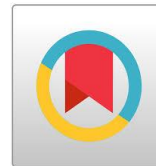


**Sentiment Analysis on Trans-nationalization of Digital Activism: The Case of #MilkTeaAlliance**



**Analisis Sentimen terhadap Trans-nasionalisasi Aktivisme Digital: Kasus #MilkTeaAlliance**

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	
<p><b>Keywords</b>                      Democratization;                      Digital Activism;                      Trans-national Advocacy Network;                      Asia;                      Twitter</p>	<p><b>ABSTRACT</b>                      Milk tea, a beloved beverage in Asia, has evolved into a symbol uniting pro-democracy activist. The hashtag #MilkTeaAlliance, propagated on Twitter (now "X"), emerged as a potent force for trans-national advocacy, uniting individuals online and onsite in the fight against authoritarianism across regions, including Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, and Myanmar. This study delves into the role of Twitter in raising awareness about authoritarian oppression on a trans-national scale, elucidating the movement's patterns on the platform. To comprehend the process of trans-nationalization, the study explores how a 'scale shift' from national to international is facilitated through Trans-national Advocacy Networks. The findings underscore the pivotal role of Twitter's openness as a key platform, coupled with the movement's strategy of disseminating factual information and garnering support, which contributed to its remarkable success in capturing attention.</p>
<p><b>Kata Kunci</b>                      Demokratisasi;                      Aktivisme Digital;                      Jaringan Advokasi Transnasional;                      Asia;                      Twitter</p>	<p><b>ABSTRAK</b>                      Teh susu, minuman yang sangat disukai di Asia, telah berkembang menjadi simbol pemersatu aktivis pro-demokrasi. Tagar #MilkTeaAlliance, yang disebar di Twitter (sekarang "X"), muncul sebagai kekuatan yang ampuh untuk advokasi transnasional, yang menyatukan individu secara daring dan di tempat dalam perjuangan melawan otoritarianisme di berbagai wilayah, termasuk Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, dan Myanmar. Studi ini menyelidiki peran Twitter dalam meningkatkan kesadaran tentang penindasan otoriter dalam skala transnasional, menjelaskan pola gerakan di platform tersebut. Untuk memahami proses transnasionalisasi, studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana 'pergeseran skala' dari nasional ke internasional difasilitasi melalui Jaringan Advokasi Transnasional. Temuan tersebut menggarisbawahi peran penting keterbukaan Twitter sebagai platform utama, ditambah dengan strategi gerakan untuk menyebarkan informasi faktual dan mengumpulkan dukungan, yang berkontribusi pada keberhasilannya yang luar biasa dalam menarik perhatian.</p>
<p><b>Article History</b>                      Send 18<sup>th</sup> October 2024                      Review 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024                      Accepted 25<sup>th</sup> November 2024</p>	<p>Copyright ©2025 <a href="#">Jurnal Aristo (Social, Politic, Humaniora)</a>                      This is an open access article under the <a href="#">CC-BY-NC-SA</a> license.                      Akses artikel terbuka dengan model <a href="#">CC-BY-NC-SA</a> sebagai lisensinya.</p>



## Introduction

In response to the observed decline in democratic quality, especially in Asia, several pertinent facets warrant scholarly attention. Chief among these is the ineffective engagement of political parties, which, in many instances, has hampered the robust functioning of democratic processes. The fragmentation caused by divergent interests further exacerbates this issue, impeding the cohesive development of democratic frameworks. Concurrently, incongruities in the institutional handling of cases have contributed to the erosion of democratic efficacy. Moreover, the enduring influence of autocratic values within the Asian governance system presents a substantial impediment to the consolidation of democratic principles. This persistence underscores the dual nature of political paradigms within the region, where democratic ideals coexist alongside deeply ingrained autocratic tendencies. The tension between these contrasting forces defines the contemporary political landscape in Asia, further shaping the trajectory of democratic governance. As democratic freedoms undergo progressive erosion, governments in Asian region are increasingly inclined towards authoritarian measures. The manifestation of oppressive actions represents a tangible manifestation of the broader challenges faced by democratic governance in Asia. As scholars continue to delve into these intricacies, a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted dynamics shaping the contemporary political milieu in Asia emerges, facilitating a more comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities inherent in the pursuit of democratic ideals.

The persistent democratic predicament in Asia is exemplified by ongoing challenges in regions such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, as well as Myanmar. The principal catalyst for democratic regression in these nations resides in the authoritative measures implemented by their respective governments. For example, the status of Hong Kong and Taiwan is a contentious issue, regarding divergent perspectives on their autonomy. While Hong Kong and Taiwan assert their autonomy, adhering to the notion of self-governance, but for China, guided by the One China Policy, contends that these territories remain integral components of the nation.

In the case of Hong Kong, the year 2019 witnessed an escalation of protests, spurred by China's Extradition Policy, which encroached upon the city's democratic freedoms. The electoral process during this period was marred by allegations of lack of fairness and freedom (Dedman & Lai, 2021). For Taiwan, Chinese oppression manifested through diplomatic constraints, with China asserting that Taiwan lacks sovereignty and is an integral part of the mainland (New York Times, 2022). The term "military junta" has gained currency in the political lexicon of Thailand and Myanmar, underscoring the ascendance of military leadership

in these nations. In Thailand, the 2006 coup d'état involving Prime Minister Thaksin catalyzed tumultuous protests, exemplified by the Thai Red Shirts, who persistently question the state of democracy in the country (Heck, 2010). Similarly, in Myanmar, governmental responses to citizens' democratic concerns have been characterized by violence, accompanied by severe restrictions on media access (Min W, 2012). The enduring democratic challenges across these diverse Asian contexts underscore the imperative for a comprehensive examination of the interplay between governmental actions, societal responses, and the broader geopolitical dynamics that shape the trajectory of democracy in the region.

