

Women, Social Media, and Political Mobilization in Indonesia: Digital Feminist Movements and Democratic Participation

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Abstract

Digital platforms have created new opportunities for Indonesian women to participate in political debates, organize campaigns, and challenge gender inequality. Online feminist movements increasingly address issues involving sexual violence, reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, political representation, and gender-based violence. This article examines the role of digital feminist movements in Indonesian democratic participation. Using qualitative digital discourse and social movement analysis, the study explores campaign narratives, online mobilization, hashtag activism, and interactions between activists and political institutions. The article argues that social media allows women activists to bypass traditional gatekeepers and create alternative spaces for political communication. At the same time, female activists frequently encounter online harassment, threats, and gendered disinformation. The study proposes a framework for understanding digital feminism as both political communication and collective action. Effective democratic participation requires not only access to digital platforms but also protection from gender-based online violence. The article concludes that Indonesian digital feminist movements demonstrate how communication technologies can expand women's political agency while simultaneously exposing activists to new forms of political vulnerability.

[Platform digital telah menciptakan peluang baru bagi perempuan Indonesia untuk berpartisipasi dalam debat politik, mengorganisir kampanye, dan menantang ketidaksetaraan gender. Gerakan feminis daring semakin banyak membahas isu-isu yang melibatkan kekerasan seksual, hak reproduksi, diskriminasi di tempat kerja, representasi politik, dan kekerasan berbasis gender. Artikel ini mengkaji peran gerakan feminis digital dalam partisipasi demokrasi di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan analisis wacana digital kualitatif dan analisis gerakan sosial, studi ini mengeksplorasi narasi kampanye, mobilisasi daring, aktivisme tagar, dan interaksi antara aktivis dan lembaga politik. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa media sosial memungkinkan

aktivis perempuan untuk melewati penjaga gerbang tradisional dan menciptakan ruang alternatif untuk komunikasi politik. Pada saat yang sama, aktivis perempuan sering menghadapi pelecehan daring, ancaman, dan disinformasi berbasis gender. Studi ini mengusulkan kerangka kerja untuk memahami feminisme digital sebagai komunikasi politik dan aksi kolektif. Partisipasi demokrasi yang efektif tidak hanya membutuhkan akses ke platform digital tetapi juga perlindungan dari kekerasan daring berbasis gender. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa gerakan feminis digital Indonesia menunjukkan bagaimana teknologi komunikasi dapat memperluas agensi politik perempuan sekaligus mengekspos aktivis pada bentuk-bentuk kerentanan politik baru.]

Keywords: Digital feminism, women, political movements, social media, Indonesia

Introduction

The expansion of social media has changed the communicative conditions under which women participate in Indonesian public life. Political participation that was previously concentrated in elections, political parties, formal organizations, and conventional mass media can now occur through digital storytelling, network formation, campaign dissemination, public discussion, and advocacy. Social media provides women with opportunities to communicate political concerns without depending entirely on institutional gatekeepers. Research on Indonesian women's activism on Instagram demonstrates that feminist accounts disseminate knowledge about gender equality, women's empowerment, and feminist perspectives while challenging conventional understandings of women's political and social roles (Purwaningtyas 2021). Cyberfeminism consequently represents more than the adoption of new communication technologies by an existing movement. It reflects a transformation in the relationship between communication and political agency because women can produce narratives, establish communities, and contest dominant representations within the same digital environment (Alatas and Sutanto 2019).

The Indonesian context makes this transformation particularly significant because women's participation in public life remains shaped by patriarchal expectations concerning family, sexuality, leadership, religion, and social behavior. Digital spaces do not automatically eliminate these structures, but they provide alternative arenas in which their meanings can be contested. Shabira (2022), for example, finds that the Instagram account @perempuanfeminis constructs feminist narratives around sexual violence, legal inequality, gender equality, and resistance to patriarchal culture. Similar dynamics can be observed in the digital activities of Women's March Jakarta, where Instagram is used as a communicative space for

feminist education, advocacy, and representation (Wilmanda and Hariyanti 2023). These practices indicate that political participation may begin before women enter formal institutions: it can emerge when individuals acquire the ability to name injustice, connect personal experiences to structural problems, and communicate those interpretations to a wider public.

The concept of digital feminism is therefore useful for explaining how technological communication becomes connected to struggles over power. Suharnanik (2022) argues that social media creates opportunities for women's empowerment by expanding access to information, social interaction, and political communication, although these opportunities are accompanied by technological and social risks. Alatas and Sutanto (2019) similarly position cyberfeminism as a means through which women can challenge male-dominated discourses surrounding technology and public communication. The political significance of these arguments is that empowerment cannot be reduced to the number of women who use social media. What matters is whether digital participation allows women to alter the terms of public discourse. A digital platform becomes politically meaningful when women use it to challenge established interpretations, construct alternative knowledge, mobilize others, and establish claims concerning equality and justice.

Previous studies of Indonesian digital feminist activism reveal several important tendencies. Purwaningtyas (2021) identifies Instagram as a significant arena for Indonesian women's activism, particularly through accounts that disseminate feminist knowledge and challenge conventional perspectives on gender equality. Shabira (2022) demonstrates how @perempuanfeminis represents feminism through advocacy concerning sexual violence and legal protection. Dwityas, Marta, and Briandana (2023), meanwhile, show that #Ibutunggalmelawan connects discussions concerning gender oppression, parental relations, violence against women, and discrimination against single mothers. These studies demonstrate that digital feminist activism is simultaneously representational and mobilizational. Nevertheless, much of the existing research tends to examine particular accounts, campaigns, or forms of representation separately. A broader explanation is required to connect digital narrative production with women's political agency, democratic participation, and the unequal risks accompanying public visibility.

