

DIGITAL ACTIVISM IN PROTECTING LOCAL COMMUNITIES FROM ECOCIDE THROUGH HASHTAG SAVESANGIHEISLAND ON TWITTER

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ABSTRACT

The extractive industry in Indonesia has become a priority to attract investors. The presence of an exploitative industry is feared to cause ecocide and the destruction of natural resources and ecosystems. This ecocide also occurred in the Sangihe Islands. The government gave gold mining exploitation to PT. Tambang Mas Sangihe (TMS). These concessions led to rejection and resistance from the people of the Sangihe Islands. The resistance was through demonstrations and Twitter, with the main actor being The Network of Mining Advocacy (Jatam) through the @Jatamnas account. This study aims to analyze @Jatamnas' digital activism against ecocide in the Sangihe Islands. This study used the qualitative approach with the virtual ethnography method. The data used is the content of the @Jatamnas account on Twitter in the period June-December 2021. The results show that the campaign with the hashtags #SaveSangiheland provoked netizen reactions to support the Sangihe communities. The online conversations at #SaveSangiheland on the Jatamnas account revealed the dynamics of the need to embed local communities from the clutches of the oligarchs who hide behind the terminology of investment and employment. Furthermore, the conversation also tends to weaken the local community struggle because of the many accounts suspected to be pro-government which enter into the discussion with local wisdom-biased. However, the #SaveSangiheland serves as a public space for open debates on ecological issues.

Keywords: *digital activism, ecocide, twitter, social media, hashtag*

INTRODUCTION

The use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter as an instrument for organizing protests has often been studied (Poell & Van Dijck, 2018; Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015). From Tunisia (Breuer et al., 2015), South Korea (Lee, 2018), Chile (Valenzuela et al., 2012), Russia (Enikolopov et al., 2020), to Indonesia (Fuadi, 2020; Sutan et al., 2021), the protesters took advantage of the presence of social media. According to

Valenzuela, the power of social media as an instrument of protest lies in information, namely social media as a source of news; expression of opinion; and activism (Valenzuela, 2013). In addition, social media also has strength in aspects of unity, number, and commitment (Freelon et al., 2018). Unity, as stated by Oruc, appears in the form of the use of hashtags (Oruc, 2019).

Sanchez researched the use of digital activism on Twitter and found that on-line activism requires not only participation but also the dissemination of online information (Sánchez, 2015). Li et al., argues that digital activism on Twitter is more profitable because it is more flexible in terms of issues shared and audience reach (Li et al., 2021). This is because Twitter has a hashtags feature (Chang, 2010). That feature is not only effective in increasing attention but also has repercussions effects (Dadas, 2020).

According to Nacher (2021), hashtags have the potential to combine and aggregate various micro-messages giving them an umbrella-like structure. For this reason, hashtags have become an indicator of mobilizing protests through social media (Ghoswami, 2020). Several studies examine the use of hashtags as a social protest, ranging from police brutality (Wang & Zhou, 2021), feminism movements (Clark, 2016; Brantner et al., 2020; Drueke & Zobl, 2016), anti-government protests (Fuadi, 2020; Sutan et al., 2021; Sinpeng, 2021), to anti-racism movements (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Yang, 2016), but it is still rare to use hashtags for digital protests over environmental issues (Dahlberg-Grundberg et al., 2014). For this reason, this study examines the use of hashtags as a digital protest tool via Twitter for cases of exploitation of added gold in the Sangihe Islands.

Located at the northern tip of Indonesia, there stands an island that is currently a hot topic of discussion regarding the issue of gold mining. This island holds a lot of potential, ranging from tourism, and biota wealth to natural resources in the form of gold reserves which are estimated to be abundant in number. Despite its location in the outermost area of the archipelago, this island has a very valuable potential like a gem in the far north of Indonesia. Its name is Sangihe Island which is a regency in North Sulawesi.

