



Igniting awareness, extinguishing ego: Earth Hour Indonesia's hybrid narrative strategy in shaping ecological citizens (2019–2025)

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study analyzes how Earth Hour Indonesia constructs digital ecological engagement through hybrid narrative persuasion and participatory communication strategies, situating digital environmental activism within broader sustainability transitions in the Global South. **Methods:** A qualitative content analysis combined with multimodal discourse analysis was applied to campaign materials collected from the official Earth Hour website and social media platforms (2019–2025), selected purposively through the hashtags #EarthHourIndonesia, #SwitchOff, and #Connect2Earth. **Findings:** The findings reveal a hybrid persuasion model integrating rational instruction, affective solidarity, moral obligation, and community-based eco-citizenship formation, in which visual storytelling and youth representation function as infrastructures for collective ecological identity. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that Earth Hour Indonesia has shifted from an annual light-off ritual into sustained digital environmental activism, carrying practical implications for environmental governance, sustainability education, and community resilience in developing economies. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** The novelty of this article lies in integrating multimodal narrative persuasion with eco-citizenship formation, positioning Global South digital campaigns as engines of everyday ecological agency within sustainability transitions.

KEYWORDS: digital activism, eco-citizenship, environmental communication, narrative persuasion, sustainability transitions.

1. Introduction

Climate change, biodiversity loss, and excessive energy consumption are now widely recognized as three of the most pressing ecological challenges of the twenty-first century. Recent studies indicate that climate-induced pressures on biodiversity are projected to intensify sharply over the coming decades, with significant impacts on mammal, bird, and amphibian populations (Schipper et al., 2024). Moreover, the recent global energy crisis has revealed how excessive energy consumption and poorly managed energy transitions directly shape public narratives on climate and biodiversity issues (Hausmann et al., 2025). A comprehensive review further highlights that global change factors since the mid-twentieth century have generated systemic impacts on terrestrial and marine ecosystems worldwide (Mosoh et al., 2024). Additionally, economic analyses emphasize that environmental degradation and biodiversity loss closely intertwined with

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overconsumption of natural resources and high carbon emissions impose substantial financial and ecological burdens on sustainable development (Ceglar et al., 2024).

In addition, medium-term climate warming predictions up to 2050 indicate that 15-37% of species are potentially extinct (Thomas et al., 2004). On the other hand, international reports emphasize that human-induced greenhouse gas emissions and unsustainable lifestyles accelerate ecological degradation and threaten human well-being (Calvin et al., 2023). Parallel to the growing risks of species extinction and natural ecological disruption, modern technological progress has paradoxically intensified the crisis through increasingly anthropogenic contributions (Ceballos et al., 2015; Løstang et al., 2025).

Within this context, environmental communication assumes a strategic role as an instrument for cultivating public awareness, constructing collective perceptions, and promoting systemic behavioral change. Scholars emphasize that communication serves not merely as a conduit for information transfer but also as a mechanism for meaning-making, framing ecological threats, and strengthening social capacities for collective action (Corner et al., 2018). Within sustainability transition studies, such communication is increasingly recognized as a soft infrastructure of environmental governance, linking state policy, market actors, and citizen engagement in the co-production of low-carbon practices. As Ettinger and colleagues suggest, the application of dialogical approaches facilitating public conversations around extreme weather phenomena has proven effective in redirecting public discourse toward tangible action, both at the individual level and within policy formulation processes (Ettinger et al., 2023).

The rapid advancement of digital media has revolutionized how environmental issues are communicated. Social media platforms, in particular, enable environmental organizations to reach broader audiences, foster direct interaction, and facilitate active public engagement (Graham & Golder, 2024). These platforms function not only as channels for information dissemination but also as dialogic spaces and instruments for collective mobilization in addressing climate change. Consequently, social media now occupies a central position in the architecture of contemporary climate communication through platforms such as Twitter/X, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, Scopus, and ResearchGate. Discourse circulation and public opinion formation increasingly occur through multimedia formats actions, videos, and narratives across these platforms. However, this dynamic also brings multifaceted complexities: declining quality of climate journalism, debates over short-form video dominance, the rise of dark platforms in algorithm-driven campaigns, the strategic role of influencers, and the emergence of novel forms of individual participation in environmental causes (Sultana et al., 2024). Participatory communication perspectives highlight that digital platforms can empower citizens by providing both symbolic and practical spaces for action. Yet, such empowerment coexists with the risk of disinformation that can realistically influence public perception. As Hameleers explains, deceptive media practices contribute to participatory fragmentation, undermining collective coherence. Within environmental communication, narratives, metaphors, and symbols become essential tools for generating emotional resonance and constructing collective identity. This perspective suggests that successful environmental campaigns integrate factual information with symbolic and participatory framing strategies to shape public attitudes and behaviors (Hameleers, 2023).

Russill's analysis reinforces that the success of environmental campaigns is not determined solely by the dissemination of scientific data but by the ability to integrate factual information with symbolic framing and participatory approaches. He argues that contemporary climate communication extends beyond the presentation of empirical findings, incorporating metaphors and narrative analogies to enhance engagement. Moreover, involving the public in determining acceptable risk thresholds transforms climate communication from a top-down process into a dialogical and justice-oriented practice. Thus, the study substantiates the thesis that the effectiveness of environmental communication relies on articulating scientific facts through resonant symbolic frames while ensuring public participation as active agents of change (Russill, 2023) Such participation encompasses all societal elements not limited to citizens but also

encompassing government–industry synergy. In Indonesia, for instance, by 2023, as many as 1,077 industries were categorized as red for their noncompliance with environmental regulations (Susilo, 2023).

One of the world's most recognizable environmental campaigns is Earth Hour, initiated by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Sydney in 20. Initially designed as a symbolic act of turning off lights for one hour, Earth Hour has evolved into a global movement spanning more than 180 countries (WWF, 2022). Scholars have examined Earth Hour as a form of symbolic participation sometimes criticized as *slacktivism*, yet also appreciated for its capacity to foster global solidarity (Kountouris, 2022). Recent studies contend that Earth Hour provides a crucial entry point for climate communication, particularly in engaging youth and urban communities.

Taken together, this body of literature reveals an unresolved theoretical tension. Studies grounded in behavioral change and persuasion emphasize the capacity of low-threshold symbolic acts to prime durable pro-environmental habits, whereas critical accounts of slacktivism and neoliberal environmentalism warn that mediated participation may substitute visibility for structural transformation. Recent work on sustainability communication and socio-ecological resilience further suggests that the long-term value of such campaigns lies less in single events than in their ability to build adaptive community capacities and everyday ecological identities. Few studies, however, have examined how these competing logics are negotiated within a single Global South campaign; this study occupies precisely that analytical space.

In Indonesia, Earth Hour was introduced in 2009 and has since become one of the country's most prominent annual environmental events. With its large youth population and among the world's highest social media engagement rates (Kemp, 2024), Earth Hour Indonesia increasingly relies on digital campaigns through Instagram, Twitter/X, YouTube, and Facebook. These platforms are not only used to promote the symbolic act of switching off lights but also to disseminate broader environmental messages such as energy conservation, plastic waste reduction, and sustainable living. Nevertheless, academic analyses of how Earth Hour Indonesia constructs its digital communication strategies, narrative frameworks, and their resonance in shaping public participation remain scarce. (Green et al., 2024)

This gap matters because Indonesia simultaneously faces the critical sustainability crises outlined above rising energy demand, plastic waste leakage, and acute climate vulnerability, so the way digital campaigns cultivate ecological citizenship bears directly on the behavioral dimension of national sustainability transitions and environmental governance. This study attempts to fill this gap by examining Earth Hour Indonesia as a case study of environmental communication in developing countries. Through content analysis of secondary data, this study places Earth Hour Indonesia within the theoretical framework of environmental communication, public engagement, and digital activism. The originality of this research lies in its focus on the dynamics of localized campaigns in Indonesia, unlike most previous studies that focused on global or Western perspectives. By highlighting the Indonesian context, this study enriches the state of the art by showing how environmental campaigns adapt to cultural, demographic, and technological conditions in non-Western societies. In doing so, the study explicitly links its research gap to pressing sustainability crises, energy overconsumption, climate change, and plastic pollution, and asks how digital citizen engagement can be harnessed to support broader sustainability transitions.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach to examine how Earth Hour Indonesia designs its communication strategies within digital environments. This method was selected not only for its capacity to interpret textual messages but also for its ability to uncover the visual and symbolic dimensions embedded in campaign materials (Machin, 2013). Through a systematic process of categorizing and interpreting data, content analysis enables the researcher to trace narrative patterns, recurring message tendencies, and the

ways in which particular symbols are employed to persuasively frame environmental issues. Furthermore, this approach provides a conceptual space to understand how Earth Hour constructs ecological imagery and encourages public engagement through digital representations. In the context of modern environmental communication, campaign success is determined not solely by informational accuracy but also by the ability to evoke emotions and establish symbolic proximity with audiences (Reser & Bradley, 2017). The study draws upon secondary data collected from a variety of digital and institutional sources, including published research articles that support the analytical interpretation of Earth Hour Indonesia's communication strategies. The primary data consist of social media content disseminated through platforms such as the official website, Instagram, Twitter/X, YouTube, and Facebook, which serve as direct representations of campaign activities and public interaction with environmental messages. Qualitative content analysis is deemed appropriate for evaluating how visual strategies, calls to action, and hashtag dissemination shape participation both in tangible and symbolic forms.