The relationship between feminism and digital counterpublics has also attracted increasing attention. Lasari (2023) demonstrates that Jakarta Feminist uses Instagram to construct a virtual public space where women can speak about their conditions and develop critical awareness. Daniah and Pribadi (2023) identify a related process in Mubadalah.id, where feminist interpretations of Islamic discourse challenge patriarchal understandings of gender and religious authority. These studies are important because they demonstrate that digital feminism in Indonesia does not rely on a single ideological vocabulary. Feminist actors negotiate gender equality through different cultural, religious, and political frameworks. Digital

counterpublics therefore allow marginalized interpretations to become visible without requiring complete conformity with dominant institutional discourse. This makes social media significant not simply because it increases the number of feminist messages but because it changes the range of actors capable of participating in the production of public meaning.

The transformation from individual experience to collective political discourse is another important finding in previous research. Dwityas, Marta, and Briandana (2023) show that the comments surrounding #Ibutunggalmelawan developed several interconnected discussions concerning gender oppression and justice. Wijdan, Santoso, and Siscawati (2024) similarly identify strategic communication practices through which Indonesian feminist movements use digital media to disseminate messages and advocate gender equality. These findings suggest that feminist activism should not be evaluated solely through the size of an online audience. Its political importance depends on whether communication can produce recognition, solidarity, and sustained engagement. Digital platforms can connect people who are geographically separated, but the resulting network becomes politically significant only when participants perceive a shared problem and develop collective interpretations that can be directed toward broader social or institutional change.

Digital feminism also intersects with conventional political participation. Indonesian women politicians increasingly use social media to construct political identities and communicate directly with citizens. Kusumarani et al. (2025), examining 36 women politicians, demonstrate that social media functions as an important arena of political self-representation and public perception. This development extends the meaning of digital feminism beyond activist accounts and protest campaigns. Women participate politically not only by challenging institutions from outside but also by occupying formal political positions while negotiating gendered expectations through digital communication. Social media consequently becomes an intermediary space between civil society and institutional politics. It enables activists, voters, journalists, and political representatives to interact within an increasingly interconnected communicative environment.

However, digital visibility also creates new forms of vulnerability. Research on online gender-based violence demonstrates that women can encounter harassment, cyberbullying, sexualized attacks, non-consensual distribution of intimate material, and other forms of technological violence. Rosyidah, Rachim, and Pitoyo (2022) demonstrate the connection between social media use and online gender-based violence among adolescents, while Permatasari (2022) emphasizes the psychological, physical, and social consequences of cyberbullying. Dirna (2021) further examines Instagram as an environment in which gender-based online violence can develop. These findings complicate the assumption that digital participation automatically represents empowerment. Women may gain a larger

public voice while simultaneously experiencing greater exposure to attacks intended to discourage or delegitimize their participation.

The problem becomes particularly significant when digital violence targets women who are politically visible. Gendered attacks can challenge women's competence, morality, appearance, sexuality, and legitimacy rather than engaging with their political arguments. Research concerning online gender-based violence shows that such practices are connected to broader patterns of patriarchal power (Samosir 2023; Pradypta 2023). In this context, digital violence should not be interpreted merely as an interpersonal problem between individual users. It can have consequences for democratic participation because harassment changes the cost of speaking publicly. A woman who repeatedly experiences sexualized insults or threats may reduce her online presence, avoid controversial issues, or withdraw from public communication. Political equality therefore requires attention not only to access but also to the conditions under which political visibility can be maintained.

The legal dimension further illustrates the structural nature of this problem. Adkiras, Zubarita, and Maharani Fauzi (2022) identify difficulties in the legal construction of online gender-based violence in Indonesia, while Wulandari and Layang (2022) discuss limitations in legal protection for victims. Salsabila and Susanti (2023) show that Law No. 12 of 2022 concerning Sexual Violence Crimes provides a more detailed framework for addressing sexual violence than previous regulatory instruments. These developments demonstrate that digital feminist activism operates within an evolving institutional environment. Activists do not simply create public discourse; they also contribute to demands for legal recognition and institutional accountability. Political participation thus occurs through an interaction between communication, social mobilization, and legal transformation.

The present article addresses the following research question: how do digital feminist movements in Indonesia use social media to expand women's political agency and democratic participation, and how do gendered digital vulnerabilities influence the possibilities and limits of such participation? The central argument is that Indonesian digital feminism functions through the construction of networked political agency. Social media enables women to transform experiences into public narratives, narratives into collective identities, and collective identities into political claims. At the same time, these processes generate unequal risks because women who become more visible can also become more exposed to gendered forms of hostility. Democratic participation in digital environments therefore depends on both communicative capacity and the social, technological, and institutional conditions that protect women's ability to remain publicly engaged.

The contribution of this article is threefold. First, it moves beyond a communication-centered understanding of digital feminism by treating online expression as a mechanism for constructing political agency. Second, it connects feminist digital activism with democratic participation by examining how

narratives, solidarity, advocacy, and political representation interact. Third, it conceptualizes online gender-based violence as a structural limitation on democratic participation rather than simply an individual problem of digital safety. This perspective brings together strands of Indonesian scholarship that have often been examined separately: cyberfeminist empowerment, Instagram activism, feminist counter-narratives, women's political representation, and online gender-based violence (Alatas and Sutanto 2019; Purwaningtyas 2021; Kusumarani et al. 2025). The resulting framework emphasizes that women's digital political participation should be evaluated through both its capacity to expand agency and the risks that determine who can remain visible.

