but produce hybrid forms of representation in which legitimacy and delegitimization coexist. This finding is reinforced by Ismail et al., who demonstrate that mainstream media increasingly integrate social media discourse into their reporting practices through direct citation, monitoring of public conversations, and the use of digital content as information sources [15].

Another pattern emerging in the literature is that social media may actually reproduce the protest paradigm rather than fully transform it. Literat et al. show that platforms such as TikTok do not always liberate protest from delegitimizing framing, as algorithmic moderation can normalize extreme or problematic narratives by masking their political implications [16]. Sensational, conflictual, or dramatic narratives (historically associated with delegitimizing framing) often receive high engagement and are therefore prioritized in digital circulation. Consequently, while social media open new spaces for alternative narratives produced by social movements, algorithmic logic can reproduce representation patterns emphasizing conflict, spectacle, and deviance, thereby reinforcing elements of the classical protest paradigm in new forms. Audiences function as co-gatekeepers, amplifying content they perceive as meaningful and increasing the visibility of particular frames in digital space [12]. At the same time, interaction between mainstream media and social media is becoming increasingly intertwined, as media organizations now operate in digital environments that make it difficult to ignore viral narratives, while journalistic practice becomes more open to correction, challenge, and public negotiation through networked interaction [14], [15].

Although the literature suggests that social media have the potential to transform classical patterns of the protest paradigm, existing empirical evidence remains limited and inconclusive. Previous studies have several important limitations. First, many studies analyze only one type of media, making it difficult to determine whether differences in representation stem from distinct media logics or from event-specific contexts. Second, most research focuses on Global North contexts, leaving the dynamics of the protest paradigm within hybrid media ecosystems in the Global South less understood. In Indonesia, studies of protest coverage remain relatively scarce and

have generally focused on mainstream media alone, without systematically comparing how protest narratives circulate between professional journalism and social media platforms. As a result, it remains unclear whether the classical patterns of the protest paradigm persist, weaken, or are reconfigured when protest actors are able to produce and distribute their own narratives through digital platforms.

This study addresses this gap by examining how protests during the 2025 demonstrations were represented across both online news media and social media, thereby providing empirical evidence on how the protest paradigm operates within a hybrid media environment in a Global South context. Addressing this gap, the study offers novelty by directly comparing how the protest paradigm operates in mainstream media and social media within the same protest case. The study not only assesses whether the protest paradigm changes or persists but also identifies which dimensions demonstrate continuity and which experience shifts. Specifically, this research analyzes the large-scale demonstrations that occurred across Indonesian cities between late August and early September 2025. It compares mainstream media coverage and social media posts by selecting Detik.com as a representation of mainstream online media and the Twitter/X account @barengwarga as a representation of citizen-based social media. The @barengwarga account is managed by a network of civil society activists and consistently voices social and political issues, as well as criticism of government policies in Indonesia [17].

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed. H1 assumes that social media are more likely to deviate from the traditional protest paradigm, whereas mainstream media tend to reproduce it. Specifically, H1a predicts that the riot frame will appear more frequently in mainstream media than in social media. H1b predicts that the confrontation frame will be more prominent in mainstream media. H1c predicts that the spectacle frame will also be more prevalent in mainstream media coverage. In contrast, H1d predicts that the debate frame will appear more frequently on social media. H2 concerns sourcing patterns, predicting that social media will more frequently feature protesters as dominant sources, while mainstream media will rely more heavily on official sources such as government representatives or law enforcement authorities. Finally, H3 addresses interpretive devices in protest coverage. H3a predicts that depictions of violence by protesters will appear more frequently in mainstream media. H3b predicts that representations of police violence will appear more frequently in mainstream media. H3c predicts that peaceful representations of protest will be more common on social media.

METHODS

This study employs quantitative content analysis as the primary method to examine patterns of protest coverage in online media. Quantitative content analysis is chosen for several reasons. First, this approach enables researchers to systematically and objectively identify, categorise, and compare the occurrence of symbolic categories in media texts, allowing the analysis to be conducted in a transparent and replicable manner [18], [19]. Through systematic coding procedures, recurring patterns of representation (such as frames, sources, and devices of legitimization or marginalization) can be measured and compared across a large number of media items. Second, content analysis has become the dominant methodological approach in protest research for examining how media frame collective action, select sources, and reproduce or challenge power relations between the state and citizens [4], [9]. Using the same methodological approach therefore allows the findings of this study to be compared with previous research on the protest paradigm in

different contexts [4], [9]. Through this approach, the study can assess tendencies toward the marginalization or legitimization of protest in a measurable and comparative way.