Complementarily, the study also examines academic literature focusing both on Earth Hour and broader environmental communication issues. This body of literature strengthens the conceptual framework, facilitates comparison between field findings and previous studies, and ensures that data interpretation aligns with contemporary scholarly developments. By integrating these diverse sources of secondary data, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how campaign messages are constructed, disseminated, and received within the digital ecosystem.

A purposive sampling strategy was applied by setting specific inclusion criteria for campaign materials that explicitly addressed issues of energy conservation, climate change, and plastic waste reduction (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Data selection was conducted through hashtag-based digital content searches on Twitter/X specifically using #EarthHour2020, #EarthHourIndonesia, #SwitchOff, #Connect2Earth, and #ShapeOurFuture to identify public conversations and message dissemination patterns. Materials were included when they (1) originated from official Earth Hour Indonesia or Earth Hour global accounts, or publicly engaged these accounts through the target hashtags; (2) were published between January 2019 and March 2025; and (3) explicitly addressed energy conservation, climate change, or plastic waste reduction. Duplicates, retweets without commentary, unrelated promotional content, and posts containing personal identifiers were excluded. Additional data were collected from the official Earth Hour website to contextualize the narrative and institutional communication materials.

The gathered content was analyzed through a combination of manual coding and digital bibliometric visualization tools, such as VOSviewer for mapping keyword relationships and *ResearchRabbit* for tracing reference networks and topic developments relevant to environmental communication. By combining digital scraping and visual mapping, the researcher not only identified the structural features of the campaign messages but also explored how specific environmental themes were positioned, reinforced, and replicated within globally resonant social media discourse.

The content analysis process consisted of three major stages, systematically designed to produce valid and in-depth interpretations, including: (1) data cleaning (all relevant posts were archived based on predefined inclusion criteria (Chen et al., 2024), while unrelated content those not addressing energy conservation, climate change, or plastic waste reduction was excluded); (2) coding process: a hybrid of deductive and inductive coding (Kiger & Varpio, 2020), deductive codes were derived from the conceptual framework of environmental communication strategies, encompassing categories such as informative strategies, emotional appeals, and forms of call-to-action, inductive codes emerged naturally from the data, reflecting themes such as youth empowerment, collective solidarity, and representations of sustainable lifestyles; (3) thematic analysis: the final stage involved clustering the coded data into broader themes to uncover comprehensive meaning patterns, the principal themes identified included climate awareness, everyday sustainability practices expressed through social media activity, community engagement,

and the use of ecological symbols to frame collective movement identities (Chen et al., 2024; Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

To enhance analytical validation and coding reliability, the coding scheme was refined iteratively: an initial codebook was piloted on approximately 10% of the corpus, ambiguous codes were revised, and the entire dataset was then re-coded in two rounds separated by a two-week interval, with intra-coder consistency checked by comparing code assignments across the two rounds until stable classifications were achieved. Discrepancies were resolved by returning to the raw posts and to the conceptual definitions in the codebook. For the multimodal dimension, each visual post was examined across three semiotic layers, representational (who and what is depicted), interactive (gaze, distance, and mode of address to the viewer), and compositional (salience, color, and text-image anchorage), following the multimodal critical discourse tradition (Machin, 2013), so that verbal and visual meanings were analyzed in an integrated rather than separate manner.

Although this approach offers valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, as a secondary analysis based on publicly available social media data, there exists a selection bias risk, as the dataset may not capture the full spectrum of participation including offline interactions or engagement from less active digital users. Second, the dataset analyzed comprising approximately 500 tweets and 200 posts from major platforms during 2019–2025, limits generalizability to broader contexts, though purposive sampling ensures analytical relevance. Third, regarding ethics, the study exclusively utilizes publicly available data without personal identifiers and maintains privacy standards by avoiding the analysis of sensitive details. In line with the growing discourse on research transparency, it is essential for the researcher to explicitly state data limitations and source boundaries to enhance the credibility and openness of the study (Malički et al., 2023).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Communication strategy

Earth Hour Indonesia employs a combination of visual storytelling, hashtag activism, and call-to-action framing as its core communication strategies. Young volunteers are frequently portrayed as the faces of change, aligning with Indonesia's demographic profile dominated by youth (Tjahyono & Tjahyono, 2014). Within the context of environmental communication campaigns, a call-to-action refers to a direct appeal addressed to the public or specific communities, urging them to take particular actions in response to the conveyed message (Johari & Johari, 2016; Mariana, 2010; Tryanto & Tryanto, 2016).

Such appeals transcend mere information delivery they are inherently persuasive and are strategically designed to foster concrete participation at both individual and collective levels. In the case of the Earth Hour campaign, the call-to-action extends beyond the symbolic slogan “switch off your lights for one hour.” It evolves into broader invitations to participate in community-based initiatives, including environmental clean-ups, tree-planting programs, and plastic waste reduction efforts within local neighborhoods.

Through these practices, the call-to-action becomes a transformative communication mechanism, converting audiences from passive message recipients into active agents within social and ecological movements. As Jechow notes, this participatory turn underscores how symbolic environmental actions when reinforced by collective narratives can cultivate a sustained sense of responsibility and ecological citizenship. (Jechow, 2019).

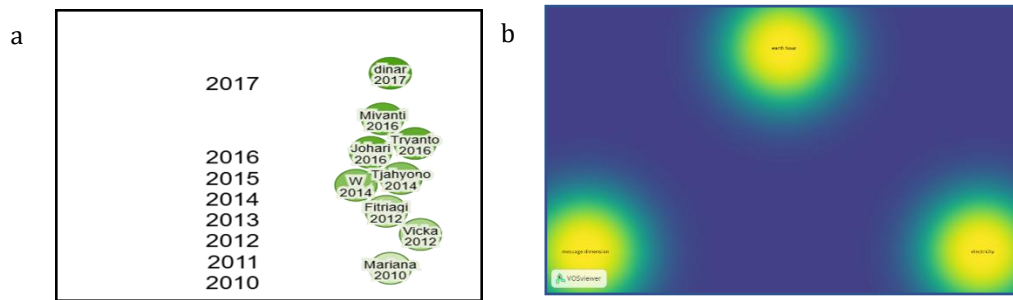


Fig. 1. (a) ResearchRabbit connection results (b) VOSviewer visualization results

The visualization results generated using VOSviewer, a common bibliometric tool for mapping thematic relationships within datasets or bodies of literature, are presented in Figure 1(b), while the reference network traced through ResearchRabbit is displayed in Figure 1(a). Figure 1 reveals three highly interconnected and prominent terms within the communication network of Earth Hour Indonesia: “*Earth Hour*,” *electricity*, and *message dimension*. These three clusters appear as the densest and brightest areas on the visual map, indicating that they are not only frequently used but also form the conceptual foundation of how the campaign is designed and perceived by the public.

The “*electricity*” cluster highlights that the campaign is anchored in a concrete and measurable issue electricity conservation as a symbolic act of environmental contribution. Yet, what is particularly noteworthy is the emergence of the “*message dimension*” cluster, suggesting that the campaign extends beyond the literal act of switching off lights. Instead, it frames the action through a spectrum of layered meanings, encompassing environmental awareness, collective mobilization, and the promotion of sustainable everyday practices as integral components of everyday life (Fitriagi, 2012).

The strength of the Earth Hour campaign lies precisely in its ability to merge a simple message with rich, multi-layered framing (Yin et al., 2024). Rather than relying solely on statistical data or rational arguments about energy conservation, the campaign integrates emotional and participatory appeals that render the message relatable and engaging. This strategy proves particularly effective due to its distribution through digital platforms spaces predominantly inhabited and shaped by young generations (Joosse et al., 2024).