From the commonplace skirmishes in the digital realm between Thai and Hong Kong internet denizens against their Chinese counterparts, an unforeseen conflict precipitated following the online engagement of Thai Teen Bi-Idol, Vachirawit Chivaaree, colloquially known as Bright. The catalyst was a seemingly innocuous act—Bright's 'like' of a tweet featuring panoramic photos, one of which depicted Hong Kong (Sup China, 2020). Bright, renowned among readers of LGBTQ+ narratives in Asia, particularly for his prominent role in a successful biseries, unwittingly became the focal point of an escalating dispute. In response to the inadvertent provocation, Bright issued a public apology for his perceived indiscretion. The controversy, however, transcended individual actions when his girlfriend's social media activity garnered Chinese attention. Her retweet of COVID-19 information dismissing it as a conspiracy originating in Wuhan amplified the tensions (Reuters, 2020). What ensued was an online war, with both factions engaging in a virtual battleground replete with factual assertions and satirical memes. This incident, unfolding on April 9, 2020, coincided with the backdrop of the Hong Kong protests against perceived encroachments by China and the escalating challenges posed by the military junta in Thailand. Recognizing the shared struggles faced by each other, a surprising turn of events transpired. China, Thailand, Hong Kong, and even Taiwan, acting as an additional player, began expressing mutual support under the unifying hashtag #nnevvy. This unexpected convergence reflected a moment where digital friction transformed into a nuanced expression of solidarity, transcending national boundaries, and capturing the complex socio-political dynamics of the time.

The expansiveness of Twitter (now called as "X"), transcending geographical boundaries, facilitates the simultaneous engagement of a global audience. This platform, spanning discussions from entertainment to political matters, democratizes discourse by allowing individuals, irrespective of social status, the ability to share perspectives freely. A distinctive feature of Twitter is the equitable potential for engagement, where a modest, anonymous account can garner comparable attention to that of a well-established counterpart.

The inception of the term “Milk Tea Alliance,” credited to the small, anonymous account @ShawTim on April 13, 2020, epitomizes the platform’s role in fostering unexpected global alliances. While the nomenclature’s origins remain unclear, popular conjecture posits a connection to the widespread Asian beverage, milk tea, a unifying cultural reference despite regional variations in recipes and nomenclature. Following the introduction of the Milk Tea Alliance term, a proliferation of the associated hashtag ensued, becoming a rallying cry for a diverse array of individuals.

The phenomenon of the Milk Tea Alliance underscores a trans-national pro-democracy movement in Asia. Despite diverse factors driving democracy-related challenges in each country, a common thread emerges—the restraint imposed by authoritarian governments on individual freedoms. The #MilkTeaAlliance hashtag has become a nexus for discussions on democracy and government violence in Asia, capturing international attention and mobilizing a global community. This research aims to delve into the nuanced background issues within key countries such as Hong Kong, Myanmar, Taiwan, and Thailand, shedding light on the patterns characterizing contemporary digital activism within the Milk Tea Alliance. By scrutinizing the strategies employed and the contextual conditions influencing the trans-national advocacy network’s efficacy, this study seeks to provide insights into the democratization process catalyzed through the trans-national digital activism of #MilkTeaAlliance on Twitter.

It is asserted by Gillin J.L (1919) that the genesis of democracy traces its origins to the ancient past, aligning with the structures of early human societies wherein cohesion was achieved through small tribal groups managing internal affairs. Gillin expounds upon the application of democratic principles in decision-making processes within these assemblies. Notably, if a proposal proved displeasing, the assembly would reject it; conversely, if agreeable, the assembly would accept it with utmost approval—a sentiment exemplified in the anointment of Saul by the priest Samuel, an election conducted by the people of Israel. As civilizations progressed, the diffusion of democratic ideals expanded beyond tribal frameworks. This evolution was catalyzed by class conflicts and, notably, the term ‘democracy’ found its early application by the Greeks in reference to the governance of their city-states. In contrast to contemporary democratic structures, the Greeks viewed larger political institutions as unnecessary and undesirable. Their political system, while less well-structured at a broader level, exhibited robust citizen participation within smaller political units (Dahl R.A, 2001).

In the contemporary context, the discourse on defective democracies gained prominence amidst unstable government conditions and financial crises in the late 1990s. Numerous articles

and critiques emerged, underscoring persistent issues with the genuine conceptualization of democracy, a theme that endures into the present day (Croissant A, Haynes J, 2021). The ongoing scrutiny reflects the enduring relevance and complexity of the democratic concept in the face of evolving political and socio-economic challenges. Democratization scholars have identified the onset of the third wave of autocratization in 1994, marked by the resurgence of classic illegal autocratic tactics to secure power, including *autogolpe* (self-coup), military coups, invasions, and the insidious nature of democratic erosion (Lührmann A, Lindberg S.I, 2019). A hallmark of authoritarian governance lies in accountability sabotage, often manifesting in the violation of individual political rights through the restriction of access to information and stifling avenues for public expression (Glasius M. 2018).

Authoritarian regimes exhibit a proclivity for innovative approaches, seeking to manipulate public attention while simultaneously limiting meaningful public participation. This manipulation, however, is often calibrated to permit a certain level of public involvement, albeit constrained, thus ensuring a veneer of participation without genuine empowerment (Curato N. Fossati D. 2020). In the Asian context, the conclusion of the Cold War brought significant implications for the application of democracy within societies. However, the deep-seated values of autocracy, predating the advent of democracy, necessitated adjustments that, at times, proved detrimental to democratic ideals in Asia. Challenges included the failure to adequately represent civilian interests, political cleavages, and a prevalent misunderstanding of the democratic ethos. (Croissant A, Haynes J, 2021).

Preventing further reluctance, active public involvement in the political process can lead to significant influence on final decision-making and foster enduring connections with the populace (Ovtchinnikov, A. V., Reza, S. W., & Wu, Y. 2020). This participatory involvement, commonly referred to as political activism, serves as a catalyst for the promotion and implementation of democracy within society. Activities such as voting, petitioning, participation in demonstrations, and expressing opinions through social media platforms collectively contribute to the dynamism of democratic engagement (Han, H. 2014).

Activists employ two primary methods, as outlined by George & Lieidner (2019): traditional offline meetings and digital activism through social media. In the 21st century, the ubiquity of technology and access to information has propelled numerous movements to leverage digital platforms for disseminating information and garnering support (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). The evolution of social media technologies has not only reshaped communication norms but has also redefined societal participation in politics (KhosraviNik, M. 2018).