This study compares protest coverage between conventional media and social media (Twitter/X) by examining large-scale demonstrations that took place in multiple Indonesian cities in 2025, between 25 August and 5 September 2025. The selection of Detik.com in this study is based on several characteristics that make it representative of mainstream online news coverage in Indonesia. First, Detik.com is widely recognized as one of the most influential digital news outlets in the country. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025, Detik.com has the highest weekly reach among online news brands in Indonesia, with 46% of respondents reporting weekly use and 28% accessing the site at least three days per week [20]. This large and diverse readership makes Detik.com a significant node in the Indonesian digital news ecosystem, meaning that its coverage has substantial visibility and agenda-setting influence in public discourse. Second, Detik.com is known for its high-volume, real-time news production model, which prioritizes rapid updates and continuous reporting of breaking events. This journalistic style is particularly relevant for analyzing protest coverage because demonstrations are highly dynamic events that unfold quickly and require immediate news dissemination. Third, Detik.com targets a broad national audience rather than a narrow ideological or niche readership. Compared with outlets that have more specialized editorial orientations or smaller audiences, Detik.com functions as a widely consumed general news platform within Indonesia's digital media landscape [20]. This broad audience orientation further supports its use as a case representing mainstream online news coverage. All news articles covering protest-related issues during the period are analyzed, with a total of $N = 2,682$ articles.

For social media, the study selects the Twitter/X account @barengwarga, a collective account with approximately 260,000 followers that actively documents, curates, and disseminates information about protests. The selection of X (Twitter) is also related to the specific platform affordances that facilitate rapid circulation of protest information. Bossetta [21] conceptualizes these affordances through the notion of digital architectures, which include four dimensions: network structure, functionality, algorithmic filtering, and datafication. Network structure shapes patterns of user relationships, functionality governs content production and distribution, algorithmic filtering influences the visibility of information, and datafication enables platforms to collect and utilize user data to optimize content circulation. These features allow protest-related content to spread quickly through open networks and real-time communication flows. Previous research also shows that platform affordances differ significantly across social media environments. X (Twitter) is characterized by open networks and rapid information diffusion, making it particularly relevant for examining the circulation of protest narratives [21]. In addition, the @barengwarga account is managed by a network of civil society activists and consistently voices social and political issues, including criticism of government policies in Indonesia [17]. The unit of analysis for social media is the main post (tweet) published by the account, excluding replies. During the study period, a total of 421 tweets are analyzed.

The conceptualization and operationalization of variables are adapted from several studies [7], [8], [9], [10], [11], [12], [22], [23], [24], [25]. Three aspects are analyzed in this study: news frames, sourcing, and marginalization/legitimization devices.

The first aspect analyzed is news framing, defined as the way media represent protest events through particular patterns of emphasis that shape public meaning and interpretation of

demonstrations. This study identifies four primary frames in protest coverage: riot, confrontation, spectacle, and debate [11], [23]. The riot frame emphasizes violence, deviance, and disruption caused by protesters, portraying protest as a threat to public order [22], [23]. The confrontation frame focuses on clashes between protesters and authorities, particularly conflict with police, directing audience attention toward conflict dynamics rather than the political demands of the movement [11], [23]. The spectacle frame highlights drama, sensationalism, and unusual aspects of protest, presenting protest as an emotional spectacle that may trivialize the political goals of the movement [7], [22]. The debate frame, by contrast, focuses on the substantive dimension of protest, including goals, grievances, and agendas, thereby providing legitimacy and opening space for discussion of the issues raised [10], [19].

The four frames are measured using a nominal scale (0 = absent, 1 = present). These frames are not mutually exclusive; therefore, a single news item may contain more than one frame simultaneously [7], [10], [12], [22].

The second aspect analyzed is sourcing. This variable assesses whether media coverage predominantly reproduces the state's perspective or provides space for protester legitimacy and alternative interpretations of protest events. Within protest paradigm theory, mainstream media are considered to prioritize official sources over protesters' voices [11], [23]. When official narratives dominate, authorities gain greater control in defining public problems and shaping media interpretation, while protesters' perspectives become marginalized [22]. The dominance of official sources often results in protest being covered from the perspective of the power holders being challenged, thereby implicitly weakening movement legitimacy [8].