According to government-owned marine and fisheries statistics (BPS-Sangihe, 2020), Sangihe Island is one of the top three of the largest fishermen's economies in Sulawesi. Interestingly, this island has abundant wealth such as primary forests, endemic animals, and marine resources to the local wisdom of its inhabitants. The local people live dependent on nature because the majority are farmers and fishermen. In addition to marine products, there are underwater mountains such as Banua Wuhu Volcano on Mahengetang Island and six clusters of West Kawio Volcanoes. There is also a mangrove ecosystem covering an area of 632 hectares and coral reefs estimated at 6,773 hectares.

On the mainland, there is a mount named Sahendaruman which has 70 upstream rivers which are also primary forests with protected status. Sangihe Island area also contains natural wealth in the form of gold, which is estimated to be hundreds of thousands of ounces. Based on the company's exploration results in Binebas and Bowone, there is a potential of 114,700 ounces of gold and 1.9 million ounces of silver as well as 105,000 ounces of gold and 1.05 million ounces of silver. Meanwhile, according to an official statement from PT Tambang Mas Sangihe (TMS) (Kamalina,

2022), Sangihe Island area holds 3.16 million tons of referenced resources with a gold content of 1.13 grams per ton (g/t) and silver of 19.4 g/t, if mining is carried out openly (open pit). Every year, the components of gold ore capable of dredging reach 904,471 tons of 4 million tons of rock. Based on the information, we also know how valuable this territory is. According to the latest data released by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) (BPS-Sangihe, 2020), the GRDP of Sangihe Island Regency in 2019 was recorded at IDR 4.24 trillion.

Although the population is relatively small, its economy is the sixth largest among all districts in the province of North Sulawesi (BPS-Sulut, 2020) The main problem began with a concession permit from the Directorate General of Oil and Gas of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources to PT Tambang Mas Sangihe (TMS) for gold and copper exploration rights for the next 33 years, with a contract of work area which equals to 42,000 hectares or about half an island with an area of Sangihe Island which is only 73,689 hectares (736.89 km²). Law No.1 of 2014 states that islands with a land area of fewer than 2000 km² are categorized as small classes and should not be mined.

This is very reaping the opposition of the local community which they depend on all the natural resources available on Sangihe Island. They are not willing that Sangihe, their home, their island, to be ruined by the mining activities that lead to exploitation. Exploitation in mining is a business with to produce excavated material and utilize This activity can be distinguished based on the nature of the excavated material which is solid excavation, and liquid and gas excavated materials. Exploitation is also taking of natural resources to be used or used or utilized in various human needs in meeting their needs (Wellmer & Becker-Platen, 2002).

The local community have been trying to maintain the preservation of Sangihe island. Starting from rejections in the form of making petitions filed for president Jokowi to the existence of a digital movement through Twitter with @SaveSangiheland accounts. Twitter is currently part of the media to be digitally opinionated about a phenomenon that is happening in Indonesian society. The current presence of social media provides an opportunity for all parties to be involved in intensifying themselves to be more broadly on social media through status or commenting on current issues (Santia & Williams, 2018).

In addition, social media has now manifested into public opinion through sentiment to the latest trends that are happening (Neri et al., 2012). Hootsuite (We are social) in January 2021 stated that Twitter ranks fifth as the most used social media in Indonesia (Hootsuite, 2022; Riyanto, 2022). Twitter users have reached 14.05 billion in Indonesia, which is a forecast that digital opinion will continue to grow. Twitter, which has been known to be a social media, has been widely used as a forum to form a movement, campaigns, petitions, and activism activities, and others, often use the hashtag feature to support these activities to be carried out (Riyanto, 2022).

Hashtags are used in digital activism (Dobrin, 2020). In fact, in digital activism literature, a term known as "Hashtag Activism" appears as a movement (in the form of approval or rejection) of something that is refuted by using hashtags. Hashtags on social media are also influenced by current trends which pushes until it becomes a sentiment on Twitter towards this social phenomenon (Dadas, 2020; Yang, 2016). The phenomenon is also influenced by the communication network formed in it.

