



Strategic Digital Feminism: Engagement and Messaging Through Instagram in Indonesia

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Abstract: Digital platforms have become important sites for contemporary feminist activism, particularly in sociocultural contexts where patriarchal norms, moral conservatism, and platform governance shape public discourse. In Indonesia, Instagram has emerged as a contested digital space in which feminist expressions are both enabled and constrained. This study examines how feminist discourse is constructed, sustained, and adapted through the Instagram account @indonesiabutuhfeminis, a grassroots digital feminist community. Grounded in Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality, the study explores feminist activism not merely in terms of visibility or engagement, but as an ongoing process of meaning construction within a structurally challenging digital environment. Using qualitative content analysis of visual and textual posts published between 2021 and 2022, complemented by systematic online observation of interaction patterns and platform practices, the findings show that feminist discourse on the account is maintained through adaptive practices rather than isolated campaigns. These practices include the repeated circulation of accessible visual-textual content, the strategic use of hashtags to foster collective identification, sustained interaction with followers, and the activation of a secondary account following platform disruption. As a single-case qualitative study, the findings are not intended for generalization; however, they provide an in-depth understanding of how grassroots feminist activism navigates digital vulnerability while maintaining ideological continuity. This study contributes to digital feminism scholarship by demonstrating how social media functions as a site where feminist meanings are continuously constructed, negotiated, and stabilized within contested digital spaces in contemporary Indonesia.

Introduction

The increasing entwinement of society and digital technologies has fostered the emergence of new conceptual frameworks, such as cyberpolitics, cybercommunication, and cybersociology, which reconfigure social interaction within virtual environments (1). Among these, cyberspace has become a critical arena for the evolution of feminist discourse (2). Despite significant strides in the global gender equality movement, gender inequality remains deeply embedded in various cultural, economic, and institutional systems (3). In Indonesia, patriarchal norms continue to dominate public and private life, with women often facing discrimination in employment, education, and representation (4). Data from the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (2020) indicate that women earn, on average, 23% less than men and remain underrepresented in decision-making positions (5). These conditions point to the ongoing need for accessible and inclusive spaces through which feminist perspectives can challenge dominant ideologies (6).

Alongside traditional forms of feminist activism rooted in

physical mobilization and academic discourse, digital media, particularly social platforms such as Instagram, have introduced new dynamics in feminist communication and mobilization (7). Instagram enables rapid dissemination of ideas, visual storytelling, and participatory engagement, making it an attractive platform for feminist advocacy. However, feminist activism in digital spaces is not without challenges. Online discourse is often fragmented, shaped by misinformation, algorithmic visibility regimes, and platform regulations that may marginalize critical or oppositional voices (8). Moreover, although many online feminist campaigns have gained public visibility, such as #MulaiBicara and community-based initiatives by accounts like @jakartafeminist, @indonesiafeminis, and @magdaleneid, the depth of engagement and the sustainability of feminist meanings within these campaigns are frequently questioned (9). Existing efforts often prioritize awareness and reach, while paying less attention to how feminist discourse is continuously constructed, negotiated, and maintained as a shared social reality.

This study addresses this gap by examining the

Instagram account @indonesiabutuhfeminis, a grassroots digital feminist community initiated in Jakarta in 2016. The account primarily discusses gender-based violence, everyday sexism, patriarchal norms, and public misconceptions surrounding feminism in Indonesia. Unlike institutional feminist media platforms that rely on journalistic authority, @indonesiabutuhfeminis positions itself as a participatory space that encourages user interaction, reposting, and collective discussion (10). Rather than aiming to represent all forms of digital feminism, this account is selected as a critical case that enables closer examination of how feminist meanings are constructed and sustained through everyday interaction within digital environments shaped by sociocultural resistance and platform constraints (11). Compared to professional media outlets such as @magdaleneid or campaign-oriented initiatives like @indonesiafeminis, its community-driven orientation allows for deeper observation of participatory discourse and audience engagement (12).