The operationalization of this variable is adapted from prior studies [9], [11], [12], [22], [23], [24], [25]. Each news item is identified based on the primary type of source cited: (1) official, including government officials, security authorities, and institutional spokespersons; and (2) protester, including demonstrators, activists, and citizens directly involved in the protest. Following previous work, the composition of sources is categorized according to balance within the news item as official-dominated, balanced, or protester-dominated [12], [24].

The third aspect is marginalization/legitimization devices, which measure how protesters' morality is attributed in both text and visuals. Prior work shows that tactic-based devices, such as explicit emphasis on violence, are often used to construct the perception that protest is synonymous with disorder [7], [24]. Conversely, references to peaceful protest may function as legitimizing devices by challenging automatic associations between protest and violence [24]. These devices do not operate independently but interact with framing and sourcing in shaping dominant protest narratives [22], [24].

The operationalization of this variable follows previous studies [8], [10], [22], [24], [25]. Two primary categories are coded: peaceful and violent. The violent indicator is assigned when the news item explicitly associates protesters with violence, riots, property destruction, or threats to public order. Conversely, the peaceful indicator is used when protesters are portrayed as engaging in peaceful action (e.g., vigils, silent marches, or other forms of nonviolent symbolic action) or when the text explicitly states that the protest was peaceful [9], [18], [20]. These two devices are not mutually exclusive and may appear simultaneously within a single news item.

Table 1. Conceptualization and Operationalization

Aspect	Conceptualization	Operationalization	Nature of Variable	No	Categories
News Framing (Frames)	<p>The way media represent protest events through patterns of emphasis that shape how demonstrations are interpreted by audiences. Frames highlight certain aspects of protest while downplaying others, thereby influencing whether protests are seen as conflict, spectacle, or legitimate political expression.</p> <p>Source Adaptation: Harlow & Johnson (2011); Harlow et al. (2017); Brown et al. (2018); Harlow et al. (2020); Harlow et al. (2022); Harlow (2019)</p>	<p>Each news item is coded for the presence of specific protest frames based on textual and visual cues in headlines, leads, body text, and accompanying images. Coders identify whether the coverage emphasizes violence, clashes, dramatization, or substantive protest demands. A single news item may contain more than one frame if multiple emphases are present.</p>	<p>Not mutually exclusive (multiple frames may appear within the same news item).</p>	1	<p>Riot frame – Protesters portrayed as threats to social order (riots, looting, vandalism, destruction of property, criminal acts, chaos, disorder). Verbal indicators: words referring to riots, burning objects, vandalism, property destruction, criminal behavior, “massa anarkis,” or police attempts to control riots. Visual indicators: images of burning tires or vehicles, damaged buildings, broken barricades, smoke, fires, or protesters engaging in destructive acts.</p>
				2	<p>Confrontation frame – Emphasis on clashes between protesters and authorities. Verbal indicators: references to arrests, tear gas, dispersal by police, physical clashes, or standoffs between demonstrators and security forces. Visual indicators: images of police confronting protesters, riot police</p>

Aspect	Conceptualization	Operationalization	Nature of Variable	No	Categories
					formations, protesters being detained, or visible physical confrontation.
				3	Spectacle frame – Focus on dramatic or unusual aspects of protest rather than substantive issues. Verbal indicators: emphasis on crowd size, emotional atmosphere, celebrity participation, dramatic narratives, or unusual protest actions. Visual indicators: panoramic shots of large crowds, dramatic protest scenes, symbolic performances, banners, costumes, or emotionally expressive participants.
				4	Debate frame – Coverage highlighting protest demands, grievances, and policy debates. Verbal indicators: explanation of protest demands, policy criticism, discussion of government decisions, or

Aspect	Conceptualization	Operationalization	Nature of Variable	No	Categories
					contextual background of the protest. Visual indicators: images of protest banners containing demands, speeches by protest leaders, discussion forums, or symbolic expressions of political claims.
Sourcing	Examines whose voices dominate protest coverage and whether the news narrative is shaped primarily by institutional actors or by protest participants. Source Adaptation: Harlow & Johnson (2011); Harlow et al. (2020, 2022); Brown et al. (2019, 2018)	Each news item is coded based on the dominant source quoted or paraphrased in the article. Dominance is determined by frequency of quotation and narrative prominence.	Exclusive at the level of dominance category	1	Only / more protesters – Protesters, activists, civil society groups, or protest participants appear as the only source or are quoted more frequently than officials. Verbal indicators: quotations from protesters or activists. Visual indicators: images of protesters speaking to journalists or addressing crowds.
				2	Equal protesters & officials – Protesters and official sources are both quoted with roughly similar frequency and prominence in the news narrative. Verbal indicators: balanced quotations from both protesters and officials.