The rapid proliferation of the internet and mobile phones in Asia, for instance, has empowered civil society groups to amplify their voices with minimal physical engagement, relying instead on media or social media platforms (Lee, S.H. 2017). Examining global movements such as the Arab Spring and the Black Lives Matter Movement underscores the pivotal role of social media in sharing information, shaping public opinion, and mobilizing support during democratic conflicts (Khondker, H.H. 2011; Mundt, M. Ross, K. & Burnett C. M., 2018).

In the context of Indonesia, activists harnessed social media in 2019 to counteract hoaxes and provide accurate information about the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) (Suwana, 2019). More recently, the Milk Tea Alliance in Asia has emerged as a novel form of digital activism, utilizing Twitter as its primary platform to disseminate information about the democratic conditions in participating countries (Dedman & Lai, 2021). Within the expansive realm of social media, activists engage in the exchange of information and collaborative development of movement strategies (Edwards, Howard, & Joyce, 2013). The interconnectedness of these digital platforms thus serves as a catalyst for the evolution and efficacy of contemporary activism, transcending geographical boundaries and reshaping the landscape of political participation.

In the face of internal and external pressures, proponents of democracy in Asia have responded by vocalizing their concerns, innovating, and adapting to evolving political, social, and technological landscapes (Curato N, Fossati D, 2020). This adaptive resilience underscores the dynamic nature of the struggle for democratic values in the region. Digital activism serves as a potent vehicle for the creation of public opinion platforms, emancipated from the constraints of political hierarchies (Bennett W. L, Manheim J. B, 2006). The concept of connective action, as delineated by (Bennett W.L, Segerberg A. 2012), elucidates the capacity of diverse actors to spontaneously coalesce based on self-motivated personal interests on social media. In this paradigm, networks are characterized by individualization and technological organization, obviating the necessity for collective identity framing, and rendering participation more accessible through social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

As highlighted by Kane et al. (2014), social media provides users with the tools to construct unique profiles, generate digital content, establish sharing connections, and explore the connections made by others. Twitter, in particular, stands out as one of the most utilized platforms for digital activism due to its openness, enabling the simultaneous engagement of a broad audience and encouraging individuals to express their thoughts freely (Park C.S, 2013). The visibility of hashtags on Twitter enhances user engagement and facilitates the organization



of discussions around specific topics, exemplifying the platform's capacity to galvanize discourse (Small T. A, 2011).

Movements leveraging social media platforms seek to foster high-quality democracy by acknowledging the equal rights of individuals to voice their opinions and be heard (Della Porta, D, 2011). A case in point is the Spanish Los Indignados in 2011, which blended offline and online activism, strategically leveraging Twitter to create a viral topic and encourage open expression of opinions (Postill. J, 2014). More recently, the Milk Tea Alliance, emblematic of the latest pro-democracy movement in Asia, harnesses the openness of Twitter to rally support and amplify their cause (Dedman & Lai, 2021). In essence, the strategic utilization of social media platforms emerges as a dynamic force in contemporary activism, transcending physical boundaries and democratizing the discourse on a global scale.

In Hong Kong, the introduction of democratic values by the British posed a significant challenge for China in asserting control. The emergence of student activists in the late 1980s marked a turning point, with impassioned voices advocating for democratic principles and contemplating the merits of separation from the mainland (Ortmann. S, 2012). Departing from traditional protest strategies, the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest witnessed the innovative use of film and video art for documentation and awareness dissemination. This approach persisted during the 2014 Umbrella Movement, where documentaries were publicly shared through social media, leaving a profound and lasting impact on the Hong Kong government and protesters (Pernin. J, 2020). Similarly, Taiwan's democratic movement in the early 1990s was largely spearheaded by workers and students. The strategy of utilizing video documentation for awareness dissemination mirrored that of Hong Kong. This tactic gained prominence during the 2014 Sunflower Movement, marking a synchronized effort by both Hong Kong and Taiwan in the pursuit of democracy (Pernin. J, 2020).

In Myanmar, a response to the oppressive authorities suppressing democratic activities materialized in 1988, with students, workers, and even monks initiating protests that tragically resulted in 5,000 deaths (Min, 2012). The pro-democracy movement in Myanmar persists, with ongoing protests and, notably, the Milk Tea Alliance movement on Twitter providing an international platform for their cause (Dedman & Lai, 2021). Meanwhile, Thailand, characterized by military and monarch rule, has witnessed persistent challenges to democracy. In 1973, Prime Minister Sanya played a pivotal role in raising awareness about Thailand's socio-economic conditions by supporting a student movement to disseminate basic democratic education in remote areas (Kongkirati. P, 2012). Subsequent efforts to reinstate democratic

values have been relentless (Heck, 2010). Each of these instances reflects the multifaceted struggles and diverse strategies employed in the pursuit of democracy across Asia.

The emergence of the Milk Tea Alliance during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic was not only a manifestation of the internet war but also rooted in several significant factors. Dedman & Lai (2021) posit that the formation of the movement served as a unifying force for voices marginalized by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), particularly in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand. In the case of Thailand, the CCP was perceived as a key enabler of the post-2014 Thai junta. Moreover, the aggressive imperialistic tendencies associated with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) impacted other Asian countries, especially in Southeast Asia (Schaffar & Wongratanawin, 2021). Crucially, the Milk Tea Alliance resonated with young pro-democracy activists across Asia, fostering mutual support among them. According to Dedman & Lai (2021), the Milk Tea Alliance operates on a dual-track attention strategy. Firstly, it localizes the struggle, focusing on democratic reform within individual nations. Secondly, it broadens the struggle to garner support against Chinese-centered globalization or authoritarianism. This dual-track approach signifies a paradigm shift in political activism in Asia, showcasing the potential of trans-national digital activism to propel democratic movements forward (Schaffar & Wongratanawin, 2021). The movement serves as a testament to the evolving dynamics of political activism in the digital age, allowing for cross-border collaboration and the amplification of democratic ideals.