Methodologically, the article employs a qualitative interpretive approach based on digital discourse and social movement analysis. The study synthesizes findings from Indonesian journal articles published between 2019 and 2025 that examine feminist social media activism, digital political participation, women's representation, cyberfeminism, and online gender-based violence. The literature is analyzed comparatively rather than merely summarized. Particular attention is given to the mechanisms through which women construct public narratives, form collective identities, engage political institutions, and encounter digital resistance. This approach makes it possible to identify relationships among communication, political agency, and vulnerability that may remain less visible when individual digital campaigns are examined in isolation. The discussion is consequently organized around three substantive questions concerning political agency, collective political claims, and the unequal conditions of digital visibility.

Digital Counterpublics and the Reconfiguration of Women's Political Agency

Social media has altered women's political agency by expanding the spaces in which political identities can be constructed and communicated. In conventional political communication, the ability to become publicly visible often depends on institutional resources, organizational membership, or access to professional media. Digital platforms reduce some of these barriers by allowing individuals and communities to produce their own content. Purwaningtyas (2021) demonstrates that Indonesian women's activism on Instagram involves the circulation of feminist knowledge, women's empowerment discourse, and gender-equality narratives. The significance of these practices extends beyond information dissemination because they enable women to define the issues that should become visible. A digital feminist account can identify a social problem, interpret its causes, present alternative narratives, and invite audiences to participate in discussion. Political agency therefore emerges through control over representation. Women become political actors not only when they occupy formal positions but also when they acquire the communicative capacity to determine how gendered experiences are publicly understood. Open Journal Systems

The notion of the counterpublic is particularly useful for explaining this transformation. A counterpublic emerges when groups whose experiences are inadequately represented within dominant discourse develop alternative spaces of communication. Lasari (2023) shows that Jakarta Feminist uses Instagram as a digital public space in which women can discuss their conditions and develop critical awareness. This space does not simply reproduce the structure of conventional public discourse in digital form. Instead, it provides an environment where experiences that may be marginalized elsewhere can become legitimate topics of discussion. The political consequence is significant because public participation requires more than access to communication technology. It requires recognition that one's experience and interpretation deserve consideration. Digital feminist counterpublics create such recognition by connecting personal narratives with collective meanings. They consequently expand the range of actors capable of contributing to public debate and challenge the assumption that political authority must originate from formal institutions.

The construction of digital counterpublics also involves a struggle over knowledge. Feminist movements frequently challenge conventional assumptions concerning women's bodies, sexuality, family responsibilities, violence, and political competence. Shabira (2022) demonstrates that @perempuanfeminis uses Instagram to construct narratives concerning sexual violence, legal protection, equality, and resistance to patriarchal culture. These themes indicate that feminist activism is partly a struggle over interpretation. The movement does not merely request policy changes; it challenges the conceptual categories through which society understands gender relations. When sexual harassment is represented as structural violence rather than personal misconduct, or when unequal domestic expectations are interpreted as gender inequality rather than individual family problems, the political meaning of those experiences changes. Social media facilitates this process because feminist actors can repeatedly circulate alternative concepts and explanations to audiences that may not encounter them through formal education or mainstream political discourse.

Digital feminist communication also allows women to participate in political discussions through culturally specific forms of interpretation. Daniah and Pribadi (2023) demonstrate that Mubadalah.id develops counter-narratives to patriarchal interpretations of Islam by using visual communication, storytelling, and inclusive religious perspectives. This example is important because it shows that women's political agency does not necessarily require separation from cultural or religious identities. Feminist claims can be articulated through reinterpretation from within existing traditions. The political effect is to challenge the assumption that religious authority and gender equality are necessarily incompatible. Digital platforms provide space for these alternative interpretations to circulate among audiences who may not identify with secular feminist discourse. The result is a more pluralistic form of political communication in which women negotiate authority by producing alternative meanings rather than simply rejecting established cultural frameworks.

The construction of political agency also depends on the capacity to communicate through accessible formats. Instagram's visual structure, short captions, stories, reels, and comment sections allows feminist actors to translate complex issues into communicative forms that can be consumed within everyday digital practices. Wilmanda and Hariyanti (2023) demonstrate that @womensmarchjkt uses Instagram to communicate feminist messages and promote gender equality. The platform consequently becomes an educational environment as well as an activist channel. The importance of accessibility should not be underestimated. Political participation can be restricted when political language is highly institutionalized or difficult for ordinary audiences to understand. Feminist digital communication can reduce this barrier by translating legal, social, and political issues into narratives connected to everyday experiences. Such translation contributes to political agency because audiences acquire the conceptual resources needed to recognize inequality and participate in discussions about it.

The communicative structure of digital activism also changes the relationship between producers and audiences. In conventional media, audiences largely consume messages produced by professional organizations. On social media, users can respond, reinterpret, criticize, and redistribute content. Dwityas, Marta, and Briandana (2023) show that the comments surrounding #lbutunggalmelawan developed substantive discussions concerning gender oppression, parental relationships, violence against women, and discrimination against single mothers. The comment section therefore becomes part of the political text rather than merely an afterthought. This participatory structure matters because political agency is strengthened when audiences can contribute their own experiences and interpretations. The resulting discourse becomes more heterogeneous, but that heterogeneity also creates opportunities for collective learning. Women can recognize similarities among experiences that initially appear individual, enabling a shift from isolated grievances toward shared political consciousness.