By featuring volunteers, influencers, and youth figures as the faces of the movement, Earth Hour successfully recontextualizes environmental discourse into forms that feel accessible rather than didactic. Messages about energy responsibility and environmental solidarity are disseminated through familiar media formats visual posts, short narratives, and shareable hashtags. This synthesis of clear messaging, appealing presentation, and platform alignment transforms Earth Hour from a momentary awareness event into a sustained behavioral movement. Gradually, the campaign fosters individual and community-level habit formation, demonstrating how symbolic communication can evolve into tangible environmental practices (Ulfa & Fatchiya, 2018).

While the synthesis of visual storytelling, hashtag activism, and participatory framing has undeniably strengthened the communicative reach of Earth Hour Indonesia, the long-term effectiveness of this strategy remains contingent upon the extent to which symbolic engagement is translated into structurally embedded practice. The prominence of “*electricity*” and “*message dimension*” within the VOSviewer mapping underscores that the campaign has succeeded in associating environmental concern with a recognizable and easily performed act. However, the very simplicity that makes the campaign accessible also presents an inherent limitation. When repeated annually without sufficient expansion into structural education, policy advocacy, or infrastructural innovation, the act of switching off lights may gradually become ritualized to the point of normalization, where participation is driven more by social expectation than by critical ecological consciousness. In such circumstances, the practice risks becoming an annual digital performance rather than a catalyst for sustained transformation in patterns of energy consumption.

The extensive involvement of young volunteers and digital influencers, while strategically effective in amplifying visibility, further complicates this dynamic. Youth participation is often framed in idealistic narratives of hope, renewal, and moral responsibility, positioning young bodies as symbolic carriers of environmental futures. While this representation is powerful, it also places a disproportionate emotional burden on younger generations to save a planet whose degradation has largely been produced by previous industrial and political regimes. The circulation of images featuring smiling volunteers, candlelit gatherings, and darkened skylines contributes to a visually compelling environmental imaginary, yet such imagery can mask the structural realities of fossil fuel dependency, corporate extraction, and unequal access to clean energy. Thus, the campaign oscillates between empowerment and displacement, simultaneously mobilizing youth agency while obscuring the deeper institutional centers of accountability.

Within the communicative architecture of Earth Hour Indonesia, the call-to-action expands into community-based practices such as clean-up initiatives, tree-planting programs, and plastic reduction campaigns. These actions undeniably generate localized environmental benefits and contribute to the cultivation of eco-consciousness at the grassroots level. Yet, they largely operate within the micro-sphere of individual or communal effort, rarely intersecting with macro-political arenas in which regulatory, industrial, and economic decisions are made. As a result, while communities become more aware of sustainability, the systemic mechanisms that govern energy production and environmental exploitation remain intact. The symbolic dimension, therefore, carries both emancipatory potential and ideological containment, enabling participation without necessarily destabilizing existing power structures.

From a communication perspective, this phenomenon can be understood through the concept of moral performativity, in which individuals enact publicly visible forms of ethical behavior as a means of affirming social belonging. Sharing a post with the Earth Hour hashtag, uploading a photograph in the dark, or participating in a candlelight event becomes not only an ecological act, but also a performative declaration of environmental virtue. In digitally mediated spaces, such acts acquire symbolic capital, allowing individuals and institutions to align themselves with global sustainability narratives. However, this visibility does not automatically equate to substantive behavioral change. The return to conventional energy consumption patterns after the symbolic hour highlights the temporal fragility of the ritual and raises critical questions about the depth of internalized transformation. In this regard, Earth Hour Indonesia exemplifies a broader tension inherent in contemporary environmental campaigns: the reliance on spectacle as a medium for awareness. The visual impact of illuminated candles, dimmed monuments, and collective gatherings generates a powerful affective moment, but affect alone cannot sustain long-term ecological reform. Emotional engagement must be coupled with structural literacy and an understanding of energy systems, consumption patterns, and political responsibility if symbolic awareness is to evolve into enduring change. Without such integration, the event risks functioning as what could be termed a temporal spectacle of care, offering a brief suspension of ecological indifference without fundamentally altering its underlying causes.

Yet it is precisely within this tension that the significance of Earth Hour as a communication phenomenon must be located. Rather than dismissing it as ineffective or glorifying it as revolutionary, it should be understood as a contested symbolic terrain where multiple meanings coexist. It is at once a moment of genuine collective reflection and a commodified ritual embedded in global branding strategies. It is both an invitation to slow down and a product of hyper-connected digital culture. It fosters a sense of belonging while simultaneously deflecting deeper systemic critique. These contradictions do not nullify its importance; rather, they illuminate the complexities of communicating environmental urgency within contemporary media ecologies.

The campaign's ability to integrate localized practices with global narratives also reveals its function as a bridge between global environmental discourses and culturally specific interpretations. By incorporating Indonesian contexts, youth demographics, community initiatives, and local environmental issues such as plastic waste, Earth Hour

Indonesia translates a universal message into a culturally resonant experience. This localization not only expands participation but also re-signifies the campaign, transforming it from a global directive into a shared national and communal endeavor. In this sense, Earth Hour becomes a site of cultural negotiation, where global environmental discourse is filtered through local values, identities, and social structures. Beside, the enduring challenge remains whether such negotiations can move beyond symbolic affirmation and contribute to tangible environmental transformation. If the brightest clusters within the communication network remain centered on Earth Hour and electricity without expanding toward concepts such as policy reform, energy transition, or institutional accountability, the campaign may find itself trapped within the boundaries of its own rhetoric. Its success in the realm of communication may paradoxically signal its limitation in the realm of structural change.

The significance of Earth Hour Indonesia should not only be measured by participation rates, hashtag trends, or visual engagement, but also by its capacity to evolve. The future relevance of the campaign will depend on its willingness to transform its messaging from merely symbolic acts into sustained educational, political, and infrastructural dialogues. Only through such evolution can the campaign transcend its ritualistic origins and contribute meaningfully to long-term environmental resilience. In this light, Earth Hour Indonesia stands as both an accomplishment and an unfinished project a powerful example of how communication can mobilize meaning, identity, and participation, but also a reminder of the limitations of symbolism when it remains detached from systemic reform. It reveals the paradox of modern environmental activism: that awareness is abundant, participation is visible, and yet transformation remains elusive. And it is within this paradox that the true analytical richness of Earth Hour, as a communication and cultural phenomenon, ultimately resides.

3.2 Thematic narrative

A content analysis of tweets featuring the hashtags #EarthHour2024, #SwitchOff, #EarthHourID, and #UntukBumi reveals that the communication strategy of *Earth Hour Indonesia* extends beyond a symbolic appeal to switch off the lights. Instead, it constructs a narrative ecosystem operating across three layers of persuasion: rational-ecological, emotional-collective, and moral-personal. These intertwined narratives collectively establish a form of social consensus positioning Earth Hour not merely as an annual ceremonial event, but as an environmental ritual one that is worth repeating, worth joining, and worth amplifying in the digital sphere. The results of the data crawling further indicate four narrative themes that generate persuasive communication outcomes, each functioning as a strategic component within the broader framework of the campaign, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of dominant narratives in Earth Hour Indonesia campaign tweets

Narrative Theme		Core Message Function	Example Phrasing (from tweets)	Persuasive Strategy Type
Climate Action & Energy Conservation		Encouraging direct behavioral action	"Switch off your lights for an hour", "Matikan lampu selama satu jam"	Rational/ Instructional
Global Solidarity & Collective Unity		Framing participation as part of a worldwide movement	"Global show of solidarity", "Wherever you are, join us"	Emotional/ Communal
Sustainable Lifestyle & Personal Responsibility		Positioning Earth Hour as a lifestyle commitment	"A small act makes a great impact", "Brighter tomorrow"	Moral/ Transformative
Community Engagement & Local Participation		Highlighting involvement of citizens, youth, or institutions	"Kilang Balongan also joined", "Siapa yang ikutan Earth Hour?"	Social Identity/ Inclusive

(Twitter/X scraping results)

From the thematic categories emerging within the Earth Hour campaign tweets, it becomes evident that the conveyed messages are not merely informational but strategically designed to influence both audience behavior and emotion. The theme “Climate Action and Energy Conservation” emphasizes a rational approach through direct instructions such as “Turn off your lights for one hour”, encouraging tangible and easily executable actions. Meanwhile, the theme “Global Solidarity and Collective Unity” frames participation as part of a broader global movement, fostering a sense of belonging and emotional connectivity across national boundaries.