The concept of trans-national advocacy networks, as introduced by Keck M. E, Sikkink. K, (1999), encompasses a group of actors who collaborate on a particular issue, effectively blurring the boundaries between the domestic and international systems. Central to these networks is a shared set of values, ideas, and beliefs that drive their collective efforts to effect change. Their effectiveness lies in the strategic use of information and a commitment to making a difference, fostering connections within their movements. Typically, the issues these networks address originate at the local or domestic level but have the potential to gain global attention beyond their initial localized contexts (Tarrow. S. & McAdam. D, 2005). Trans-national advocacy networks play a crucial role in the social realm by facilitating the integration and promotion of norm harmonization at both regional and international levels. Often, these networks emerge when channels between domestic groups and their governments face obstructions. Expanding their strategies and campaigns allows them to navigate these obstacles, believing that broadening their reach will amplify their missions and garner increased support on the international stage.



The transformative impact of these networks is evident in their ability to apply ideas and moral influence globally, challenging the notion that actors, whether states or non-state entities, are solely driven by self-interest. Instead, they demonstrate a commitment to ideas that hold significance in world politics. The term ‘advocacy’ aptly characterizes these actors as defenders of principles or individuals, motivated not solely by self-interest but by a dedication to ideas that transcend personal gain (Keck & Sikkink, 1999). In essence, trans-national advocacy networks exemplify a collaborative and values-driven approach to addressing complex global issues. To comprehensively evaluate the resonance of a movement, an understanding of the influence wielded by trans-national advocacy networks and their strategies is crucial. The process of network influence can be delineated into five distinct stages:

1. *Agenda-Setting*. Networks must first identify and highlight an issue, employing agenda-setting strategies to garner attention. The creation of a compelling narrative, as suggested by Stone (1989), is pivotal. Particularly effective are issues involving bodily harm to vulnerable individuals and those related to legal equality of opportunity. This agenda-setting laid on the agreed value served as the basis for the advocacy.
2. *Discursive Influence*. Networks strategically transition from local to international spheres, influencing both societal and governmental discourses. This stage involves shaping public discourse and perceptions through various communication channels.
3. *Institutional Alignment*. Networks seek to align themselves with institutional procedures, aiming to influence decision-making processes within relevant institutions at both domestic and international levels.
4. *Policy Advocacy*. The focus shifts to influencing and demanding policy changes from targeted actors, be they governments or other entities. This stage involves direct engagement with policymakers and advocating for specific policy reforms.
5. *State Response and Accountability*. Networks strategically provoke responses from states, holding them accountable for their commitments. This stage is deemed essential for ensuring that the state adheres to its stated positions and takes concrete actions in response to advocacy efforts.

In the digital era, social media, particularly platforms like Twitter, has become the primary channel for individuals and movements to express their views and extend their influence (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Recognizing the diminishing authority of states over public discourse, non-state actors leverage social media platforms to initiate actions. The democratic potential of these movements lies in the deliberative and distributed nature of social media, providing a space for digital activists to voice their perspectives and garner support. By

employing Twitter as their main platform, digital activists associated with movements such as the #MilkTeaAlliance utilize viral hashtags like #MilkTeaAlliance and #nnevy to catalyze collective action and engage with a broader audience. This strategic use of social media amplifies their impact, fostering a more inclusive and participatory form of advocacy in the digital realm.

In the context of the Milk Tea Alliance movement, this research focuses on the second stage of the Trans-national Advocacy Networks theory, which revolves around expanding the agenda from the local to the international level. This stage encompasses the movement’s efforts to gain attention and recognition beyond its immediate local context through the strategic use of social media, particularly Twitter. The discussion is confined to this stage, as the movement has not directly influenced policy changes or government behavior. The research operationalizes this stage using the following concepts:

**Table 1. Trans-national Advocacy Networks Influence**

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Stage Definition</b>	<b>Derivative Concept</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
Issue Creation & Agenda Setting	Generating attention to the issue by setting the agenda to influence through media	Narration of the issue by providing the ideas, facts, and causal stories.	Tweets sampling
Spreading Influence on the international level	Expanding the agenda to the international stage to gain support and recognition	Influential actors who have international present	Account and Tweets sampling

**Source:** Keck & Sikkink (2009)

By utilizing tweets as the primary data source and applying the Connectivity of Action theory, this research aims to dissect the strategies employed by the Milk Tea Alliance movement to traverse from local concerns to gaining international recognition. The focus is on the narrative construction and the identification of influential actors contributing to the movement’s expansion on the global stage through the connectivity and amplification inherent in social media platforms, particularly Twitter.