Aspect	Conceptualization	Operationalization	Nature of Variable	No	Categories
				3	Only / more officials – Government officials, police, military officers, institutional spokespersons, or political elites appear as the only source or are quoted more frequently than protesters. Verbal indicators: statements from ministers, police spokespersons, or official press releases. Visual indicators: images of press conferences or official briefings.
				4	No protesters / officials – News items that do not quote either protesters or officials, relying primarily on journalist narration or background information.
Marginalization / Legitimization Devices	Measures moral attribution toward protesters in media coverage, assessing whether protest actors are portrayed as legitimate participants in democratic expression or as disruptive actors threatening social order. The representation of protester behavior in both text and visuals can contribute	Each news item is coded based on the representation of protester behavior in textual and visual elements. Coders examine headlines, leads, body text, captions, and accompanying images to determine whether protesters are associated with violence or portrayed as peaceful actors. Both indicators may appear simultaneously within the	Not mutually exclusive (both representations may appear within the same news item).	1	Violent representation – Protesters associated with violence, riots, vandalism, aggression, or threats to public order. Verbal indicators: references to property destruction, attacks on authorities, riots, vandalism, criminal acts, or language portraying protesters as dangerous

Aspect	Conceptualization	Operationalization	Nature of Variable	No	Categories
	to either legitimizing or marginalizing protest actions. Source Adaptation: Harlow et al. (2017); Brown et al. (2018); Brown et al. (2019); Brown & Harlow (2021)	same news item if the coverage contains mixed representations.			crowds. Visual indicators: images of burning objects, damaged public facilities, clashes with police, aggressive crowd behavior, or scenes suggesting disorder and chaos.
				2	Peaceful representation – Protest portrayed as peaceful civic action such as rallies, marches, vigils, or symbolic demonstrations. Verbal indicators: references to peaceful protests, disciplined demonstrations, moral claims, or nonviolent collective action. Visual indicators: images of orderly marches, protesters holding banners or placards, peaceful gatherings, symbolic protest performances, or protesters interacting calmly with others.

The coding process was conducted by five students who received structured training on the codebook and the operational definitions of each variable prior to the coding stage. The training involved detailed explanations of each category, including examples of how frames, sources, and marginalization/legitimization devices appear in both written text and visual materials, followed by guided practice sessions using sample news items. During this phase, ambiguous cases were discussed collectively to ensure a shared understanding of the coding rules. After the training, the researcher conducted a preliminary intercoder reliability test using approximately 10% of the news sample to evaluate coder agreement. When discrepancies were identified, the cases were reviewed and the coding guidelines were clarified before proceeding with the full dataset. Intercoder reliability testing followed standard procedures recommended in content analysis research, and the results produced a reliability coefficient above 0.80, which is generally considered to indicate a very good level of agreement [18]. Data analysis was conducted comparatively by examining differences in coverage patterns between mainstream media (Detik.com) and social media (the X account @barengwarga). To test whether differences between media types were statistically significant, this study employed the chi-square (χ^2) test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study seeks to examine whether mainstream media coverage and social media posts exhibit similar patterns in portraying protest events, or whether they diverge in meaningful ways. Specifically, it asks whether the protest paradigm operates exclusively within journalistic coverage or whether it also emerges in social media posts managed by social movement actors. Table 2 and Table 3 present a summary of the empirical findings.

Three analytical dimensions are examined in this study. The most central dimension within the protest paradigm concerns the framing of protest events. Protests may be constructed as riots, confrontations, spectacles, or as sites of public debate. The protest paradigm literature consistently argues that news media tend to privilege riot, confrontation, and spectacle frames, while debate frames (those emphasizing substantive claims, grievances, and policy issues) are comparatively marginalized. As a consequence, protest actions are more likely to be interpreted by audiences as disruptions to social order rather than as legitimate expressions of public aspirations. The rise of social media is expected to potentially disrupt this pattern. Unlike traditional media, social media platforms enable activists and citizens to produce and disseminate their own narratives without being fully dependent on journalistic gatekeeping. This structural shift creates the possibility for more substantive framing, particularly through debate-oriented narratives that foreground demands, arguments, and political claims.

The findings indicate that both online news coverage (Detik.com) and social media posts (@barengwarga) are predominantly characterized by the confrontation frame. Quantitatively, this frame accounts for more than half of the content in both media types, making it the most dominant frame in the dataset (see Table 2). Other prominent frames include spectacle and riot (clashes), while the debate frame appears only in a relatively small proportion of coverage.