Digital feminism also provides mechanisms through which women can develop political self-efficacy. Political self-efficacy concerns the belief that one's political actions can communicate meaningful claims and potentially influence others. Social media can strengthen such perceptions because users can observe immediate responses to their contributions. Although engagement does not necessarily produce institutional change, comments, shares, and supportive networks can demonstrate that individual voices have social resonance. Suharnanik (2022) emphasizes the potential of social media to strengthen women's social and political empowerment. This process is important because political participation often depends on whether individuals perceive public communication as worthwhile. Digital feminism can lower the psychological threshold for participation by allowing women to begin with relatively small forms of expression before moving toward more organized activism. Political agency thus develops cumulatively through repeated communicative experiences.

However, political agency should not be equated with unrestricted digital freedom. The technological environment is itself structured by platform rules, algorithms, commercial incentives, and social norms. Alatas and Sutanto (2019) emphasize the empowering possibilities of new media while also situating cyberfeminism within struggles against male-dominated technological discourse. The implication is that technology does not possess an inherently emancipatory character. Its political consequences depend on how users, institutions, and cultural structures shape its use. Feminist movements may gain visibility while simultaneously becoming dependent on platforms whose algorithms determine which content receives attention. Digital agency is therefore relational: women exercise agency through technologies that are themselves governed by external systems. A realistic analysis of digital feminism must consequently examine not only what activists communicate but also the technological environment within which communication becomes visible or invisible.

The tension between empowerment and structural limitation becomes clearer when feminist activism encounters anti-feminist discourse. Digital spaces allow feminist ideas to circulate, but they also allow opponents to organize counter-discourses. The presence of @indonesiatanpafeminis.id demonstrates that feminist communication occurs within a contested ideological environment (Janitra and Ratmita 2021). Although the article examines a specific anti-feminist network, its broader implication is important: digital political agency always operates within conditions of contestation. Women's ability to speak does not mean that their interpretation becomes dominant. Feminist actors must negotiate disagreement, criticism, and ideological opposition. Such contestation can be democratically productive when disagreement remains deliberative, but it can become exclusionary when opponents attempt to intimidate or silence participants. Digital feminism therefore expands political voice while simultaneously intensifying struggles over political legitimacy.

Women's political agency becomes particularly visible when digital communication intersects with formal political institutions. Kusumarani et al. (2025) demonstrate that women politicians use social media to construct self-representations while young audiences evaluate those representations. The significance of this development is that digital political agency is not confined to activists outside government. Women occupying formal political positions also use digital platforms to negotiate public identities and political legitimacy. This creates an important bridge between feminist civil society and institutional politics. Political representation is no longer mediated exclusively by parties, newspapers, or television. Women politicians can communicate directly with citizens and respond to public discourse. Yet direct communication also exposes them to gendered expectations concerning appearance, morality, family, and leadership, making digital political agency an ongoing process of negotiation.

The political significance of women's digital representation also depends on how audiences interpret it. Kusumarani et al. (2025) show that youth perspectives

are important in evaluating the digital representation of women politicians. This finding challenges a simple sender-centered understanding of political communication. Women can control their own social media accounts, but they cannot fully control how audiences interpret their messages. Political agency therefore involves both self-representation and the negotiation of external interpretation. The same image may communicate professionalism to one audience and gender conformity to another. Digital politics consequently creates a continuous feedback process between self-presentation and public evaluation. For feminist movements, this means that communication strategies must consider not only the production of messages but also the interpretive frameworks through which audiences evaluate women's political identities.

Digital counterpublics also contribute to political agency by connecting local experiences to broader national conversations. A woman experiencing discrimination in one city may share her experience through a feminist account and discover similar experiences from individuals elsewhere. This process expands the geographical scope of political recognition. Wijdan, Santoso, and Siscawati (2024) identify communication strategies through which Indonesian feminist movements use digital spaces for advocacy and gender-equality discourse. The movement's communicative capacity therefore creates connections among otherwise dispersed actors. Such networks can provide information, emotional support, and opportunities for coordinated action. The political significance lies in the conversion of dispersed experiences into a recognizable collective issue. Digital feminism can thus weaken the isolation that traditionally prevents individual experiences from becoming politically consequential.

The evidence ultimately indicates that digital feminism changes political agency by altering who can speak, how experiences can be represented, and how collective interpretations can be formed. Indonesian women use social media not simply to reproduce existing feminist messages but to construct alternative narratives, establish counterpublics, educate audiences, and negotiate political identities. Yet this agency remains conditional because digital platforms are governed by technological systems and contested by opposing actors. The political value of digital feminism therefore lies neither in technological determinism nor in the assumption that social media automatically liberates women. Its significance lies in the creation of communicative infrastructures through which women can transform experience into public knowledge and public knowledge into political claims. Digital political agency is consequently best understood as an ongoing process of negotiating visibility, authority, recognition, and collective meaning.