Furthermore, the theme “Sustainable Lifestyle and Personal Responsibility” demonstrates a shift from momentary action toward long-term commitment, articulated through phrases such as “A small act makes a great impact” that highlight individual moral responsibility. The theme “Community Engagement and Local Participation”, in contrast, reflects an inclusive strategy through mentions of public figures or institutions involved in the campaign, cultivating a sense of ownership and social identification within local communities. Hence, it can be concluded that the Earth Hour campaign integrates instructional, emotional, moral, and social approaches to broaden the reach of its persuasive communication and ensure that environmental messages resonate across diverse societal segments.

Beyond this conclusion, the combination of narrative themes displayed in Table 1 also indicates that the Earth Hour campaign is built upon a multilayered architecture of meaning that operates at both the individual and collective levels. Rather than relying on a single dominant discourse, the campaign distributes its persuasive power across complementary dimensions, each of which addresses a different psychological and social trigger within the audience. The rational-instructional element ensures clarity, presenting participation as something simple, concrete, and non-disruptive, thereby reducing the perceived cost of action. In contrast, the emotional-communal frame works to dissolve feelings of isolation, replacing them with a sense of collective presence and shared responsibility. This dynamic reveals that participation in Earth Hour is not framed merely as a private decision, but as a public, symbolic alignment with a global environmental conscience.

At the same time, the moral-transformative discourse embedded in phrases advocating small actions and a brighter future reveals a deeper ideological function of the campaign. These messages shift the interpretation of Earth Hour away from being a symbolic gesture and reposition it as the gateway to an ongoing ethical commitment. The emphasis on small acts and tomorrow builds a bridge between the present moment and an imagined sustainable future, urging individuals to perceive themselves as agents of intergenerational change. Thus, the tweets analyzed in this study do not only promote temporary behavioral modification but strive to cultivate an internalized ecological identity, in which environmental preservation becomes part of the individual’s moral self-concept.

Meanwhile, the social identity and inclusive dimension manifested through mentions of institutions, communities, and individuals provides a strong mechanism of normalization. When users encounter statements indicating that a specific organization, region, or prominent actor also joined, participation becomes aligned with what is perceived as socially expected or desirable behavior. This is particularly significant in digital environments, where visibility and recognition function as powerful motivators. By publicly acknowledging involvement, the campaign transforms environmental action into a form of symbolic capital, reinforcing the idea that ecological awareness is not only ethically commendable but also socially valued. In this sense, the role of social proof functions not merely as an invitation, but as a subtle normative pressure that aligns individual choice with collective patterns of action.

Furthermore, the strategic alignment of global and local references within the campaign illustrates how Earth Hour successfully negotiates the tension between universality and contextual relevance. On one hand, global phrases such as “Wherever you are” communicate inclusivity and borderless cooperation, inviting participation from diverse geographical contexts. On the other hand, local references such as specific

institutions or regions anchor the campaign within tangible communities, making it feel immediate and personally relevant. This dual anchoring allows the message to function effectively within both macro and micro spheres, ensuring that global environmental narratives do not remain abstract but become embedded in the daily realities of specific audiences. The table thus reflects how the campaign uses scale strategically, oscillating between the global and the local to enhance both reach and emotional proximity.

In addition, the interactional tone observed in questions like “*Siapa yang ikutan Earth Hour?*” signals an invitation to dialogue rather than monologic instruction. This dialogic approach is crucial in contemporary digital activism, where audiences increasingly seek participation rather than passive reception. By posing questions and inviting responses, the campaign opens a space for self-expression and community interaction, reinforcing a participatory culture. This type of engagement strengthens the internal motivation of participants, as the act of responding publicly commits individuals to a declared identity as environmentally conscious actors. Consequently, the Earth Hour discourse does not only circulate messages but also produces a performative environment in which users enact and affirm their ecological positions through digital interaction.

Taken together, the patterns shown in Table 1 demonstrate that the Earth Hour campaign represents a sophisticated model of environmental communication in the digital era. Its persuasive effectiveness does not rely on fear-based narratives or catastrophic framing; instead, it employs a more nuanced and constructive approach grounded in hope, unity, moral agency, and collective empowerment. This approach is particularly effective in avoiding resistance or apathy, as the message does not blame or accuse but rather invites, affirms, and includes. In this context, participation is framed not as an obligation imposed by external authority, but as a voluntary, meaningful, and socially celebrated act.

Therefore, Table 1 does more than categorize themes; it reveals the communicative logic underlying a global environmental movement. It demonstrates how language, symbolism, and collective representation are deliberately orchestrated to transform environmental awareness into symbolic action and symbolic action into long-term consciousness. In this way, the Earth Hour campaign exemplifies how digital discourse can function as both a mobilizing force and a cultural ritual, one that temporarily suspends ordinary routines in order to reassert a shared commitment to ecological sustainability. Such a pattern suggests that future environmental campaigns may benefit from adopting similarly layered strategies that harmonize rational clarity, emotional resonance, moral vision, and social affirmation within a unified narrative structure. To synthesize these findings, Figure 2 presents the conceptual model of hybrid narrative persuasion identified in this study, illustrating how the four narrative layers are enacted through digital participation and progressively consolidated into eco-citizenship, while Table 2 summarizes the relationships among the model’s components.

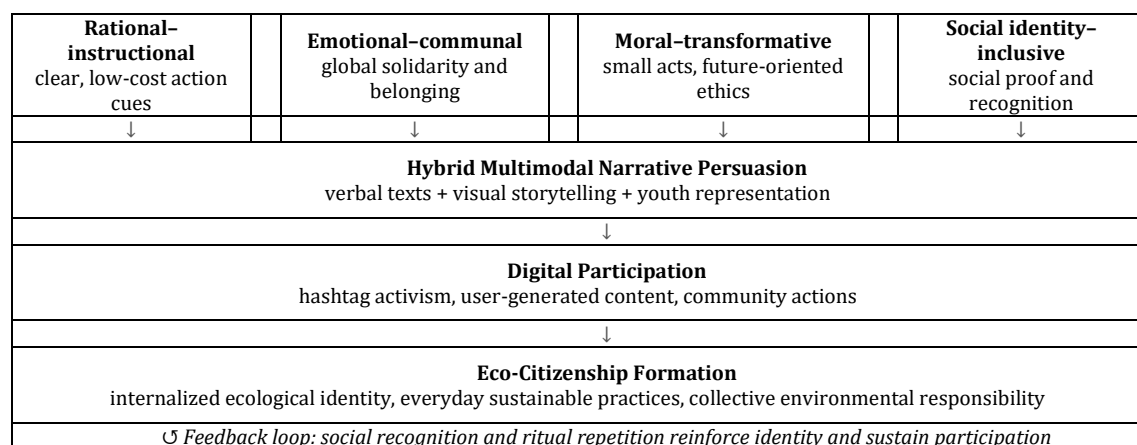


Fig. 2. Conceptual model of hybrid narrative persuasion, digital participation, and eco-citizenship formation

Table 2. Relationships among narrative persuasion, digital participation, and eco-citizenship in the hybrid persuasion model

Model Component	Communicative Mechanism	Form of Digital Participation	Contribution to Eco-Citizenship
Rational-instructional layer	Clear, low-cost behavioral instructions (e.g., switch-off appeals)	Direct compliance and sharing of instructional posts	Lowers entry barriers and builds a sense of personal efficacy
Emotional-communal layer	Solidarity framing and imagined global togetherness	Synchronized hashtag use and joining trending moments	Fosters belonging and collective ecological identity
Moral-transformative layer	Framing small acts as seeds of long-term ethical commitment	Pledges, testimonies, and lifestyle-change posts	Internalizes sustainability as part of the moral self-concept
Social identity-inclusive layer	Social proof through institutions, influencers, and communities	Mentions, replies, and community-based offline actions	Normalizes eco-citizenship as socially valued everyday practice

3.2.1 Narrative of climate action as energy responsibility

The narratives developed in the Earth Hour campaign consistently frame climate action as an extension of individual responsibility toward energy use. Direct appeals such as “Switch off your lights for one hour” (Fardaniah, 2024) function not only as informational statements but also as performative acts, carrying an implicit behavioral expectation. The act of turning off lights is positioned as a small yet symbolic contribution to climate mitigation, reinforcing the perception that even minimal participation can yield meaningful impact.

Visual elements such as the use of Earth emojis and phrases like “A small act makes a great impact” strengthen the moral logic that the scale of an action does not determine its significance. This framing positions sustainability as attainable through small, everyday interventions rather than through grand policy or technological initiatives. Consequently, Earth Hour is strategically marketed as a low-barrier action an accessible form of participation available to anyone regardless of social, economic, or geographic background.