Several factors may contribute to this dominance. First, confrontation aligns with journalistic news values, particularly conflict, drama, and visual intensity, which often shape how protest events are reported in mainstream media. Second, in social media environments, confrontation-related content may attract higher audience engagement, as dramatic or emotionally

charged posts are more likely to circulate widely through reposts and algorithmic amplification. Third, the dominance of this frame may also reflect the dynamics of the protests themselves, where clashes between protesters and police became highly visible moments that were repeatedly documented and shared. In contrast, the debate frame appears less frequently in both media types because discussions of policy grievances or protest demands often receive less attention compared to dramatic scenes of confrontation. This pattern is also commonly observed in protest coverage, where substantive debate about issues tends to be overshadowed by visually compelling conflict events.

Table 2. Comparison of Protest Framing and Representational Devices in Mainstream Media and Social Media

Dimension	Category	Mainstream Media (Detik.com) (N = 2682)	Social Media (@barengwarga) (N = 421)	Total (N = 3103)	χ^2	Sig.
Framing	Riot	466 (17.4%)	68 (16.2%)	534 (17.2%)	0.39	n.s.
	Confrontation	1466 (54.7%)	224 (53.2%)	1690 (54.5%)	0.34	n.s.
	Spectacle	488 (18.2%)	124 (29.5%)	612 (19.7%)	32.96	p < .001
	Debate	132 (4.9%)	44 (10.5%)	176 (5.7%)	24.47	p < .001
Devices	Violence of protesters	1042 (38.9%)	3 (0.7%)	1045 (33.7%)	414.6	p < .001
	Violence of police	231 (8.6%)	232 (55.1%)	463 (14.9%)	529.8	p < .001
	Peacefulness	433 (16.1%)	144 (34.2%)	577 (18.6%)	82.9	p < .001

Note: (1) Numbers represent frequency (n) with percentages in parentheses; (2) Categories in the Framing and Devices dimensions are non-exclusive, meaning that a single news item may contain more than one category; therefore, percentages may not sum to 100%; (3) Percentages are calculated based on the total number of items within each media type; (4) χ^2 values represent Pearson chi-square tests comparing the distribution of each category between mainstream media and social media; (5) n.s. indicates not statistically significant.

Table 3. Distribution of News Sources in Protest Coverage Across Mainstream Media and Social Media

Dimension	Category	Mainstream Media (Detik.com) (N = 2682)	Social Media (@barengwarga) (N = 421)
Sourcing	Only / more protesters	32 (1.2%)	244 (58.0%)
	Equal protesters & officials	88 (3.3%)	6 (1.4%)
	Only / more officials	421 (15.7%)	22 (5.2%)

Dimension	Category	Mainstream Media (Detik.com) (N = 2682)	Social Media (@barengwarga) (N = 421)
	No protesters / officials	2141 (79.8%)	149 (35.4%)
	Total	2682 (100%)	421 (100%)
χ^2 (df=3) = 1020.41*, p < .001			

Note: (1) Numbers in parentheses indicate percentages; (2) Categories in the Sourcing dimension are mutually exclusive; each news item is classified into only one dominant source category; therefore, the chi-square test is calculated for the overall distribution of sourcing categories rather than for individual rows; (3) Percentages are calculated based on the total number of items within each media type.

The findings indicate that this hypothesis is only partially supported (see Table 2). With regard to the riot and confrontation frames, no statistically significant differences are observed between social media and mainstream media; both demonstrate comparable tendencies in emphasizing the conflict dimension, with confrontation remaining the most dominant frame. Mainstream media and social media (the @barengwarga account) display broadly similar patterns in foregrounding riot and confrontation. The riot frame accounts for approximately 15% of the content in both Detik.com news coverage and @barengwarga posts, while the confrontation frame appears in more than half of the items across both platforms. However, a notable divergence emerges in how confrontation is constructed. Detik.com tends to position protesters and the police in relatively symmetrical roles, portraying confrontation as an unavoidable outcome of competing interests between the two sides. In contrast, social media posts from the @barengwarga account frame confrontation primarily as a consequence of excessive police action. Demonstrations are initially depicted as peaceful, but later escalate into clashes following what is represented as disproportionate use of force by the police against protesters.