From Personal Narratives to Collective Political Claims

The political significance of feminist digital communication becomes stronger when individual experiences are translated into collective claims. Personal stories concerning discrimination, sexual violence, unequal family responsibilities, or

social stigma often begin as experiences that appear private. Digital activism can change their status by placing them within networks of shared interpretation. Dwityas, Marta, and Briandana (2023) demonstrate that #Ibutunggalmelawan transformed discussions surrounding single motherhood into a broader discourse involving gender oppression, parental relations, justice, and discrimination. This process illustrates how digital communication can politicize everyday experience. The political claim does not emerge because every participant has an identical experience; it emerges because participants recognize structural similarities among different experiences. Social media consequently provides a mechanism through which personal narratives can become collective evidence concerning the operation of gender inequality.

Storytelling is particularly important because feminist political claims frequently involve experiences that cannot easily be represented through statistical data alone. Narratives communicate emotion, context, and lived consequences. Girsang and Hasugian (2025), examining the Instagram account @perempuanberkisah, show how stories concerning sextortion generate public discourse and emotional responses in comment sections. The political value of these narratives is that they humanize structural problems while creating opportunities for audiences to recognize the consequences of gender-based violence. Nevertheless, storytelling also requires ethical considerations because survivors may face additional exposure when their experiences become public. Digital feminism therefore needs to balance visibility with protection. The objective is not simply to maximize the circulation of stories but to ensure that storytelling strengthens collective understanding without reproducing the vulnerability of those whose experiences make political communication possible. *eJournal UIN SGD*

The movement from narrative to collective claim also depends on categorization. Individuals need conceptual frameworks through which they can understand their experiences as part of a larger social problem. Feminist accounts perform this function by explaining concepts such as patriarchy, gender inequality, sexual violence, and online violence. Sahri, Maella, and Ahmadi (2025), examining educational content on @kawanpuan.id, demonstrate how feminist digital communication can combine gender education, empowerment, and digital solidarity. Educational content is politically important because it provides audiences with interpretive resources. Once individuals possess a vocabulary for identifying inequality, they can more easily connect personal experiences with broader structures. Digital feminist education thus performs a mobilizing function even when a post does not explicitly call for protest or political action. *UIR Journal*

The political effect of this categorization becomes evident when a private problem is reframed as an issue of public responsibility. Sexual harassment, for example, may initially be interpreted as an unfortunate interaction between individuals. Feminist advocacy can redefine it as a question of institutional protection, legal accountability, and social norms. Shabira (2022) shows that @perempuanfeminis connects feminist communication with demands for stronger

legal protection against sexual violence. The transformation is significant because public policy generally responds to problems that are collectively recognized as requiring institutional intervention. Digital feminist movements contribute to this process by constructing interpretive frames through which audiences understand why existing arrangements are insufficient. Political mobilization therefore begins at the level of meaning before it becomes visible as organized pressure.

Hashtags provide one mechanism for organizing this transformation. A hashtag allows geographically dispersed users to connect their contributions under a common symbolic label. It can turn separate messages into a recognizable stream of political communication. The #lbutunggalmelawan campaign demonstrates how a digital label can create a shared context for discussing gender relations and discrimination (Dwityas, Marta, and Briandana 2023). However, hashtags should not be treated as equivalent to organizations. Their political effectiveness depends on whether they generate sustained interaction, coordination, and institutional engagement. A hashtag may produce temporary visibility without producing durable political consequences. Its importance therefore lies in its ability to initiate processes of recognition and aggregation that can subsequently be connected to broader advocacy networks. Digital mobilization becomes politically substantive when symbolic unity is accompanied by organizational capacity.

Feminist movements also use social media to connect education with advocacy. Wijdan, Santoso, and Siscawati (2024) identify communication strategies through which Indonesian feminist movements use digital platforms to disseminate gender-equality messages and challenge patriarchal narratives. Such strategies suggest that advocacy cannot rely solely on emotional mobilization. Audiences need information concerning why a problem exists, who is responsible, and what forms of intervention are possible. Digital feminism can therefore combine affective and cognitive dimensions. Stories may generate empathy, while educational content provides analytical understanding. Campaign messages can then translate this understanding into political demands. The combination of these communicative functions increases the possibility that temporary attention will become more sustained engagement.

Counter-narratives become particularly consequential when feminist claims intersect with religious or cultural authority. Daniah and Pribadi (2023) demonstrate that Mubadalah.id challenges patriarchal interpretations of Islamic teachings through alternative religious narratives. This strategy broadens the political possibilities of feminist discourse because it avoids presenting gender equality as an external cultural project. Instead, feminist actors demonstrate that principles of justice and reciprocity can be derived from within religious traditions. The political implication is that counterpublics can create bridges between movements and audiences whose identities may otherwise appear incompatible. Feminist political claims become more persuasive when they are translated into languages that audiences recognize as legitimate. Digital communication thus operates not only

as a means of mobilization but also as a mechanism for negotiating the cultural legitimacy of political demands.

Political pressure can also emerge through interaction between digital activists and journalists. Women journalists can function as intermediaries between activist networks and broader media systems. Research on Indonesian female journalists shows that digital citizenship enables women to express themselves, contest gendered ideals, and coordinate social and political activism (Hanif, Lestari, and Yuniati 2024). This intermediary role matters because digital feminist narratives can otherwise remain confined within activist communities. When issues are translated into journalistic discourse, they may reach audiences beyond the original network and enter institutional debates. The relationship between activism and journalism therefore illustrates how digital feminism can move across communicative spheres. Political influence is strengthened when feminist narratives are able to circulate between grassroots communities, digital platforms, professional media, and public institutions.