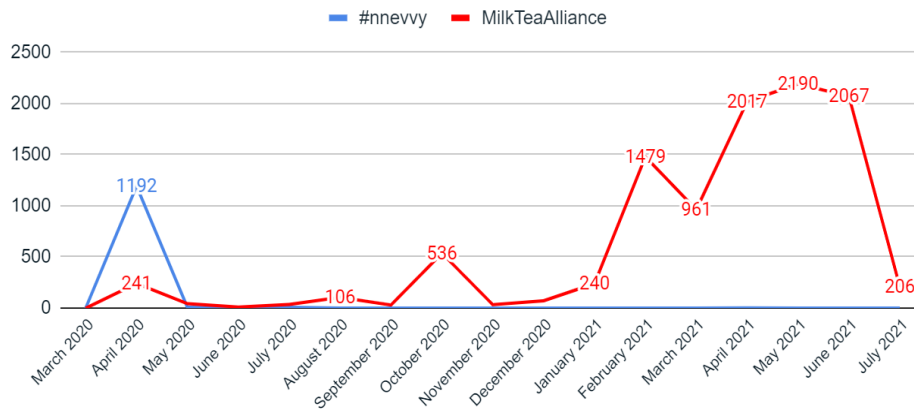
## **Method**

This research employs qualitative-descriptive research methods, leveraging a case study approach to offer an in-depth exploration of the Milk Tea Alliance Movement in 2020. Qualitative-descriptive methods are chosen to elucidate, discover, and comprehend the sentiments, beliefs, and perspectives of the involved individuals. The focus is on seeking agreement on the interpretation of research findings (Kumar, 2011). By studying the unfolding and ongoing process of the Milk Tea Alliance Movement, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the democratization process within its digital activism context. The democratic backgrounds of the involved countries will be considered, and the role of social media openness will be emphasized as a primary driver for idea dissemination. Primary data is gathered through media tracking, specifically by collecting information from Twitter using the hashtags #MilkTeaAlliance and #nnevy. Social Network Analysis (SNA) is applied to trace the basic patterns in Twitter data, focusing on key concepts such as actors participating or influencing the movement and relational ties between these actors (Wasserman, 1995). NodeXL, a social network analysis software, is used to collect and analyze tweets from five influential pro-democracy activists between April 2020 and July 2021. Tweets are filtered based on hashtag use and content, and their characteristics (facts, support, humor, or uncategorized) are classified. Secondary data is obtained from journal articles, previous research, trusted news media, and official websites. Keywords such as “Milk Tea Alliance,” “digital activism,” “democracy in Asia,” and “trans-national activism” are used to identify relevant secondary sources. Two analytical processes are implemented in this research are social network analysis and content analysis. Social network analysis relies on the hashtags #MilkTeaAlliance and #nnevy, as well as the activities and backgrounds of the primary accounts to define relations. Content analysis follows four steps outlined by Kumar (2011): identifying main themes, assigning codes to assess keyword frequency, classifying data, and integrating themes to construct findings. This method helps unveil themes, patterns, and the interpretation of words used in the observational field notes. By combining these analytical approaches, this research aims to unravel the intricate dynamics of the Milk Tea Alliance Movement, shedding light on its impact, patterns, and the role of digital activism in its democratization process.

## **Result and Discussion**

The period of data collection for this study was April 2020–July 2021. The hashtag #nnevy peaked in April 2020 with over a million tweets, according to TrendsMap (2021).

Thailand and Hong Kong were the main areas influencing this trend. However, the trend seems to have changed since the new hashtag “#MilkTeaAlliance” was introduced on April 13. Twitter users produced almost 11 million tweets in favor of the movement in a single year using the latter hashtag.



**Figure 1. Hashtags Trends**

Note: values represent 1/10,000 of 1% of tweets, which means 1,000 would represent 0.1% of all tweets sent on Twitter for that time period.

Source: TrendsMap (2022)

The significant increase in the use of hashtags, particularly the transition from #nnevy to #MilkTeaAlliance, indicates a dynamic shift in the online discourse surrounding the movement; signifies the process of trans-nationalization started to flower. The initial surge of #nnevy suggests a concentrated effort or event in April 2020 that garnered massive attention, likely related to issues in Thailand and Hong Kong. The subsequent adoption and dominance of #MilkTeaAlliance signify the emergence of a broader and more inclusive movement that transcends individual hashtags. The widespread use of hashtags over the year underscores the sustained engagement and interest in the Milk Tea Alliance movement on Twitter. This extensive digital footprint illustrates the movement’s ability to maintain relevance and capture the attention of a global audience over an extended period, as proof that the discourse has already played.

The next phase of analysis will delve into the qualitative aspects of the tweets, focusing on their content, themes, and the role of key actors in shaping the narrative and influence of the movement. Using NodeXL social network analysis, five influential accounts were identified based on their ability to receive a notably high number of engagements with tweets containing the hashtags #MilkTeaAlliance and #nnevy. These accounts play a crucial role in shaping the discourse and spreading the movement’s message across the digital landscape. The next phase of analysis will delve into the content, patterns, and interactions associated with

these influential accounts, providing insights into their strategies and impact on the dissemination of the Milk Tea Alliance movement. This qualitative examination aims to uncover the nuances of their engagement and contribution to the overall narrative of the movement.

*Table 2. Five Influential Accounts*

Twitter Handle	Display Name	Country	Number of Followers (2022)
<b>joshuawongcf</b>	Joshua Wong 黃之鋒	Hong Kong	716K
<b>youranoncentral</b>	Anonymous	-	5.5M
<b>mrattkthu</b>	Mratt Kyaw Thu	Myanmar	277.2K
<b>nathanlawkc</b>	Nathan Law 羅冠聰	Hong Kong	307.2K
<b>netiwitc</b>	Netiwit Chotiphathaisal	Thailand	174.4k

*Source: Twitter (2022)*

*Table 3. Account Engagement with the Hashtags*

Twitter Handle	Total Tweets Gathered	Total Retweets	Total Likes
<b>joshuawongcf</b>	85	522,232	303,963
<b>youranoncentral</b>	51	424,753	528,228
<b>mrattkthu</b>	19	214,754	165,008
<b>nathanlawkc</b>	9	19,520	34,767
<b>netiwitc</b>	10	25,457	5,446

*Source: Twitter (2022)*

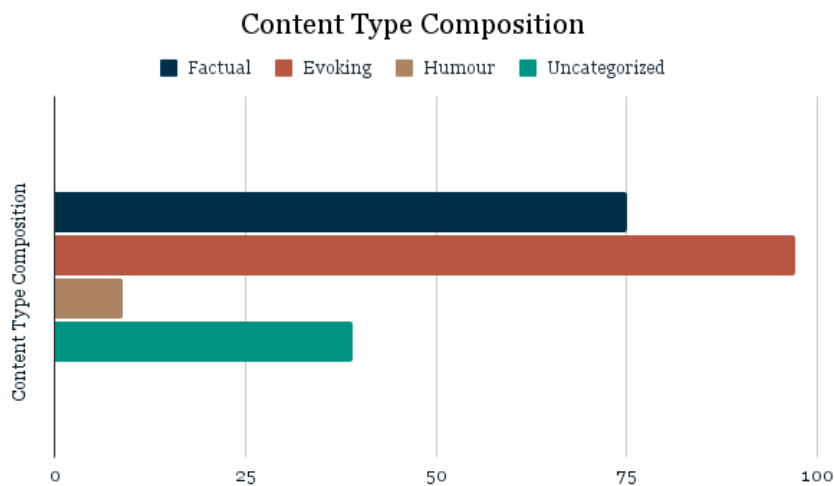
For the selection criteria, three key factors were considered in choosing the five influential accounts analyzed in this research:

1. *Activeness During the Period.* The selected accounts demonstrated consistent and active participation in the discourse surrounding the Milk Tea Alliance movement throughout the specified period. This activeness is a crucial factor in gauging their impact on the digital landscape.
2. *Influence and Mass Gathering Ability.* Accounts held by Joshua, Mratt, Nathan, and the Anonymous handle were chosen due to their influential positions in society. Joshua and Nathan, both Hong Kong-based activists, have been actively involved in pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. The ability of these accounts to gather a mass following is indicative of their influence and reach within the digital space.
3. *High Engagement Metrics.* The selected accounts received a notable level of engagement in terms of retweets and likes for their tweets containing the #MilkTeaAlliance and #nnevvy hashtags. High engagement metrics signify the resonance of their messages and the effectiveness of their communication strategies.

Using content analysis, tweet samples from each selected account were pulled to gain insights into the trans-national activist network’s dimensions. This analysis aims to understand the patterns of influence, the language used, and the ideas conveyed by these influential accounts within the context of the Milk Tea Alliance movement.

Based on the samples (see table 4), in figure 2 we can conclude four themes that composes the content of the Tweets, i.e.:

1. Factual Tweets (34.1%): Providing information about the democratic conditions in each country and updates on protest events.
2. Evoking Tweets (44.1%): Expressing support, hopes, and dreams related to the movement.
3. Humorous Tweets (4.1%): Sharing memes and humorous content to engage and entertain.
4. Uncategorized Tweets (17.7%): Primarily retweets from Netiwit, promoting books about democracy/movement in Asia.



**Figure 2.** Content Type Composition from Influential Accounts  
Source: NodeXL (2022)

**Table 4.** Tweets Content Sampling from 4 Influential Accounts

Twitter Handle	Date	Tweets Content	Retweet Count	Likes Count
joshuawongcf	4/12/2020	1. Hong Kong stand with our freedom-loving friends in Thailand against Chinese bullying! #nnevvy	27,633	29,474
joshuawongcf	4/12/2020	11. This incident is giving me a lot of hope in youth activism and transnational social engagement. Perhaps we can build a new kind of pan-Asian solidarity that opposes all forms of authoritarianism. ☐☐☐☐☐☐!!! ☐☐☐	1,545	2,131
joshuawongcf	7/19/2020	[Support our Thai fellows in their fight for democracy] 1. #Hongkongers will never forget how our Thai fellows stood with us against #China’s nationalist trolls during	41,266	16,977



		#nnevy saga and spoke up for us amid #Beijing’s authoritarian suppression in #HK. #MilkTeaAlliance <a href="https://t.co/jcipVpqqTN">https://t.co/jcipVpqqTN</a>		
joshuawongcf	10/14/2020	I believed #MilkTeaAlliance could create a “pan-Asia” grassroots movement that would draw more attention to social causes in Asia. “Be it Belarus, Thailand, or other places where injustice is happening, we are constantly fighting for the same beliefs.” <a href="https://t.co/hAOorWCBMo">https://t.co/hAOorWCBMo</a>	2,903	3,883
joshuawongcf	10/16/2020	They can lock up our bodies but can't lock up our minds. #MilkTeaAlliance <a href="https://t.co/lyiYY9w1m2">https://t.co/lyiYY9w1m2</a>	3,758	3,176
joshuawongcf	4/8/2021	Always in solidarity, no matter how hard the times. #MilkTeaAlliance #奶茶聯盟	4,352	6,181
nathanlawkc	4/12/2020	Assemble, my Thai friends. #nnevy <a href="https://t.co/lwZAbCDXg0">https://t.co/lwZAbCDXg0</a>	1,701	6,196
nathanlawkc	10/16/2020	Democratic Reform Now, Release all political prisoners. “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” — Martin L. King #StandWithThailand #MilkTeaAlliance □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ <a href="https://t.co/1hSEHiYCFu">https://t.co/1hSEHiYCFu</a>	3,730	4,093
nathanlawkc	4/8/2021	Stronger together — We fight for democracy, we never give up. □□□□□ □□□□□ #MilkTeaAlliance	1,724	3,634
mrattkthu	2/28/2021	DAWEI: A soldier gives the gun to a police for like test-shooting. And when he hit a man, all celebrate happily. Today in Dawei, Tanintharyi. #MilkTeaAllianceMyanmar <a href="https://t.co/7kas3h4k5T">https://t.co/7kas3h4k5T</a>	20,204	14,034
mrattkthu	2/28/2021	LOVELY: During the crackdown, people left their phones, shoes and accessories. Residents nearby kept them and displayed in public. Everyone can take their belongings back. #MilkTeaAllianceMyanmar <a href="https://t.co/4mjRkViSEO">https://t.co/4mjRkViSEO</a>	17,384	17,411
mrattkthu	2/28/2021	MANDALAY: A demonstrator was shot head and killed on the spot. - Witness on the ground who dragged dead body told me. #WhatsHappeningInMyanmar #MilkTeaAllianceMyanmar	11,234	8,279
mrattkthu	2/28/2021	Police forced the medical workers to take off the ‘white coats’ and put them into the vehicle in Kyaukkone, Yankin Township, Yangon. #MilkTeaAllianceMyanmar <a href="https://t.co/RIVa67bRON">https://t.co/RIVa67bRON</a>	17,533	12,305
youranoncentral	2/11/2021	Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. #EndImpunity #WhatsHappeningInMyanmar #Feb11Coups #MilkTeaAlliance #CyberSpeechFreedom <a href="https://t.co/2ka09k57nr">https://t.co/2ka09k57nr</a>	35,188	47,788