In Detik.com coverage, the riot frame typically appears in reports describing protesters damaging public facilities or engaging in looting, with the resulting disorder attributed to unruly or uncontrolled crowds. In contrast, posts from @barengwarga tend to frame riots as a consequence of heavy-handed security responses in managing the demonstrations. A similar divergence emerges in the portrayal of confrontation. Detik.com frequently reports incidents involving physical pushing or clashes between protesters and police officers, presenting these encounters as direct confrontations between opposing groups. By contrast, @barengwarga often portrays confrontation as triggered by police provocation. Within this narrative, police actions (such as the deployment of tear gas or physical force against demonstrators) are depicted as initiating the escalation of violence, which is then followed by resistance from protesters and ultimately results in clashes.

Differences between mainstream media coverage and social media posts become more apparent with regard to the spectacle and debate frames. Social media (particularly the @barengwarga account) demonstrates a stronger tendency to foreground spectacle compared to mainstream media. Numerous posts highlight the dramatic and performative dimensions of protest, including creative actions, political humor, visually striking symbols, and the participation of public figures or celebrities. Such representations position protest not merely as a site of conflict, but also as a space of collective expression imbued with symbolic, cultural, and aesthetic meaning. Social media posts from @barengwarga display a higher proportion of the debate frame. Compared to mainstream media, social media more frequently foregrounds the economic, social, and political

grievances underlying the emergence of protest. In this sense, protest is contextualized not only as an event, but as a response to structural conditions and policy issues.

Detik.com tends to emphasize the presence of celebrities and influencers participating in protest actions, thereby framing spectacle primarily through the lens of public visibility and media appeal. By contrast, the @barengwarga account frequently showcases the creative and distinctive expressions of protesters themselves, ranging from posters and clothing to memes displayed during demonstrations.

Another significant difference concerns the debate frame. The @barengwarga account exhibits a higher proportion of debate-oriented content than mainstream online news. Posts from @barengwarga often elaborate on the substantive reasons behind the protests, articulating grievances and policy critiques directly from the perspective of participants. In contrast, when Detik.com employs the debate frame, it typically does so through interviews with experts, observers, or researchers, thereby maintaining a conventional journalistic structure in which interpretive authority is delegated to external commentators rather than to protesters.

Another crucial dimension of the protest paradigm concerns the sourcing pattern in news coverage. Protest paradigm theory posits that mainstream media tend to privilege official sources (particularly government representatives and security apparatuses) when reporting on protest events. As a consequence, statements and interpretations from state actors frequently dominate media narratives, while the voices and perspectives of demonstrators receive comparatively limited visibility. This reliance on official sources not only shapes the interpretive framework of protest coverage but also reinforces institutional authority in defining the meaning and legitimacy of collective action. The rise of social media introduces the possibility of disrupting this structural imbalance. Digital platforms enable protesters and ordinary citizens to produce, circulate, and amplify their own narratives without depending entirely on traditional journalistic gatekeeping. In principle, this communicative shift may broaden the range of visible perspectives in public discourse, potentially enhancing the presence of alternative viewpoints that challenge or counter official interpretations.

The findings strongly support this hypothesis. Social media significantly more often feature protester sources compared with mainstream media, while mainstream media rely more heavily on official sources (see Table 2). In addition, social media more frequently contain content without quotations from official or institutional sources, indicating a pattern of information production more grounded in direct documentation and citizen participation. Differences across all sourcing categories are statistically significant, confirming a structural contrast between mainstream media, which are more institutionalized, and social media, which provide greater space for protesters' voices and non-official perspectives.

Another characteristic of the protest paradigm appears in the use of marginalization and legitimization devices. In the classical pattern, mainstream media tend to emphasize protester violence, thereby delegitimizing the movement, while violence by authorities receives relatively less attention. The presence of social media is expected to shift this tendency, as direct documentation by citizens and activists enables the emergence of alternative narratives that highlight protesters' experiences and perspectives different from those presented in mainstream media.

The findings reveal differences between the two media types (see Table 2). Mainstream media are far more likely to associate protesters with violence, whereas social media more

frequently foreground police violence. The @barengwarga account, for instance, extensively circulates photographs and videos depicting the use of force by police officers. It also amplifies user-generated content (through replies and reposts) from protest participants reporting instances of police violence. Representations of protest as peaceful are likewise more prominent on social media. Taken together, these differences indicate a divergence in moral attribution across the two media environments. Mainstream media tend to delegitimize protesters by emphasizing disorder and violence, whereas social media more often construct protesters as peaceful actors while highlighting coercive and repressive actions by state authorities.