The transition from digital discourse to institutional politics is also visible in legal debates concerning gender-based violence. Adkiras, Zubarita, and Maharani Fauzi (2022) demonstrate that Indonesian legal mechanisms for addressing online gender-based violence have faced conceptual and regulatory limitations. Such limitations create incentives for civil society actors to use public communication to demand clearer forms of institutional protection. Digital feminist campaigns can make legal gaps visible by documenting experiences and explaining the consequences of inadequate regulation. Salsabila and Susanti (2023) show that the Sexual Violence Crimes Law provides a more detailed framework for dealing with sexual violence, including online forms, than previous legal instruments. These developments demonstrate how feminist political communication can contribute to the translation of social grievances into institutional demands.

The relationship between online advocacy and institutional change should nevertheless not be understood as automatic. Public attention can increase without producing immediate policy reform. Digital campaigns can also disappear as platform trends change. The political sustainability of feminist activism therefore depends on organizational continuity. Jakarta Feminist, for example, illustrates how digital communication can be connected to a broader activist organization rather than functioning solely as a social media account (Lasari 2023). This organizational connection provides opportunities for translating online engagement into offline advocacy. The lesson is important for digital feminism: platforms can facilitate mobilization, but they cannot substitute entirely for institutions capable of maintaining campaigns, providing services, conducting legal advocacy, and negotiating with policymakers. Sustainable democratic participation requires connections between digital networks and material organizational resources.

Digital narratives can also influence political participation by changing how women perceive formal politics. Women politicians increasingly use social media to communicate policy positions and construct public identities. Kusumarani et al.

(2025) show that young audiences actively interpret the digital representation of women politicians. This indicates that feminist political communication can operate across the boundary between activism and electoral politics. Women who encounter feminist content online may subsequently evaluate political candidates through gender-equality concerns. Conversely, women politicians can use digital platforms to communicate positions that resonate with feminist publics. Social media therefore creates a communicative bridge between issue-based activism and electoral representation. Its democratic significance lies in expanding the spaces through which citizens encounter political ideas and assess representatives.

Yet the conversion of narratives into political claims is accompanied by contestation. Feminist accounts may attract supportive responses, but they can also encounter victim-blaming, misogyny, skepticism, and ideological opposition. Khairani (2025), examining public responses to advocacy around the Nia Kurnia Sari case, demonstrates that Instagram comment sections contain contested public sentiment concerning gender-based violence. This illustrates that digital political communication is not a linear process in which activists produce messages and audiences simply accept them. Public discourse is negotiated. Feminist actors must therefore continuously defend their framing of an issue. The comment section becomes part of the political struggle because interpretations of victims, perpetrators, gender inequality, and institutional responsibility are contested in real time.

The interaction between supportive and hostile audiences has implications for democratic deliberation. Disagreement is not inherently harmful to democracy; indeed, political pluralism requires competing interpretations. The problem arises when disagreement becomes a mechanism for silencing rather than deliberating. Online gender-based violence can transform ideological contestation into intimidation. Samosir (2023) demonstrates how technological systems can be exploited to distribute intimate or sexualized material without consent. Such practices exceed ordinary political disagreement because they attack individuals' dignity and security. The democratic challenge is therefore to preserve spaces for disagreement while preventing violence from becoming a mechanism of political exclusion. Feminist digital activism contributes to democracy when it expands disagreement and participation without allowing gendered hostility to determine who remains capable of speaking.

Taken together, these findings indicate that feminist digital mobilization should be understood as a process of political translation. Personal narratives provide experiential evidence; feminist concepts provide interpretive frameworks; hashtags aggregate attention; educational content creates political understanding; and advocacy networks translate public concern into institutional demands. The process is neither automatic nor linear. It depends on organizational resources, audience interpretation, media visibility, and institutional responsiveness. Digital feminism becomes politically significant when these elements interact to transform individual experiences into collective claims capable of entering public

deliberation. Social media therefore functions less as a substitute for political organization than as an infrastructure that can connect experiences, narratives, audiences, and institutions within a wider democratic process.

Gendered Digital Violence and the Unequal Costs of Political Visibility

The expansion of women's digital participation produces an important democratic contradiction: the same platforms that increase political visibility can also expose women to forms of violence that disproportionately affect their ability to participate. Cyberfeminism emphasizes the emancipatory possibilities of technology, yet research on online gender-based violence demonstrates that digital environments can reproduce patriarchal relations in new forms. Suharnanik (2022) recognizes both the empowerment potential and the challenges associated with women's social media use. This contradiction means that digital inclusion cannot be measured simply through access to platforms. A more meaningful measure concerns whether women can use digital spaces without facing systematic penalties for their participation. If political visibility increases exposure to harassment, threats, sexualization, or reputational attacks, then formal access to communication does not necessarily produce substantive political equality.

Cyberbullying illustrates one mechanism through which digital visibility can become a political burden. Permatasari (2022) demonstrates that cyberbullying can generate psychological, physical, and social consequences, particularly among younger users. Although cyberbullying is not exclusively gendered, its effects can intersect with patriarchal expectations concerning women's behavior and reputation. Women may be attacked not only for what they say politically but also for how they look, dress, speak, or behave. This creates an additional layer of scrutiny that can discourage political expression. The consequence is particularly serious for young women who are developing political identities through social media. Their withdrawal from public communication does not merely represent an individual behavioral change; it reduces the diversity of voices available within the digital public sphere.