youranoncentral	2/25/2021	Anonymous supports the #MilkTeaAlliance with #OpCCP. #WhatsHappeningInMyanmar #WhatsHappeningInThailand #WhatsHappeningInHongKong #WhatsHappeningInIndia #WhatsHappeningInTaiwan #WhatsHappeningInIndonesia <a href="https://t.co/9Zm42BNkAS">https://t.co/9Zm42BNkAS</a>	24,811	31,931
youranoncentral	2/26/2021	Call for an International protest for Myanmar on February 28th, 2021. #OpCCP #MilkTeaAlliance #WhatsHappeningInMyanmar <a href="https://t.co/L3SVbizFua">https://t.co/L3SVbizFua</a>	19,549	25,511
youranoncentral	2/28/2021	TW// gunshots, blood Junta forces opened fire on unarmed pro-democracy protestors in Hleden Center, Yangon on Feb 28. Multiple injuries reported. Some images to graphic to repost. #WhatsHappeningInMyanmar #Feb28Coupe #MilkTeaAlliance <a href="https://t.co/HsgKplgk3I">https://t.co/HsgKplgk3I</a>	24,319	21,813
netiwitc	4/8/2021	Twitter launches emoji #MilkTeaAlliance awareness global campaign against Chinese influence and domination	18,752	2,456
netiwitc	6/4/2021	Today, my friend and I went to the Chinese embassy. Standing in mourning for the victims of the 1989 Tiananmen Incident and to cheer up for Hong Kong residents who have been banned from holding remembrance events. The spirits would not bow to their tyranny to continue. (This is the fifth year in a row that I have taken this stance.) #June4th #MilkTeaAlliance	1,492	981
raiyounggarden	4/11/2020	Hi Chinese, Please tell your gov about giving permission to you for using google ,youtube without VPN #nnevvy	10,000	4,290
tracingtheworld	4/12/2020	What made #nnevvy so entertaining was Thai users humoring all the insults towards the king and the government because Chinese bots didn't realise how much Thais despise their country currently. Some of my personal favourites:	6,008	5,031
sweetTen10	4/12/2020	(Translated) There is a foreign twitter saying Thailand should apologize to China. Because now Thai tourism depends on China. No Chinese, Thai will be in trouble. very agree It's not an apology But it's about our economic deficit. Thailand should stop relying on China and earn other income. This kind of international relations should not be kept as a threat #nnevvy .	48,718	11,920
_maerz_	4/14/2020	In milk tea we trust. #MilkTeaAlliance #ชาวมั่นกว่าเลือด	32,500	9,830

MmPorcupine	4/15/2020	(Translated) I like Energie netizens very much. Recently, I brought my knowledge of geography to spread a map in front of the Chinese embassy that came out to say that “China and Thailand are not far away from each other” is about the Mekong River. China’s maritime rights Let’s face it that the brothers and sisters don’t act like this, that is, they will step on the ground for this moment #ขานมฉันกว่าเลือด #MilkTeaAlliance #奶茶聯盟	27,772	6,117
margianta	3/4/2021	Deng Jia Xi, a 20-year-old university student was shot dead by Myanmar security forces. When found, she was wearing an "Everything Will Be OK" T-shirt and left a letter asking for her organs to be donated. She is the only child in her family.	27,499	61,500

*Source: Social Network Data Analysis NodeXL (2022)*

From the sample of tweets, Joshua expressed his solidarity with Thailand, positioning it as a key ally while advocating for a broader collaboration among Asians as pan-Asia democracy activists. Nathan Law echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the importance of mutual support among Hong Kong, Thailand, Taiwan, and Myanmar, considering them as pioneers in the movement who should stand united. Mratt, a Burmese Journalist residing in Spain after escaping mass arrests in Myanmar, played an active role in reporting on the conditions during the deadly protests in February 2021. His use of tweets and the hashtag #MilkTeaAllianceMyanmar aimed to garner sympathy and shed light on the situation.

The tweets also revealed instances of solidarity among protesters, illustrated by simple acts such as safeguarding protesters’ belongings. An anonymous account, @youranoncentral, which focuses on exposing human rights abuses, actively participated in spreading information during the Myanmar protests. This included tweets related to the Milk Tea Alliance, providing support for activists, and sharing visuals depicting police brutality. Netiwit, a student activist based in Thailand, contributed to the movement by retweeting numerous posts with the #MilkTeaAlliance hashtag and sharing them with his followers. Additionally, three top tweets were selected based on their popularity, irrespective of the users’ status or follower count. These top tweets contained factual information and responses addressing the ongoing protest situation on Twitter.

From the five accounts discussed, we found that the tweets’ content composition consisted of 44.1% evoking tweets such as support, hopes, and dreams, 34.1% of facts about the democratic condition of each country and also the protests event, 4.1% humorous tweets with memes, and 17.7% uncategorized tweets that mostly came from Netiwit retweeting

activities which those tweets contain promoting books about democracy/movement in Asia. Thus, from the overall data collected, we conclude that these accounts played a huge role in providing facts, the current conditions, and also utilizing memes so people can be more engaged to know more about the issue. However, these numbers did not show the overall tweets of this movement, but it is able to give us a picture of how this movement goes. Regardless of the number of tweets, considering the fast-moving and open nature of Twitter, anyone can be reached by the tweets through the likes and retweets activity of others. These findings are important to tailor the flow of Milk Tea Alliance which will be discussed in the next part. Indeed, the emergence of the Milk Tea Alliance serves as a response to the common challenges faced by various Asian countries in upholding democracy. The activists strategically leveraged Twitter as a platform to draw attention to these shared issues. The initial phase of transnational advocacy networks involves identifying a collective problem and framing the agenda to influence public opinion. In this context, the activists ingeniously employed the hashtag #MilkTeaAlliance as a symbolic representation of their solidarity and dedication to democratic principles.

The openness of Twitter played a pivotal role in enabling them to reach a diverse audience, surpassing national confines. Through the dissemination of their concerns, factual information, and personal testimonies, their objective was to foster empathy and establish trust among individuals encountering similar struggles. Social media, particularly Twitter, emerged as a vital tool in amplifying their voices and catalyzing a collective response against authoritarian practices. The agenda-setting phase, integral to transnational advocacy, was effectively harnessed by the Milk Tea Alliance to draw attention to democracy-related challenges in their respective nations. This collaborative endeavor, driven by a shared mission and facilitated by digital platforms, epitomizes a contemporary mode of activism that transcends conventional boundaries.