At the same time, the findings suggest both continuity and change in relation to the protest paradigm. Social media provide somewhat greater space for debate-oriented framing compared to mainstream media, indicating that these platforms can facilitate the articulation of protest demands and alternative narratives. However, social media also display relatively high proportions of confrontation and spectacle frames, which remain central characteristics of protest coverage. This suggests that while social media may expand opportunities for deliberative discourse, they simultaneously reproduce conflict-oriented representations of protest. In this sense, social media function as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, they allow activists and protest participants to circulate debate-oriented narratives with greater freedom; on the other hand, the same communicative environment can amplify dramatic and confrontational content. For example, social media can foreground instances of police violence by circulating photographs and videos documenting the use of force during protest events. Such visual materials may be difficult for mainstream media to publish due to editorial norms, institutional constraints, or considerations related to news presentation.

Discussion

This study departs from the hypothesis that the protest paradigm undergoes transformation within social media environments. Through social media, individuals (particularly social movement actors) are able to construct and disseminate messages from their own perspectives without relying on mainstream media gatekeeping. However, the findings indicate that not all hypotheses concerning the “transformation of the protest paradigm” in the era of social media are supported. While social media provide greater space for debate-oriented framing and protester-centered sourcing, several core elements of the traditional protest paradigm (such as confrontation framing) remain dominant across both media environments (see Table 4).

Table 4. Summary of Hypotheses, Empirical Results, and Conclusions

Hypothesis	Result	Conclusion
H1a: Riot frame appears more frequently in mainstream media than in social media.	Mainstream 17.4%; Social media 16.2%; difference not significant ($\chi^2 = 0.39$).	Not supported
H1b: Confrontation frame appears more frequently in mainstream media.	Mainstream 54.7%; Social media 53.2%; difference not significant ($\chi^2 = 0.34$).	Not supported
H1c: Spectacle frame appears more frequently in mainstream media.	Social media 29.5%; Mainstream 18.2%; significant difference ($\chi^2 = 32.96$, $p < .001$).	Not supported (reversed; social media higher)

Hypothesis	Result	Conclusion
H1d: Debate frame appears more frequently on social media.	Social media 10.5%; Mainstream 4.9%; significant difference ($\chi^2 = 24.47, p < .001$).	Supported
H2: Social media rely more on protester sources, while mainstream media rely more on official sources.	Protester sources dominate social media (58.0%), while official sources are more common in mainstream media (15.7%).	Supported
H3a: Violence of protesters appears more frequently in mainstream media.	Mainstream 38.9%; Social media 0.7% ($\chi^2 = 414.6, p < .001$).	Supported
H3b: Violence of police appears more frequently in mainstream media.	Social media 55.1%; Mainstream 8.6% ($\chi^2 = 529.8, p < .001$).	Not supported (reversed; social media higher)
H3c: Peaceful protest representations appear more frequently on social media.	Social media 34.2%; Mainstream 16.1% ($\chi^2 = 82.9, p < .001$).	Supported

Although it is often assumed that social media would consistently generate protest representations that are more substantive and more aligned with demonstrators, the empirical evidence instead reveals a combination of continuity in classical patterns alongside shifts in specific dimensions. These results are consistent with Lev-On's argument that transformations in protest coverage in the digital era are hybrid, non-linear, and do not fully replace earlier patterns [14]. This hybrid pattern may partly reflect the structural dynamics of social media platforms, where engagement-driven algorithms tend to prioritize content that attracts attention and interaction, such as conflict, confrontation, or dramatic visuals. As a result, even when social movements communicate through their own channels, conflict-oriented representations may still be amplified. At the same time, the findings also show areas where transformation is more evident, particularly in the greater presence of debate-oriented framing and protester-centered sourcing on social media.

With regard to protest framing, the riot and confrontation frames appear with broadly similar distributions in both Detik.com and @barengwarga. This similarity suggests that conflict-oriented frames remain deeply embedded in protest coverage across different media environments, indicating that both conventional media and social media tend to position protest as a conflictual event, with confrontation remaining the most dominant frame. One explanation for this convergence lies in the enduring news value of conflict, which provides dramatic and easily recognizable narratives that attract audience attention. In the context of social media, the engagement-driven nature of platforms (through likes, shares, comments, and reposts) also incentivizes the circulation of emotionally charged and conflict-oriented content. Posts emphasizing confrontation or dramatic protest scenes often generate higher levels of interaction, which in turn increases their visibility through platform algorithms. As a result, even when activists disseminate protest narratives through their own social media channels, conflict-oriented representations may still be amplified. These patterns suggest that while social media expand opportunities for protest actors to communicate their perspectives, they do not fully disrupt the protest paradigm; rather, they reproduce some of its core elements within a new communicative environment.