Although symbolic in nature, such calls to action serve a long-term strategic function in building collective ecological awareness. By internalizing the idea that minor actions carry environmental consequences, Earth Hour fosters a sense of agency the belief that each individual has the capacity to contribute to global issues. As participants repeatedly engage in and document these acts on social media, the campaign evolves into a digital ritual that strengthens shared ecological identity. In this context, the act of “turning off the lights” transcends technical utility and becomes a moral declaration and a symbolic membership within a global climate-conscious community.

3.2.2 Narrative of collective solidarity and global belonging

The involvement of global figures such as UN Secretary-General @antoniouterres and Singapore’s Prime Minister @leehsienloong provides significant symbolic power to the Earth Hour campaign. Support from authoritative leaders not only broadens message reach but also embeds moral legitimacy, positioning energy conservation as a shared global agenda worthy of collective pursuit. When such calls to action are voiced by world leaders or international organizations, they transform from environmental campaigns into ethical appeals carrying collective responsibility.

Expressions like “a global show of solidarity,” “wherever you are,” and “we all switch off together” are designed to evoke an imagined global connection a shared moment that transcends geography and culture. This framing turns the simple act of switching off lights into a symbolic gesture of moral participation in a worldwide community. Over time, such constructions help normalize Earth Hour participation as a social norm. Non-participation

does not result in explicit condemnation but subtly places individuals outside the morally engaged majority.

This mechanism operates through soft social pressure, not coercion but persuasion people join not out of obligation but from a desire to belong. Here lies the campaign's communicative strength: it mobilizes environmental consciousness through affective and symbolic communication, combining collective identity, moral authority, and global empathy rather than relying solely on rational argumentation.

This performative framing also reflects broader tendencies within contemporary environmental communication to personalize systemic problems, translating abstract global concerns into tangible, individual gestures. Such personalization, while effective in mobilizing mass participation, may also obscure structural dimensions of the climate crisis by displacing attention from institutional accountability toward private moral conduct. Nonetheless, this strategic simplification allows campaigns like Earth Hour to maintain a unifying narrative that is easily reproducible across diverse cultural contexts. The universality of the gesture turning off a light renders it both comprehensible and actionable, facilitating cross-border solidarity and enabling the formation of a transnational discourse of environmental citizenship.

Furthermore, the ritualistic repetition of Earth Hour each year reinforces its mnemonic function it becomes an annual reminder of environmental urgency embedded within everyday life. The campaign's digital amplification, particularly through hashtags and user-generated content, transforms private acts into public performances of virtue, thereby generating a collective visibility that sustains the moral momentum of climate advocacy. Through this interplay of symbolism, affect, and accessibility, Earth Hour exemplifies how environmental communication can merge ethical persuasion with participatory culture to cultivate a global sense of ecological belonging.

3.2.3 Narrative of sustainable lifestyle and individual transformation

Tweets from both personal and institutional accounts ranging from energy corporations such as @aramco to digital media platforms like @kumparan illustrate how Earth Hour is no longer treated as a one-time symbolic ritual but reframed as an entry point to long-term behavioral change. Motivational expressions such as "for a cleaner future," "start taking action," or "for a brighter tomorrow" operate as psychological devices binding audience emotion to a collective vision of the future. The tone employed is aspirational and persuasive, not authoritarian, inviting audiences to co-own the narrative of change.

This communication pattern reflects a shift from moment-based campaigns to continuity-based engagement. The act of switching off lights is not presented as the endpoint but as the beginning of internalizing sustainability values. By framing small acts as the seeds of habitual change, Earth Hour creates a progressive participation model from symbolic reflection to lifestyle adjustment. This strategy aligns with the principle of behavioral priming, where an initial small act opens the cognitive pathway for sustained commitment.

In this way, the campaign aims to generate not just a moment of attention but a moment of transformation. Audiences are repositioned from spectators to protagonists whose continued actions shape the collective future. Earth Hour functions as a prototype of an ecological lifestyle replicable, low-cost, and psychologically accessible. Such inclusivity enables engagement across social strata without dichotomizing participants as activists versus ordinary citizens. Within this framework, Earth Hour operates as a psychosocial engineering tool facilitating identity transformation. The act of turning off lights may appear simple, but this simplicity enables participation without resistance while cultivating a sense of personal efficacy. Once individuals perform small actions and receive social recognition through digital interactions, a positive feedback loop reinforces their self-perception as part of the solution. The campaign thus shifts from external persuasion to self-persuasion, where individuals align their behavior with their emerging eco-conscious identities.

This process reflects the concept of identity-based behavior change, which posits that sustainable habits endure when linked to self-identity rather than fleeting intention. Earth Hour strategically nurtures this identity not through heavy labels like climate activist, but through accessible social identities such as responsible citizen or good person. By framing sustainability as a moral and emotional identity, the campaign reframes environmentalism from a technocratic duty into an existential question of who we wish to become. Once internalized, this identity naturally extends into lifestyle transformations, energy conservation, alternative mobility choices, and waste reduction, as forms of self-expression rather than obligation.

3.2.4 Narrative of community empowerment and local participation

Government and institutional accounts, such as @pertamina, employ a more interactive and community-based tone, often opening with rhetorical questions like “Who joined Earth Hour last night?” This approach indicates that the campaign targets not only individual awareness but also collective identity building at the community level. When large state-owned enterprises lead such initiatives, they inject a localized dimension into what is otherwise a global event.

Some tweets feature local imagery, such as posts from Kilang Balongan or Indonesian political figures, demonstrating contextual adaptation the translation of the global “Save the Earth” message into culturally resonant narratives. This localization transforms Earth Hour from an imported campaign into a shared national ritual. Institutional involvement thus functions not only as an indicator of campaign reach but also as a representational strategy that shapes public perception of environmental issues as a multi-sectoral agenda.

When entities like Pertamina or government bodies publicly participate, they not only advocate for energy conservation but also position themselves as moral stakeholders in the environmental discourse. This aligns with existing scholarship on corporate sustainability communication, which highlights that environmental narratives often serve to build social legitimacy without necessarily altering operational structures.

Linguistically, this inclusivity is evident in the recurrent use of collective pronouns “we,” “together,” “our participation” which symbolically equalize the relationship between citizens, corporations, and the state. Such collective language plays a crucial role in fostering the impression that ecological responsibility is shared rather than hierarchical.

Hence, Earth Hour functions not only as a ceremonial campaign but as a discursive space where the relationships among citizens, corporations, and the state are renegotiated through environmental communication. Yet, within this study’s context, it is important to note that such participation often remains declarative expressed through symbolic online representations like darkened office photos or official statements without measurable follow-up. This finding suggests that the campaign’s success is largely evaluated through digital visibility rather than tangible reductions in energy use. In other words, communication itself becomes the primary medium of perceived change, even before material transformation occurs.

Although the symbolic and discursive power of the Earth Hour campaign is evident in its widespread visibility and institutional endorsement, a growing body of critical scholarship questions the extent to which such highly mediated environmental initiatives translate into measurable, long-term behavioral or structural change. Several researchers argue that campaigns like Earth Hour operate primarily at the level of representation rather than transformation, producing what may be described as an illusion of agency, in which participants experience a sense of contribution without necessarily altering their habitual patterns of consumption or energy use. From this perspective, the act of turning off the lights for one hour while visually powerful and emotionally resonant, risks being absorbed into the realm of performative environmentalism, where symbolic participation substitutes for sustained commitment and systemic reform. The circulation of images depicting darkened spaces, although effective in generating awareness, may simultaneously enable a

form of moral satisfaction that discourages deeper engagement, thereby reducing complex ecological challenges into easily consumable gestures.

The involvement of corporations and government institutions, while expanding the campaign's reach, introduces a degree of paradox into its environmental messaging. On one hand, their participation reinforces the legitimacy and scale of the movement; on the other, their presence raises critical questions about sincerity, accountability, and structural impact. In some cases, the symbolic alignment with environmental causes may function as a strategic narrative designed to enhance corporate reputation or political image rather than to initiate meaningful operational change. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of "green symbolism" discussed in sustainability communication literature, which suggests that environmental language is often deployed to construct a favorable public identity without addressing the underlying mechanisms that contribute to ecological degradation. Consequently, Earth Hour risks becoming entangled in a cycle of representation where visibility is mistaken for impact and discourse is conflated with action.

In addition, the annual and episodic nature of the campaign may unintentionally reinforce a temporal compartmentalization of environmental responsibility. By concentrating collective attention into a single, highly ritualized moment, the campaign may allow individuals and institutions to externalize sustainability as an occasional obligation rather than an ongoing ethical practice. The clearly defined temporal boundary of "one hour" creates a symbolic enclosure around environmental action, potentially minimizing the perceived necessity for continuous behavioral modification. In this sense, the event might simultaneously raise awareness and limit it, framing environmental care as a temporary interruption rather than a permanent reorientation of values, habits, and infrastructures. This critique does not deny the communicative success of the campaign; rather, it warns against equating symbolic participation with ecological transformation.