Some main actors are formed so that the conversation on this topic is even greater (Fang, 2016).

In communication networks, there is cybernetics tradition which is a complex system consisting of several sub-systems that are interconnected with each other. If it is associated with a communication network in the tradition of cybernetics, communication is a system whose elements influence each other, form, and control to achieve the goals of balance and change (Heylighen, 2007). Social Network Analysis (SNA) is one of the right solutions to analyze the relationship formed by the hashtag #SaveSangihelsland on Twitter. SNA is a method of the mapping process and also an analysis of interactions between people. SNA can be used to obtain information as well as interaction relationships and friendships between users which can be described with graphs (Freeman, 2004).

This research focuses on activities in the @jatamnas Twitter account with the hashtag #savesangiheisland and various texts produced in the digital space. Jatamnas account (@Jatamnas), according to Drone Emprit, become the most influential influencer regarding the case in Sangihe Island (Droneemprit, 2021). Jatamnas (@jatamnas) with #savesangiheisland is a Twitter account that voices opposition to the injustice of society. Jatamnas is an activist account that supports the Indonesian people against dehumanization and environmental destruction due to the invasion of the mining, oil, and gas industries. The hashtag of #SaveSangihelsland is hyped by top influencers such as @BBCIndonesia (10,682 engagements), @asumsico (7,516 engagements), @andikamalreza (4,797 engagements), @jatamnas (16.121 engagements), and @andreasharsono (15,357 engagements) (Droneemprit, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative method of virtual ethnography. The data source is based on primary data obtained through thematic searches on @Jatamnas Twitter account starting from May to July 2021 and the secondary data is obtained from books and journals. The research approach used in this study is a qualitative approach by explaining the phenomenon of data collection which in this case is a description of the level of analysis of the @jatamnas Twitter account with the hashtag #SaveSangihelsland.

The method used in this study is virtual ethnography. Crichton & Kinash, also Dominguez et al., states that virtual ethnography is the methodology used to investigate the internet and exploit entities (users) when using the internet (Crichton, S.; Kinash, 2003; Domínguez et al., 2007). In Twitter, virtual ethnography also represents the implications of the Twitter media community (Choi & Park, 2014).

The data in this study was collected through observation of the @jatamnas Twitter account with the hashtag #SaveSangihelsland, then examined the virtual interaction of this activity as a virtual space community. We observed @jatamnas Twitter account with the hashtag #savesangheisland with its influence on the outcome of this mining permit in the real world, and also its influence on the court's decision related to the permit to operate the mining activities. The observation also included the implementation of the government's decision on the case. Therefore, researchers are interested in researching the protection of local communities against gold mining through the hashtag #SaveSangihelsland on Twitter.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study uses data from the Twitter social media network taken from the @jatamnas account, which is devoted to analyzing tweets in May, June, and July, the peak time of the Hashtag #SaveSangihe. The hashtag #savesangiheisland symbolizes a symbol of community resistance in protecting local communities. The emergence of this hashtag symbolizes the solidarity of all Indonesians toward the residents of Sangihe Island against the government's oligarchic system and certain groups whose ambition is to gain personal gain without thinking about the destructive impact that will arise as a result of such exploitation.

The phenomenon of mining conflicts in various regions in Indonesia is not a new thing. This proves that the natural wealth and abundant biodiversity make Indonesia a *prima donna* in the eyes of the world to win, especially the existence of its mines. Sangihe Islands is a Regency in North Sulawesi Province with 737 square kilometers. In 1987 Sangihe Island was made a mining location with the issuance of a contract of work during President Soeharto's reign without the public's knowledge. In the Sangihe case, the conflict involved many actors, including the community, companies, local governments, and the central government.