The Bright incident initially drew considerable attention, but to underscore the core democratic issues, activists introduced distinctive hashtags for easy identification on Twitter, namely #nnevy and #MilkTeaAlliance. About 34.1% of the tweets, constituting factual information, provided a concise overview of the concerns raised by activists. This approach elicited sympathy from the audience, emphasizing the potential infringement on people's rights. The 44.1% of supportive tweets played a crucial role in showcasing solidarity, demonstrating that one's struggle is acknowledged and endorsed across Asia. Given the decentralized nature of influence, anyone could emerge as a key opinion leader, enabling tweets with movement hashtags to circulate widely and motivating individuals to

voice their perspectives. Moreover, the inclusion of 4.1% of humorous tweets reflected the youth's mode of expression, characterized by humility, enlightenment, and spirited engagement. This humor-infused approach marked the agenda of the Milk Tea Alliance during its initial stage of transnational design.

Crucially, the connectivity of their action logic involves individuals choosing to participate as a means of expressing personal opinions on an issue and seeking self-validation within trusted connections. Consequently, activists initiated the movement by articulating their views on China's perceived overreaction to the Bright incident and disseminated information about China's government behavior to other Asian countries. In response to numerous negative comments from Chinese users, notable examples included @raiyounggarden highlighting China's internet access restrictions outside the mainland, @MmPorcupine drawing attention to the government's perceived cruelty towards Thailand over the Mekong River issue, and @tracingtheworld expressing admiration for the attention-grabbing humorous tweets from activists. These tweets conveyed personal opinions, stimulating reactions through responses, retweets, quotes, and likes, thereby triggering a chain reaction as the logic of Twitter propagated these tweets to broader audiences.

Analyzing the patterns and themes of tweets, this study identifies two types crucial for supporting agenda-setting and international outreach: (i) tweets addressing the core problem by sharing facts, current conditions, and support, and (ii) humorous tweets that poke fun at their own governments through sharing funny memes. The first type, crucial for networking, serves information with not just facts but also testimonies from affected individuals. Clear, impactful messages foster empathy, build trust within networks, and prompt action, such as joining the movement. The second type, complementing the first, persuades through simple, humorous content, particularly effective for engaging audiences, like the Thais, with a wealth of memes. Activists frequently utilize both types to express their views in diverse ways.

While the Milk Tea Alliance easily spread its ideas across Asia, the movement didn't immediately focus on influencing people with democracy-related issues faced by activists. Shifting attention was necessary, expanding from the debate about whether Hong Kong is a country to China's oppression of Hong Kong's democracy, especially considering the ongoing democratic struggles. The Bright incident served as a prologue to the main ideas, recognizing that emphasizing the motivations behind Chinese netizens' trolls – highlighting the government's actions against Hong Kong's freedom – triggered responses. This resonated particularly with countries facing similar issues with their respective

governments, such as Taiwan's injustice from China, Myanmar's authoritarian regime, and even Indonesia and Malaysia, prompting a united front of support.

International actors also played a significant role in amplifying the Milk Tea Alliance's ideas. Among the five influential accounts analyzed, two were pro-democracy activists from Hong Kong, notably @joshuawongcf and @nathanlawkc. On April 12, 2020, Joshua expressed hope for youth transnational activism in Asia, emphasizing the potential grassroots impact of the #MilkTeaAlliance. When the term was introduced on April 13, 2020, by an anonymous account @ShawTim, Joshua reiterated his support, stating that solidarity transcends injustice locations, reinforcing shared beliefs. Nathan Law supported the movement through memes and retweets. In the early stages, an illustration representing the Milk Tea Alliance, featuring figures from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand toasting their milk tea recipes in solidarity, gained immense traction. Reshared by @Maerz, it garnered 32,500 retweets and 9,830 likes, symbolizing the movement's spirited support.

This movement, expressed through popular hashtags on Twitter, aimed to establish a high-quality democracy and freedom of expression, recognizing equal rights for all to be heard. Offline protests were shared online with #MilkTeaAlliance, bridging the gap between local and international support. The movement's connectivity in digital activism, witnessed across countries, exemplifies the realization of transnational advocacy networks. Amidst the rising Myanmar issue in February 2021, the #MilkTeaAlliance hashtag reached its peak usage, with activists employing it to report Myanmar police brutality to an international audience. Myanmar activist @mrattkthu used hashtags like #MilkTeaAlliance and #WhatIsHappeninginMyanmar, eliciting countless responses. Additionally, the account @youranoncentral played a role in disseminating information on police brutality, extending support, and advocating for action. While social media could not guarantee safety, it provided a platform for expression, allowing transnational activists to share their ideas within a trusted community. The openness of Twitter emerged as a potential game-changer, impacting international politics.

## **Conclusion**

The openness of social media plays a crucial role in information searching and sharing during the trans-national movement, especially for those who share the same ideas and seek support. Exploring digital activism in various contexts brings new ways to utilize social media for the development of movements and maintaining democratic systems. Thus, the result of this study implies that social media can be an excellent platform to realize the



democratization process and expand the movement at the international level. However, a strategy is needed to integrate ideas harmonization so that the message can be delivered clearly. Continuing from the Bright incident, the Milk Tea Alliance with the existing exposure, expanded its focus into a bigger view as a part of their agenda-setting. A good content narration with various delivering methods can be applied; providing the truths, supportive messages, and humorous memes that resonate with many. The next is to involve influential actors to participate in spreading the ideas. Those actors have a well-known public identity that makes them credible and relevant to the issues, thus, people can be more certain and feel empowered to further the movement.

This research only took 5 (five) influential accounts as the main analysis; however, many other accounts also had an important role in sharing the movement through tweets, retweets, likes, and share buttons. Furthermore, as this research aims to describe the democratization process through trans-national digital activism, further research is needed to analyze the impact of their movement to the government and how its strategy can be copied by other movements. Finding the best practice of trans-national digital activism can help many movements to voice their ideas and be heard.

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