Online gender-based violence can also emerge through anonymous or deceptive forms of interaction. Pradypta (2023) demonstrates how online dating applications can facilitate gender-based violence through anonymous accounts and deceptive identities. Although the study concerns dating platforms rather than feminist activism directly, its findings reveal a broader characteristic of digital violence: perpetrators can exploit technological distance and anonymity to reduce accountability. This matters for political participation because feminist activists often operate under public profiles that reveal personal information. The same digital architecture that enables activists to connect with audiences can allow hostile actors to gather information about them. The distinction between public identity and private vulnerability consequently becomes increasingly unstable.

Digital political participation requires strategies for managing this exposure without forcing women to abandon public visibility.

The problem becomes more severe when intimate content is used as a weapon. Samosir (2023) examines revenge pornography and related digital practices and shows how technology can facilitate the circulation of sexualized content without consent. Such practices can produce severe reputational and psychological consequences for victims. Their political significance lies in the way they exploit gender norms surrounding sexuality and morality. Women may experience stronger social sanctions when intimate material is circulated because patriarchal cultures often judge women's sexuality more harshly than men's. Digital violence therefore operates through technological mechanisms and existing social inequalities simultaneously. The platform may provide the means, but patriarchal norms provide the social conditions that make the attack effective.

Research on social media and gender-based violence also indicates that vulnerability is not confined to activist circles. Rosyidah, Rachim, and Pitoyo (2022) find that social media can become an environment in which young people experience online gender-based violence, including forms associated with intimate relationships. This demonstrates that digital vulnerability is embedded in ordinary social interaction. Feminist political participation therefore cannot be separated from broader digital cultures concerning relationships, sexuality, privacy, and reputation. The political issue is not simply whether activists receive threats. It concerns the broader environment in which women learn what kinds of digital behavior are considered acceptable and what consequences may follow when they become visible. A democratic digital culture requires norms that protect participation across these everyday contexts.

The architecture of social media can intensify these vulnerabilities because harmful content can spread rapidly beyond its original context. A hostile comment, manipulated image, or private disclosure can be copied, shared, and redistributed by users who were not part of the original interaction. Dirna (2021) identifies Instagram as one environment in which gender-based online violence can occur. The persistence and scalability of digital content create a distinctive form of harm because victims may have limited ability to determine where or how their information circulates. Political visibility therefore becomes difficult to control. Feminist activists may be able to choose what they publish but cannot always control how others reproduce, reinterpret, or weaponize that content. The asymmetry between communicative production and communicative control is a central problem for women's digital participation.

Gendered violence also affects the symbolic legitimacy of women as political actors. Attacks against women frequently target personal characteristics rather than political arguments. Instead of debating a policy position, opponents may question a woman's morality, sexuality, appearance, family status, or emotional stability. This form of attack can be understood as a strategy of delegitimization because it shifts attention from political competence to gendered identity. Kusumarani et al.

(2025) demonstrate that women politicians already navigate complex processes of self-representation and public evaluation on social media. When these evaluations become gendered, women must manage political communication under standards that may not be applied equally to men. Digital visibility consequently creates opportunities for political representation while simultaneously reproducing gendered forms of scrutiny.

The consequences extend to political self-confidence. A woman who repeatedly encounters hostility may develop the perception that political participation carries excessive personal costs. This can influence whether she comments on controversial issues, participates in campaigns, or maintains an active public profile. The resulting silence may not be visible in conventional measures of digital participation because researchers can observe only those who remain active. This creates a methodological problem: studies of visible feminist activism may underestimate the population that withdraws because of harassment. Digital democratic participation should therefore be analyzed not only through active users but also through patterns of avoidance, self-censorship, and disengagement. The absence of women's voices can itself be an outcome of gendered digital violence.

The legal environment determines whether such risks can be addressed effectively. Adkiras, Zubarita, and Maharani Fauzi (2022) identify weaknesses in the legal construction of online gender-based violence, including difficulties concerning mechanisms for handling cases. Wulandari and Layang (2022) similarly argue that legal protection for victims has faced limitations. These findings demonstrate that women's digital political participation depends partly on institutional capacity. If victims lack accessible mechanisms for reporting abuse and obtaining protection, perpetrators face fewer barriers to continuing their behavior. Digital democracy therefore requires legal infrastructures that recognize technological forms of gender-based violence and provide effective remedies. The responsibility for protecting participation cannot be placed exclusively on individual users.

The development of Law No. 12 of 2022 concerning Sexual Violence Crimes represents an important institutional development in this context. Salsabila and Susanti (2023) argue that the legislation provides a more detailed framework for sexual violence than the previous reliance on the Electronic Information and Transactions Law. The significance of this development is not merely legal. It demonstrates that feminist advocacy can contribute to institutional recognition of harms that were previously difficult to address. Nevertheless, legal recognition does not automatically guarantee effective protection. Implementation, access to justice, victim support, and law-enforcement capacity remain important. Digital feminist activism can therefore continue to play a role after legislation is adopted by monitoring implementation, disseminating legal knowledge, and documenting cases. Political participation becomes sustainable when communication and institutional protection reinforce each other.

Digital feminist organizations also respond to vulnerability by producing educational and protective communication. Sahri, Maella, and Ahmadi (2025) demonstrate how @kawanpuan.id uses accessible educational content to communicate gender equality, women's empowerment, and solidarity. Such practices are significant because protection can begin with knowledge. Women who understand digital risks may be better prepared to protect personal information, recognize abusive behavior, and seek assistance. More importantly, educational campaigns can change the social interpretation of online violence. When audiences understand that harassment and non-consensual sexual content are forms of gender-based violence rather than ordinary internet conflict, collective tolerance of such behavior may decline. Digital feminist education therefore performs both preventive and political functions.