The Mas Sangihe Mining Company (TMS) combines a Canadian company, Sangihe Gold Corporation, and three Indonesian companies. TMS has been the holder of the VI Contract of Work since 1997 and already has a Mining Business Permit (IUP) through SK 163. K/MB.04/DJB 2021 from the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and also environmental feasibility approval from Sulawesi Province. His concession permit in Sangihe covers an area of 42,000 hectares or half of the area of Sangihe Island. Gold and mining exploration rights cover seven sub-districts of 80 villages covering Mount Sahendaruman for the next 33 years.

The granting of a gold mining permit for half an island from the area of Sangihe Island shows the relationship between the entrepreneur and the ruler. Robison and Hadiz (in Ananta) describe oligarchy as a system of power relations that allows the concentration of wealth and authority and collective defense of the concentration of wealth (Ananta, 2017). Another opinion explains that oligarchs are like predators who involve themselves in defense and increase wealth through the number of businesses they manage. Oligarchy looks like it gives new nuances and jobs, but on the other hand, oligarchy causes an income gap (Suaib et al., 2016). As Hidayat explains, an oligarchy is the power of a small group oriented toward personal interests. Therefore, oligarchy can be concluded as the possession of power and the use of power whose main target is not the people (society) but the actors themselves (Hidayat, 2018). Oligarchy is understood in the form of power relations from politico-business coalitions to enrich themselves by extracting public resources (Kapferer, 2005).

In Law No. 1/2014 concerning the Management of Coastal Areas and Small Islands (WP3K), article 1, number 3 reads that a small island is an island with an area smaller than or equal to 2000 square kilometers and its ecosystem. Article 35 states that mining activities are prohibited from being carried out on small islands in the coastal area if these activities cause environmental damage and pollution and are detrimental to the community. Sangihe is threatened by the loss of protected forest on Mount Sahendaruman, a source of clean water, and various endemic animals, such as the Sangihe sunbird and Sangihe serving (Kontras, 2021). The damage in-

cludes the history and identity of the Sangihe people.

Jatam's advocacy with the Twitter account name @jatamnas has so far found that small islands used as mines have suffered massive ecological damage and lost people's livelihoods. Humans are destroying and destroying the earth's ecosystem (ecocide), including those who participate in making policies and consuming them massively. The practice of ecocide has been carried out in various regions of the earth with various motives and interests. The practices, characteristics, and patterns of ecocide in Indonesia are seen with the over-exploitation of natural resources, the spirit, and ideology of development, control over policy actors, and development practices that need to be reconstructed for survival in Indonesia. The destruction by a few people or companies has caused suffering and human rights violations to most of the Sangihe community.

The Sangihe community's rejection of the existence of PT TMS was manifested through protest actions which later developed into a resistance movement involving a larger mass. Taylor Michael C Hudson Charles Lewin Taylor said that a demonstration is an act of protest that is the actualization of the values and interests of society, political values, and interests which are clashed directly with the values of the state's political interests. The community's resistance movements have encouraged solidarity between citizens who feel the same threat to their lives and environment. Since its inception, PT TMS has attracted protests and rejections from the community, which have now developed into resistance to the revocation of mining permits in the Sangihe Islands area and to preserve the natural environment and its ecosystem.

This condition proves that the Sangihe community is at the lowest point of the power hierarchy, so they have difficulty voicing their interests. The tendency of the Sangihe community movement is through community resistance to capitalism and the privatization of natural resources. In the case of Sangihe, capitalism can trigger poverty and hunger for farming families during PT TMS' massive destruction of nature. The petition initiated by the local community through the #savesangiheisland campaign is a form of support for the wider community. Since the petition was launched on April 3, 2021, until June 2022, 156,007 people have signed it, and it is still running.