It is important to note that the reduction in electricity consumption and light pollution during the one-hour Earth Hour session is inherently temporary and does not necessarily guarantee long-term changes in attitudes or energy use patterns. Without systematic follow-up through continuous education, value internalization, and sustained behavioral interventions, such symbolic actions risk remaining purely performative rather than evolving into consistent and integrated ecological practices in everyday life (Jechow, 2019).

3.3 Public engagement patterns

The peak of public engagement typically occurs in the days leading up to and during the Earth Hour event usually held toward the end of March each year marked by a significant surge in hashtag activity that frequently reaches the national trending lists on Twitter. This pattern illustrates that the campaign does not rely solely on one-way information dissemination, but rather thrives on digital participation driven by user-generated content.

The participatory framework extends beyond social media and is systematically embedded within Earth Hour's official campaign website, as shown in Figure 3. On the global campaign page, the call-to-action statement "Engage your community, Earth Hour has always drawn its power from the people..." explicitly positions the public as the driving force of the movement. The subsequent phrase, "By bringing your community together... you can help us create the #BiggestHourForEarth!", further underscores that the campaign's success is measured not merely by visibility, but by the collective capacity of communities to engage both virtually and physically.

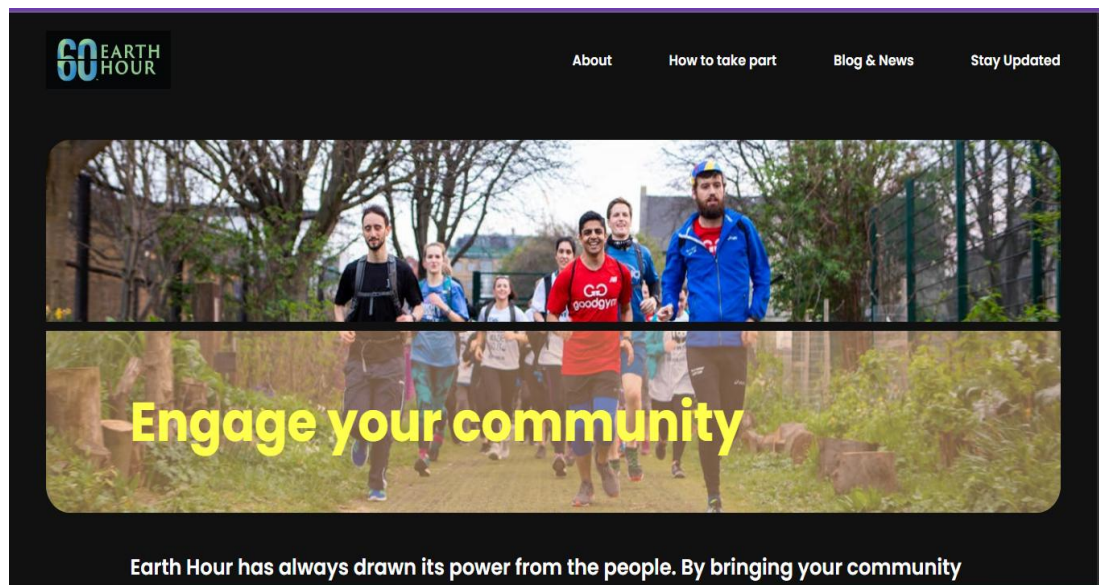


Fig. 3. Earth Hour official website
(Earth Hour, n.d.-a)

The core message of the campaign, as reflected in the analysis, is visually and structurally reinforced through the design of its official website. The phrase “Engage your community” appears as a dominant call-to-action, serving as a strategic focal point that explicitly encourages visitors to move from passive awareness to active collective participation. The imperative tone of this message underscores Earth Hour’s position as a global campaign centered on active engagement, framing participation not as an option, but as a shared responsibility within the movement.

Visually, the representation of groups engaging in outdoor communal activities amplifies the idea of energetic, inclusive, community-based participation. This imagery constructs a collective imagination of solidarity and togetherness in addressing global environmental challenges, expanding Earth Hour’s meaning beyond the symbolic gesture of “turning off the lights” to an expression of social mobilization oriented toward sustainability. Within the framework of visual communication theory, the interplay between verbal and non-verbal elements demonstrates the synergy between textual anchorage and visual narrative, effectively reinforcing the campaign’s central message. The visuals act as affective bridges, stimulating emotions such as belongingness and shared responsibility, which in turn strengthen participants’ intentions to engage.

Furthermore, the website’s primary navigation particularly through the “How to Take Part” menu embodies a process of institutionalizing public participation. This feature functions not merely as a technical guide, but as a strategic entry point designed to convert visitors into active participants. The systematic structure of the navigation reflects a communication design that prioritizes facilitating concrete action rather than mere information dissemination. By offering step-by-step guidance, the website exemplifies the principles of participatory communication, emphasizing that sustainable social change can only be achieved through direct civic involvement. This approach also signifies Earth Hour’s effort to build an engagement ecosystem, where every digital interaction contributes to strengthening networks of solidarity and participation across diverse social groups.

The site extends its participatory reach by providing customized practical guidelines tailored to different audience segments such as friends, families, businesses, and institutions. This differentiation reflects a layered and adaptive communication strategy, responsive to the unique capacities and needs of each social group. By offering contextualized participation frameworks, Earth Hour reinforces the notion that environmental responsibility is a shared endeavor, actionable at multiple levels from individuals to institutions. This inclusive and multiscalar approach not only enhances the

campaign's accessibility but also cultivates a sense of collective efficacy within the global environmental movement. In doing so, Earth Hour transforms individual engagement into socially rooted ecological awareness, grounded in solidarity, cooperation, and sustained collective action.

This participatory orientation indicates that Earth Hour has evolved beyond the conventional structure of a campaign into a form of contemporary environmental discourse that is simultaneously performed, circulated, and negotiated within digital culture. The campaign's architecture does not merely encourage individuals to join an event; rather, it invites them to become visible actors in a collective narrative that is continuously reproduced through symbols, language, and shared practices. By positioning communities as the central drivers of change, Earth Hour destabilizes the traditional top-down model of environmental communication and replaces it with a networked model, in which meaning is distributed, replicated, and reinterpreted through countless micro-interactions among online users. Each post, hashtag, image, and testimonial becomes part of a broader semiotic ecosystem that reinforces the idea that climate action is not restricted to institutions or policymakers, but is instead embedded in everyday social performance.

Within this context, the hashtag itself functions not only as a technical tool for grouping content, but as a symbolic anchor that links individual expressions to a larger collective consciousness. When the hashtag trends nationally, it signifies more than popularity; it reflects a moment of synchronized attention, in which dispersed individuals converge around a shared concern. This convergence temporarily transforms the digital sphere into a symbolic public space dedicated to environmental reflection. The surge in visibility creates a sense of temporal urgency, encouraging participation not through coercion, but through the desire to be present within a meaningful historical moment. As such, the campaign illustrates how temporality can be strategically harnessed in digital communication, using a specific, once-a-year moment to intensify emotional engagement and reinforce symbolic value.

The integration of the campaign's website with its social media activity demonstrates a carefully coordinated structure of engagement. The website provides ideological grounding and narrative coherence, while social media channels act as sites of enactment. This complementary relationship reveals that Earth Hour's communication strategy is not fragmented, but systemically interconnected, with each platform performing a distinct, yet interdependent, function. The website articulates the philosophy, purpose, and vision of the movement, whereas Twitter and other platforms transform that vision into a lived, participatory experience. In this sense, the website serves as the discursive core, while social media becomes the performative extension of the campaign's identity.

The phrase "Earth Hour has always drawn its power from the people" is not a simple rhetorical flourish; it is a declaration of an ideological shift regarding the locus of environmental agency. Instead of positioning the organization as the primary force, the statement redirects authority to the public, framing the masses not as recipients of a message, but as producers of impact. This rhetorical inversion is critical, because it reshapes the psychological relationship between the campaign and its participants. Individuals are not only informed; they are empowered. They are encouraged to perceive their everyday decisions, relationships, and communal interactions as legitimate sites of climate action. Consequently, the ordinary individual is symbolically elevated into an agent of global influence, even if the physical act itself turning off lights remains small and symbolic.