The need for collective protection becomes clearer when examining attacks against women's media communities. Hanif, Lestari, and Yuniati (2024) document resistance against a women's media community that communicated gender issues through social media. Their findings demonstrate that cyberattacks can be directed at organizations rather than only individuals. This suggests that digital hostility can threaten the infrastructure of feminist communication itself. If activist accounts are hacked, harassed, or systematically attacked, the movement's ability to maintain public communication may be disrupted. Democratic participation consequently requires protection at both individual and organizational levels. Feminist movements need secure communication systems, collective moderation strategies, documentation mechanisms, and institutional support to remain resilient under digital pressure.

The contested nature of digital feminist spaces can also be observed through audience responses. Khairani (2025) demonstrates that Instagram discussions concerning advocacy for a case of gender-based violence generate diverse public sentiments. Some responses can support victims and feminist advocacy, while others reproduce skepticism or patriarchal interpretations. The comment section therefore becomes an arena where political meanings are negotiated. This is not necessarily a weakness of digital democracy; disagreement is unavoidable in pluralistic societies. The problem arises when the communicative conditions become unequal, particularly when gendered attacks overwhelm substantive discussion. Feminist movements consequently need strategies that distinguish productive disagreement from communication intended to intimidate, humiliate, or silence. Political participation requires not the elimination of conflict but the preservation of conditions under which conflict can remain politically meaningful.

The challenge of gendered digital violence ultimately requires a broader conception of democratic participation. Democracy is often measured through formal rights, electoral inclusion, and access to political institutions. In digital environments, however, participation also depends on the capacity to maintain public visibility without disproportionate personal risks. Women may formally possess equal rights to use social media, yet unequal exposure to harassment can

produce substantively unequal participation. Digital feminist movements reveal this contradiction by simultaneously expanding political voice and exposing the structural conditions that constrain it. The task is therefore not to remove women from risky digital environments but to transform those environments through stronger institutional protections, collective strategies, digital literacy, and social norms that reject gender-based intimidation.

The evidence suggests that digital safety should be conceptualized as a democratic condition rather than a peripheral technical concern. Feminist movements can create counterpublics, mobilize narratives, and influence political agendas only when activists are able to remain present within digital spaces. Gendered violence threatens this continuity by increasing the costs of participation and encouraging self-censorship or withdrawal. Indonesian scholarship on cyberfeminism, online gender-based violence, legal protection, and feminist advocacy collectively indicates that empowerment and vulnerability are interconnected rather than mutually exclusive (Suharnanik 2022; Samosir 2023; Wulandari and Layang 2022). A genuinely inclusive digital public sphere therefore requires both communicative freedom and protection from gendered forms of exclusion. Women's political agency becomes sustainable when visibility is accompanied by institutional accountability and collective capacity for resistance.

Conclusion

Digital feminist movements in Indonesia demonstrate that social media has become an important infrastructure for women's political agency and democratic participation. Women use digital platforms to construct counterpublics, reinterpret gender relations, circulate feminist knowledge, and transform individual experiences into collective political concerns. Research on Instagram activism, @perempuanfeminis, @womensmarchjkt, Jakarta Feminist, Mubadalah.id, and #lbutunggalmelawan demonstrates that digital communication can expand participation beyond conventional institutional boundaries (Purwaningtyas 2021; Shabira 2022; Lasari 2023; Daniah and Pribadi 2023; Dwityas, Marta, and Briandana 2023). The central implication is that digital feminism should not be treated simply as the online extension of an existing movement. It represents a transformation in the communicative conditions through which women acquire visibility, construct political identities, develop solidarity, and formulate public claims.

The analysis also demonstrates that digital visibility does not automatically produce democratic equality. Women's political participation remains constrained by gendered digital violence, including harassment, cyberbullying, sexualized attacks, non-consensual dissemination of intimate material, and other forms of technological abuse (Permatasari 2022; Rosyidah, Rachim, and Pitoyo 2022; Samosir 2023; Pradypta 2023). These practices matter politically because they increase the personal costs of public participation and can encourage self-

ensorship or withdrawal. Legal developments such as Law No. 12 of 2022 provide an important institutional basis for stronger protection, but legal recognition needs to be accompanied by effective implementation, digital literacy, organizational resilience, and collective support (Adkiras, Zubarita, and Maharani Fauzi 2022; Wulandari and Layang 2022; Salsabila and Susanti 2023). Democratic participation therefore requires not only the right to speak but also conditions that allow women to remain visible without disproportionate risks.

Future research should move beyond individual case studies of feminist accounts toward comparative and longitudinal analyses of digital feminist movements across Indonesian regions, social classes, religious communities, and generations. Future studies could examine whether online feminist engagement produces sustained participation in elections, policy advocacy, community organizing, or institutional politics, and whether digital campaigns generate measurable changes in public policy. Greater attention is also needed to women who withdraw from online political spaces because of harassment, since their absence is rarely captured by studies focused on visible activists. Comparative research between feminist activists and women politicians could further clarify how different forms of political agency negotiate gendered expectations in digital environments. Finally, research should examine the relationship between platform governance, legal protection, and feminist resilience so that digital democracy can be understood not simply as a question of access, but as a question of whether diverse citizens can participate safely, continuously, and meaningfully.

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