Figure 1. Tweet @jatamnas in hashtag #SaveSangihe

Jatamnas, as the media reported on the Sangihe case on May 5, 2021, on Twitter, followed by public action through a petition to President Jokowi to order the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources to revoke PT TMS's permit. The next tweet with

#savesangihe Jatamnas on May 6, 2022, explained that the geography of Sangihe Island and its natural wealth and the impact of mining exploitation could damage the habitat and nature of Sangihe Island. This was then retweeted by BBC New Indonesia and received considerable public attention.

Data from <https://pers.droneemprit.id/sangihe> states that the top trend of Sangihe's tweets started from the first tweet of @jatamnas on July 7, resulting in a 100% negative response. In the period 6-12 June 2021, there is a rapid upward trend on June 10. This was caused by the public's response to the news of the death of the Deputy Regent of the Sangihe Islands the day before (Droneemprit, 2021). The #SaveSangihe trend might not have picked up so much if it was not for these deaths. Public attention began to increase after the death of the Deputy Regent of Sangihe Helmud Hontong on Wednesday, June 9, 2021, while on his way home using a commercial plane from Bali to Manado.

The public responded strongly when news emerged that Deputy Regent Helmud Hontong had sent a letter to the government in which he defended the Sangihe community by refusing and asking for the mining permit to be revoked. His death is connected with his courage in resisting this. Before his death, the Deputy Regent had written to the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM) requesting the cancellation of gold mining operations. The news of the death of the Deputy Regent caused much speculation among the public.

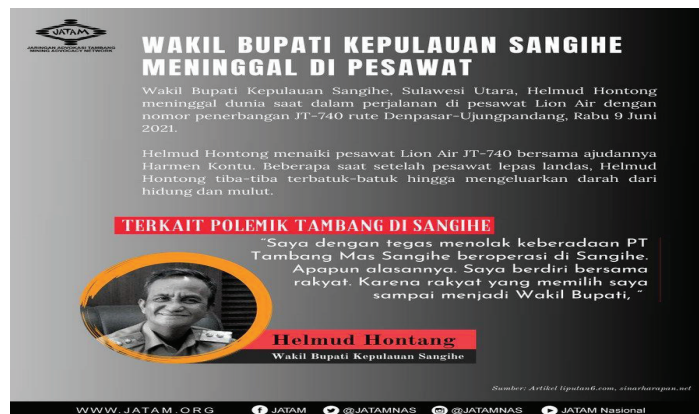


Figure 2. The death information of the vice-regent of Sangihe Islands (Soruce: Jatamnas, 2021)

Furthermore, on June 23, 2021, the women from Kampung Boone filed a lawsuit to the Jakarta Administrative Court asking the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources to revoke the Decree of the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Number 163. K/MB.04/DJB/2021 concerning the Approval for the Increase in the Production Operation Stage of PT TMS's Contract of Work (Jatamnas). This is a manifestation of the involvement of women as the driving force in which class struggle and egalitarian values can emerge.

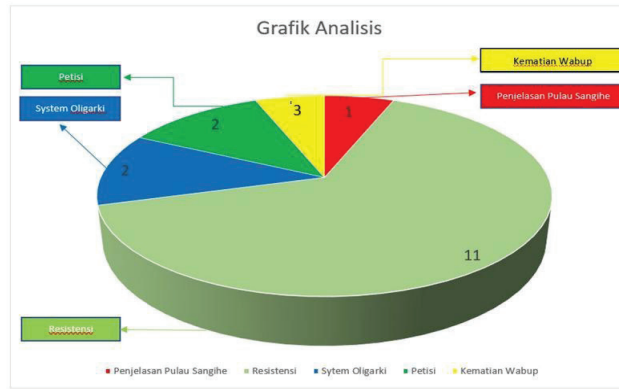


Figure 3. Thematic tweet dan retweet @Jatamnas in hashtag #SaveSangihe (Source: Droneempit, 2021)