This phenomenon is further intensified by the campaign's capacity to transform domestic space into political space. When individuals turn off the lights in their homes, schools, or offices, these traditionally private or functional environments are momentarily redefined as arenas of environmental awareness. Darkness, in this moment, becomes a shared language, a collective visual metaphor that signifies restraint, reflection, and responsibility. The absence of light is no longer simply the absence of electricity; it becomes a meaningful silence, a visual interruption that prompts contemplation about consumption patterns, dependence on energy, and the environmental cost of modern lifestyles. In this

way, Earth Hour turns absence into presence, and silence into discourse, operating through what is not seen as much as through what is declared.

Additionally, the emphasis on community-based participation fosters horizontal networks of influence that rival institutional authority. When groups of friends, companies, schools, or neighborhoods coordinate their involvement, they construct micro-communities of shared meaning. These networks often outlast the event itself, as the memory of participation reinforces social bonds and encourages future engagement with environmental issues. The ritualistic repetition of Earth Hour each year further strengthens its position as a cultural tradition rather than a mere campaign. Over time, it becomes embedded in the collective memory of participants, operating as an expected annual moment of reflection within the social calendar. This repetition reinforces its normative force, making environmental reflection not an exception, but a recurring social practice.

Importantly, the flexibility of participation ranging from individual acts at home to large public events organized by institutions allows the campaign to adapt to varying levels of economic, social, and cultural capacity. This adaptability is essential for global resonance, as it avoids imposing a uniform model of action that might exclude marginalized or resource-limited communities. Instead, it promotes an inclusive form of engagement, in which meaning is not derived from the scale of the action, but from the intention and consciousness behind it. By validating all forms of participation, regardless of size, the campaign democratizes environmental responsibility and reinforces the notion that every contribution matters, even when it appears insignificant in isolation.

From a broader perspective, this pattern of communication reflects an important transformation in the relationship between media, activism, and identity. In contemporary society, identity is increasingly constructed through participation in symbolic movements, particularly those that are globally recognized and morally valued. By participating in Earth Hour both physically and digitally individuals perform an identity that aligns with values of responsibility, solidarity, and sustainability. This performance is not necessarily superficial; rather, it often represents a genuine attempt to reconcile personal lifestyle with broader ethical concerns. In this sense, Earth Hour serves as a stage on which individuals negotiate their position within the moral landscape of climate consciousness.

Ultimately, the strong integration of digital visibility, communal storytelling, symbolic action, and moral framing suggests that Earth Hour exemplifies a new form of environmental ritual for the digital age. It is not a ritual governed by religion or tradition alone, but by shared awareness, mediated connection, and collective intentionality. The campaign's real power, therefore, lies not in the one hour of darkness itself, but in the meanings that are constructed around that hour and sustained long after the lights are turned back on. It is in this lingering awareness in the conversations, memories, images, and emotions that the campaign achieves its most enduring impact, subtly reshaping the way individuals and communities imagine their relationship with the planet.

3.4. Symbolism and ideology

The symbolism of the Earth Hour “60” logo, presented in Figure 4, can be examined through Roland Barthes’ semiotic framework. At the denotative level, the symbol “60” merely signifies the idea of switching off lights for sixty minutes. However, at the connotative level, it transcends this literal meaning, representing a global ecological ritual an act of collective repentance and environmental awakening. It is not merely a matter of time passing, but rather a call for humanity to pause, reflect, and take responsibility for its impact on the planet. Since its inception in 2007, Earth Hour has consistently deployed this symbol to map the evolving symbolic relationship between individuals and global collectivity, illustrating how a simple visual cue has sustained a fifteen-year journey toward the 2030 climate goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 °C.

At the mythic level, the “60” symbol of Earth Hour functions as more than a visual identity it becomes a cultural myth that obscures underlying socioeconomic and political power relations. The ritual of switching off lights for an hour may foster the impression that

the act itself is sufficient, inadvertently overshadowing the structural dimensions of environmental degradation. It risks overlooking how states, corporations, and energy conglomerates, which hold the true levers of environmental change, continue to operate with minimal regulatory constraints. Consequently, the myth shifts the burden of responsibility toward individuals and communities, framing the environmental crisis as a matter of personal morality rather than institutional accountability.



Fig. 4. Earth Hour logo
(Earth Hour, n.d.-b)

This condition produces an illusion of agency, wherein saving the planet appears to rest primarily on individual awareness rather than on systemic transformation. The act of turning off the lights for sixty minutes becomes a kind of ritual of redemption for the public, while the larger institutional actors those wielding disproportionate control over energy production and consumption remain largely untouched. In this sense, the “60” symbol functions not only as a call to action but also as a mechanism of normalization, subtly redirecting the axis of responsibility from structural to personal domains. This represents a modern environmental myth, one that operates through visual persuasion suggesting that the ecological crisis can be resolved through minor moral disciplines rather than through profound reform in energy and production systems.

Nevertheless, the power of the symbol lies precisely in its simplicity. Its accessibility allows it to transcend educational, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. Individuals can participate without needing to comprehend complex data on carbon emissions or climate models. Through a single symbolic act, they feel part of a global transformation. Herein lies the paradox of Earth Hour: it simultaneously awakens and pacifies evoking environmental awareness while alleviating existential guilt. The symbolic act provides a sense of contribution and belonging, even if the action itself does not necessarily address the root causes of ecological degradation.

From an ideological perspective, the “60” symbol encapsulates the ethos of liberal environmentalism, emphasizing change through individual choice and moral behavior rather than through collective confrontation with structural power. Practices such as turning off lights for one hour are elevated as moral performances, suggesting that ecological consciousness can be achieved through personal discipline alone. This ideology sustains a form of environmental individualism, where participation becomes a sign of virtue an expression of good citizenship while the deeper political and economic foundations of the crisis remain unchallenged. (Krogmann, 2025). This narrative proves effective in cultivating a sense of public engagement; however, it subtly diverts attention away from the major actors who hold structural power over energy consumption and climate policies. Consequently, the campaign reinforces the notion that environmental solutions can be achieved without challenging the power relations between the state and corporations. On the other hand, this symbol also embodies a dimension of eco-humanism, reflecting a moral appeal that positions humans as both the cause of and the remedy for ecological degradation. It emphasizes empathy, collective responsibility, and the ethical imperative to coexist harmoniously with the environment redefining environmental

activism not merely as a political movement but as a shared moral consciousness rooted in human solidarity with nature.

As articulated by Aloni and Veugelers, the underlying belief reflects a conviction that global solidarity can still be fostered through simple yet simultaneous symbolic actions. The ideology at play is not one of resistance, but of restrained hope an invitation to act collectively without disrupting established structures. At this juncture, Earth Hour occupies an ambiguous position: it unites while pacifying, awakens consciousness while avoiding confrontation. This duality renders the campaign both powerful and paradoxical a movement that mobilizes awareness yet preserves the comfort of existing socio-political order (Aloni & Veugelers, 2024).

Yet, to understand the full implications of Earth Hour as a symbolic act, it is necessary to move beyond the domain of meaning-making and interrogate how symbols operate within the political economy of environmental communication. The Earth Hour logo and its accompanying ritual do not exist in an ideological vacuum. They circulate within systems of media, capital, governance, and public relations, where meanings are constantly negotiated, appropriated, and repurposed. Within this context, the “60” functions as what Barthes would describe as a depoliticized speech: a signifier that has been emptied of its historical and structural complexity and refilled with a simplified, morally appealing narrative. The intricacies of climate governance, unequal patterns of energy extraction, and geopolitical exploitation are replaced by an image of collective unity, creating a seductive sense of universal participation. This process, while effective in mobilizing attention, risks flattening the asymmetrical realities that underlie environmental degradation.

Moreover, the symbolic appeal of Earth Hour thrives on its visual and experiential simplicity. Darkness becomes a spectacle one that is photographable, shareable, and emotionally resonant. Skyscrapers shrouded in darkness and iconic landmarks fading into silhouettes create a powerful aesthetic of absence. However, this absence is paradoxically filled with digital visibility. In the era of networked media, darkness itself becomes content. The image of non-consumption is circulated through platforms that are, in fact, energy-intensive infrastructures sustained by data centers, constant connectivity, and algorithmic amplification. This presents an ironic contradiction in which an act symbolizing restraint is reproduced via systems deeply embedded in high-consumption technological networks. As such, Earth Hour becomes both a critique of modernity and a byproduct of it, revealing an unresolved tension between ecological consciousness and digital dependence.

While the immediate reduction in electricity consumption and the decrease in light pollution during the designated hour may generate a quantifiable, albeit minor, environmental effect, such impacts are inherently temporary and spatially fragmented. They do not necessarily translate into durable transformations in energy habits, lifestyle choices, or institutional practices. The symbolic performance of turning off lights, if not embedded within a broader pedagogical and structural framework, risks remaining an episodic gesture rather than a catalyst for sustained ecological responsibility. In this sense, the campaign illustrates what can be described as temporal environmentalism, where concern is condensed into a ritualized moment rather than extended into everyday conduct. The illumination returns, routines resume, and the systemic engines of production and consumption continue largely uninterrupted.