Brown and Harlow demonstrate that the use of emotional and dramatic appeal in protest coverage is closely associated with audience engagement; content highlighting drama, tension, and

conflict more readily triggers emotional responses and interaction [25]. Within platform logic, this dynamic potentially reinforces visibility. Harlow et al. further show that the protest paradigm in social media contexts is not uniform but influenced by protest type, location, and media type; thus, in certain contexts, social media may display patterns similar to mainstream media [12].

Differences between online news coverage and social media posts become particularly evident in the dimensions of sourcing patterns and the use of marginalization/legitimation devices. In terms of sourcing, mainstream media rely far more heavily on institutional sources (government officials, security forces, official institutions), whereas social media (the @barengwarga account) predominantly present protesters' voices. This pattern aligns with prior findings that mainstream media tend to maintain an "impartial" stance by relying on official sources and emphasizing spectacle, whereas citizen media and social media may legitimize protesters and even function as commentators or actors within protest events [8]. Within the broader framework, the dominance of official sources in mainstream media reflects journalistic routines and structures of information access embedded within institutions, while the dominance of protester voices in social media reflects narrative production autonomy [12].

The sharpest contrast appears in marginalization/legitimation devices. Mainstream media significantly more often associate protesters with violence, whereas social media almost never attribute violence to protesters and instead strongly emphasize police violence. If the classical protest paradigm often operates through moral attribution that delegitimizes demonstrators, @barengwarga effectively reverses this moral focus: it is not the protesters who are positioned as the primary threat, but rather the repressive actions of authorities.

These findings can be understood as consequences of differences in media position and function. Mainstream media tend to exercise greater caution in narrating police violence, as they operate within certain institutional orbits, whereas social media are more flexible in presenting on-the-ground documentation that foregrounds protesters' experiences. These results are consistent with earlier observations regarding differences in legitimacy orientation between mainstream and citizen media and reinforce the argument that variations in the protest paradigm are strongly influenced by media type and distribution context within social platforms [9], [12].

The findings indicate that the transformation of the protest paradigm in the era of social media is selective. At the level of conflict framing (riot and confrontation), social media do not differ substantially from mainstream media. More consequential differences emerge at the level of "who is given voice" (sourcing) and "who is assigned moral attribution" (legitimation/marginalization devices).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the transformation of the protest paradigm in the era of social media is not comprehensive but selective and dimension-specific. In terms of conflict framing (riot and confrontation), patterns are relatively similar between mainstream media and social media, indicating the continuity of classical elements of the protest paradigm. However, clearer differences emerge in sourcing practices and legitimization/marginalization devices. Mainstream media tend to rely on institutional sources and more frequently attribute violence to protesters, whereas social media provide greater space for protesters' voices and more prominently highlight police violence. Social media do not fully replace the classical protest paradigm but reconstruct it through shifts in which actors are given voice and in moral attribution within protest representation.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis includes only one mainstream media outlet (Detik.com) and one social media account (@barengwarga), and therefore generalization of the findings should be undertaken with caution. Second, the study focuses on only one platform (X/Twitter), which possesses affordances that tend to encourage conflict and confrontation; different patterns may emerge on other social media platforms, yet this study does not compare findings with platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok. Third, the study does not analyze the interaction between social media and mainstream media, which in many cases may shape framing dynamics reciprocally. Fourth, the relationship between social media and movement actors or activists is not examined in detail, leaving unclear how movement communication strategies influence representation. Finally, the study does not investigate audience responses and therefore cannot explain how the public interprets, accepts, or challenges circulating representations of protest. Future research should address these limitations by examining a broader range of media outlets and multiple social media platforms in order to provide more comprehensive comparisons of protest coverage. Comparative studies across platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok may reveal how different platform affordances shape protest representation. Further research could also explore the interaction between mainstream media and social media in shaping protest narratives, as well as the communication strategies used by movement actors in producing and disseminating protest-related content. In addition, future studies may investigate audience responses to protest representations to better understand how different framing and sourcing patterns influence public perceptions of protest movements. Finally, further research could analyze the broader power dynamics underlying sourcing patterns in protest coverage, including whether reliance on official sources reflects structural biases within media systems and how these dynamics shape the perceived legitimacy of protest in the public sphere. Future studies may also examine the ideological dynamics of activist-managed social media accounts and how political orientations or advocacy goals influence the framing of protest events.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

The author used AI-assisted technology solely to support language refinement and clarity in the writing process. The author takes full responsibility for the content of the manuscript, including its accuracy, integrity, and originality

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