When viewed from the analysis chart that has been mapped, the presentation of tweets raised by @jatamnas itself is dominant towards resistance. Community resistance is carried out in various ways ranging from protests, demands, and demonstrations, to digital movements, carried out through petitions and the formation of the Save Sangihe Island (SSI) community. The communities that formed the SS itself were the Sangihe Customary Body, Minnesota Conscience Foundation, WALHI North Sulawesi, YLBHI-LBH Manado, KNTI-Sangihe, Sampiri Sangihe Association, Indonesian Birds, Forwards, FPMS, Kopitu Sangihe, AMAN Sangihe, IMM – North Sulawesi, GAMKI Sangihe, Pemuda GMPU, Secret Visual Arts Community, GP An-sor Sangihe, LMND North Sulawesi, Organic Sangihe Gapoktan, AMPS, Youth Union of Sangihe Culture Activists, Unity of Kapitalaung (Village Head) Rejecting Sangihe Mine, MPA Anemon, KPA Mangasa Ngalipaeng, KPA Spink, Sangihe Drivers Club, and Sanggar Seriwang Sangihe.

According to de Vos & Delabre, resistance is defined as all actions of lower-class members with the intent or purpose of maintaining their survival (de Vos & Delabre, 2018). Every action of members of the lower classes of society to soften or reject the demands placed on that class by the higher classes (landlords, owners of capital).



Figure 4. Screenshot of @jatamnas tweet on July 7, 2021 against PT. TMS

The concept of resistance aims to get a reaction from the opposing party. Re-

sistance is an effort to build balance and equality in a situation that suppresses a vulnerable group due to the actions or policies of a stronger group. The emergence of resistance is an effort to achieve a democracy that provides freedom and equality (Karatnycky, 2005).

The emergence of an attitude of resistance stems from public awareness as a whole; namely, gold mining is a form of massive exploitation of local communities. People try to defend their source of life from irresponsible parties. Exploitation is one of the impacts of industrialization that occurs. This is a process of socio-economic change that changes the livelihood system of an agrarian society into an industrial society.

The exploitation of natural resources is colored by a paradigm that values natural resources as income compared to capital. Technological development is part of modernization. It is said to develop if the equipment used has changed from traditional to modern, which ultimately causes changes in community social relations (Phillips, 2011).

The analysis that can be drawn from Twitter for this ethnographic study can be condensed into three parts, namely the analysis of the emotion of sadness associated with the death of Deputy Regent Helmud Hontong, the second, the analysis of the emotion of fear relating to the death of the Deputy Regent who died suddenly on the way, after sending letter against the exploitation of Sangihe Island with the permission of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources related to the gold mining. Ecosystem damage destroys life and economic resources; protected animals will be destroyed because their habitat is polluted; the third emotional analysis is the dynamic analysis of hope; by making a petition and the hashtag #savesangiheisland, the community hopes that this struggle can bear fruit with all solidarity actions from the Indonesian people.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, the researcher concludes that the existence of social media opens an alternative dialogue space for virtual discussions about resistance or community resistance movements. Resistance has access to use the platform and create content that represents awareness as an individual, a social movement, and the politics of the movement. As an account focusing on environmental and human rights issues, @jatamnas also provides a space for open debate or discourse about some important issues among netizens from those who deeply understand resistance. The @jatamnas account provides a new alternative in the form of public voices fighting for their rights in social media forums.

The existence of @jatamnas can potentially strengthen environmental issues related to politics or the interests of capitalism and oligarchy in society. This tendency can occur with the use of the identity of big cities in Indonesia in accounts that confirm their rejection of the hierarchy of power.

Thus, there is a need for further research to explore the links between community movement groups and stakeholder groups. It is also necessary to understand how digital media actively raises environmental issues and human rights violations. In addition, further research is needed to explore how resistance groups organize themselves in digital media. Next, we should elaborate further on the virtual debate

between the two sides as a digital resistance discourse that can be used to criticize and develop societal movements through both online media and offline dynamics and to interpret resistance in a country with a multicultural context.

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