This condition aligns with broader critiques within critical environmental communication scholarship, which argue that contemporary green campaigns often function within the logic of neoliberal environmentalism. Rather than challenging dominant economic paradigms, they tend to reframe environmental responsibility as a matter of individual choice and moral self-discipline. The subject is interpellated not as a political agent capable of demanding structural change, but as a consumer-activist who expresses virtue through symbolic gestures switching off a light, sharing a post, adding a hashtag. Agency, therefore, is individualized, circulated, and contained within socially acceptable forms that do not threaten existing centers of power. What emerges is a form of “soft activism” that cultivates emotional satisfaction without necessitating significant political or institutional disruption.

From a discursive standpoint, Earth Hour also operates as a performative narrative of hope. Hope, in this case, is not radical or insurgent, but carefully moderated structured around the belief that change can occur gradually, harmoniously, and without confrontation. The repeated emphasis on unity, togetherness, and shared humanity cultivates an affective atmosphere of global harmony. While this sentiment is ethically appealing, it also depoliticizes conflict, obscuring the profound inequalities that permeate environmental governance. Communities that contribute least to carbon emissions often suffer the most from climate consequences, while the largest polluters continue to negotiate, delay, or deflect accountability. The Earth Hour narrative, by centering a universal “we,” blurs these distinctions and produces what might be called an illusion of symmetrical responsibility.

Symbolic resonance of Earth Hour cannot be dismissed as mere illusion. Symbols, as semiotics has long established, possess the capacity to mobilize imaginaries, produce shared identities, and shape cultural memory. For many participants, Earth Hour is their first or only moment of conscious engagement with environmental discourse. It can function as an entry point into broader conversations about sustainability, climate ethics, and planetary stewardship. Particularly within younger generations, the ritual may plant formative seeds that later develop into deeper commitments, activism, or professional pursuits in environmental fields. In this regard, the symbolic act holds a latent pedagogical dimension. It teaches, albeit implicitly, that human action is intertwined with ecological systems and that collective behavior, however small, carries moral significance.

Thus, Earth Hour embodies a complex semiotic paradox. On one hand, it simplifies an enormously complicated crisis into a manageable and aesthetically pleasing gesture, potentially dulling the urgency of systemic change. On the other hand, it reintroduces ecological consciousness into everyday social reality, momentarily interrupting the habitual rhythms of consumption and forcing a collective pause. This pause, though brief, is not insignificant. In a world driven by speed, illumination, and relentless productivity, the deliberate act of darkness functions as a symbolic rupture a suspension of normalcy that gestures toward alternative ways of inhabiting time and space. The world, even for sixty minutes, is imagined differently.

If viewed through the lens of critical pedagogy, Earth Hour can be interpreted as a threshold ritual. It does not resolve the crisis, but it opens a symbolic doorway toward imagining other possibilities. The problem, however, lies in what follows or rather, what often does not follow. Psychological research on behavior change demonstrates that awareness is only the initial stage of transformation. Without reinforcement through policy, infrastructure, education, and community-based practices, symbolic awareness tends to dissipate. This further reinforces the argument that symbolic campaigns must be accompanied by structural mechanisms if they are to produce meaningful, long-term environmental outcomes.

Interestingly, the enduring popularity of Earth Hour suggests that humans are drawn to rituals of collective meaning-making. In secular societies, symbolic environmental campaigns function similarly to religious observances they offer moments of reflection, repentance, and renewal. The Earth replaces the divine, and ecological care replaces spiritual salvation. The switch is subtle but profound. In this sense, Earth Hour participates in the construction of a contemporary environmental spirituality, one rooted in interconnectedness, vulnerability, and ethical interdependence. The “60” symbol becomes a modern icon, a visual prayer expressed through darkness rather than light.

Ultimately, Earth Hour should not be evaluated solely in terms of kilowatt hours saved, but in terms of its broader cultural, ideological, and semiotic implications. It reflects the contradictions of our time: genuine concern entangled with symbolic performance, solidarity coexisting with inequality, and hope intertwined with complacency. It both challenges and reinforces the systems it seeks to transform. Within this tension lies its significance as a communicative phenomenon. It is not merely an environmental campaign; it is a mirror of contemporary humanity grappling with its own contradictions in the face of planetary crisis.

Overall, the “60” of Earth Hour operates simultaneously as instruction, myth, ritual, commodity, and confession. It is a site where environmental ethics, media spectacle, neoliberal logic, and collective longing intersect. Its power lies in its ambiguity, it can inspire change, yet it can also pacify resistance; it can unite millions, yet it can obscure difference it can awaken awareness, yet it can soothe guilt. It stands as a symbol of both the potential and the limitations of symbolic environmental communication in the Anthropocene. Earth Hour, therefore, is not merely one hour of darkness, but a dense semiotic field in which the struggles, hopes, contradictions, and possibilities of contemporary environmental consciousness are continuously negotiated.

Read against the broader sustainability system, these findings carry three practical implications. First, for environmental governance, the campaign’s demonstrated ability to synchronize citizens, corporations, and state institutions suggests that regulators could couple symbolic moments such as Earth Hour with concrete policy windows, for instance, announcing energy-efficiency incentives, demand-side management programs, or plastic-reduction regulations during peaks of public attention, so that attention is converted into institutional change rather than dissipating after the ritual hour. Second, for sustainability education, the hybrid persuasion model offers a transferable template: rational instruction lowers the entry cost of action, while moral and communal framings sustain identity-based commitment, a combination that school curricula and community programs can adopt to move learners from awareness toward habitual practice. Third, for community resilience, the horizontal networks formed around the campaign, neighborhood clean-ups, tree planting, and plastic-reduction initiatives, constitute latent social capital that can be mobilized for climate adaptation and disaster preparedness. At the same time, the analysis highlights an inherent trade-off within sustainability transitions: low-barrier symbolic participation maximizes reach but risks displacing attention from the structural reform of energy production and consumption. Managing this trade-off rather than denying it should therefore be treated as a central design problem for future digital environmental campaigns.

4. Conclusions

This study concludes that the communication strategy of Earth Hour Indonesia represents a dynamic synthesis between environmental advocacy, emotional engagement, and symbolic participation. Through the integration of visual storytelling, digital activism, and direct calls to action, the campaign successfully transforms ecological awareness into collective behavior. Its communication design functions not merely as a linear dissemination of information but as a social-symbolic process that constructs shared meaning, a sense of belonging, and ecological responsibility among participants.

The findings reveal that the persuasive framework of Earth Hour Indonesia is rooted in two major ideological paradigms, eco-humanism and liberal environmentalism. On one hand, the campaign embodies the spirit of eco-humanism by framing ecological responsibility as a moral and spiritual practice manifested in simple, everyday actions. On the other hand, it also reflects the logic of liberal environmentalism, wherein complex environmental issues are reduced to individual moral gestures such as switching off lights for one hour. This duality illustrates both the strength and limitation of contemporary environmental communication effective in mobilizing public participation, yet constrained by its individualistic symbolism.

Conceptually, this research contributes to environmental communication scholarship by demonstrating how multimodal narratives and digital participatory cultures co-construct ecological meanings within a local-global framework. Practically, the findings underscore that effective environmental messaging in developing countries depends not solely on the accuracy of scientific data, but also on emotional resonance, visual cohesion, and adaptability to local values and cultural contexts. Building on these findings, several recommendations can be advanced. For policymakers, environmental agencies and local governments should institutionalize follow-up mechanisms after high-visibility campaign

moments such as household energy-audit programs, community grant schemes, and transparent reporting of energy savings so that symbolic participation is linked to measurable sustainability outcomes. For campaign practitioners, the hybrid persuasion model suggests combining rational instruction, emotional solidarity, moral framing, and social recognition within a single narrative architecture, while progressively expanding message clusters toward energy transition, policy advocacy, and institutional accountability. For educators, integrating campaign-based digital rituals into sustainability education can help translate momentary awareness into durable ecological identity. Finally, because the model rests on generic persuasive mechanisms rather than context-specific content, it is applicable beyond Indonesia: environmental movements in other Global South settings with youthful, highly connected populations can adapt the same layered strategy to their own cultural symbols and governance conditions. Future research should test the model quantitatively, linking narrative exposure to measured behavioral and energy outcomes and extend it through comparative, multi-country designs.

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Author Contribution

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During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT to assist in organizing ideas and improving language clarity. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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