In this article, the term “strategic digital feminism” does not refer to planned campaigns or instrumental communication tactics alone, but to the situated practices through which feminist actors navigate structural constraints in Indonesia’s digital public sphere. Feminist activism on Instagram unfolds within a sociopolitical context shaped by entrenched patriarchy, moral conservatism, religious authority, and platform regulation, where feminist discourse is frequently contested and vulnerable to moderation or disruption. Under these conditions, sustaining feminist presence requires strategic adaptation to platform affordances, algorithmic visibility regimes, and audience interaction, positioning digital feminism as an ongoing negotiation with structural power relations embedded in both society and platform governance.

This article argues that feminist digital activism on Instagram in Indonesia should not be understood merely in terms of visibility, reach, or communication strategies, but as a continuous process of meaning construction shaped by everyday interaction, sociocultural resistance, and platform governance. Existing studies on Indonesian digital feminism largely emphasize campaigns and representational practices, while paying limited attention to how feminist meanings persist and become socially recognizable within hostile digital environments. Addressing this gap, the study applies Berger and Luckmann’s theory of the social construction of reality to examine how feminist discourse on @indonesiabutuhfeminis is continuously externalized, stabilized, and internalized through platform-based practices.

Theoretically, this research draws on Berger and Luckmann’s theory of the social construction of reality, which conceptualizes social reality as the outcome of dialectical processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization (13). Applying this framework to Instagram-based feminist discourse, the study examines how feminist ideas are articulated through digital content, stabilized as shared narratives, and internalized through user engagement within a patriarchal and algorithmically regulated context (14). Accordingly, this study asks how @indonesiabutuhfeminis utilizes digital communication practices to maintain engagement, reinforce feminist meanings, and adapt to platform constraints. Employing a qualitative netnographic approach combined with content analysis, this research contributes to digital activism and feminist communication literature by shifting attention from visibility alone toward the sociological processes that enable

ideological continuity and resilience in online feminist movements in Indonesia (15).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design using content analysis within a netnographic perspective to examine the construction of feminist discourse on Instagram. This approach is suitable for analyzing digital communities in which social meanings are produced and negotiated through mediated interaction. Rather than examining individual perceptions, the study focuses on publicly available digital artifacts as sociocultural texts that reflect collective meaning-making processes.

The analysis is theoretically informed by Berger and Luckmann’s theory of the social construction of reality, particularly the dialectical processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. This framework guides the interpretation of how feminist ideas are articulated through digital content, stabilized as shared narratives, and reinforced through recurring interaction within an online community.

Research Site and Case Selection

The research site is the Instagram account @indonesiabutuhfeminis, a grassroots digital feminist community initiated in Jakarta in 2016. The account was selected through purposive sampling as a critical case rather than a representative sample of Indonesian digital feminism. The selection was based on three empirically observable criteria.

First, consistency of feminist discourse was identified through repeated thematic patterns in posts addressing gender-based violence, patriarchal norms, everyday sexism, and public misconceptions of feminism over the observation period. Second, sustained engagement was assessed through recurring interaction across posts, including continuous comment activity, reposting of follower-generated content, and ongoing participation observed over an extended period rather than episodic or campaign-based moments. Third, explicit opposition to patriarchal ideology was identified through content that directly challenges victim-blaming narratives, gender stereotypes, and normative gender roles, rather than implicitly referencing gender issues.

Compared to professional feminist media outlets such as @magdaleneid or campaign-oriented initiatives like @indonesiafeminis, @indonesiabutuhfeminis places a stronger emphasis on participatory discourse and everyday interaction, making it particularly suitable for examining processes of social construction in digital feminist activism.

Data Collection

Data were collected over a three-month period between April and June 2021. The primary data consisted of publicly available Instagram content, including posts, captions, hashtags, and user comments. The study focused on feed posts rather than ephemeral content to ensure analytical stability.

A total of 78 posts and 1,320 associated user comments were systematically archived. Data collection involved capturing screenshots and recording engagement indicators such as likes, comments, and reposts to contextualize interaction patterns. All data were treated as digital texts

and visual artifacts rather than personal expressions, and no private messages or restricted content were accessed.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic content analysis guided by the theoretical framework of social constructionism. The analytical process involved three stages.

First, posts and captions were examined to identify how feminist ideas were externalized through visual and textual narratives, including the use of memes, slogans, and symbolic imagery. Second, patterns of objectivation were analyzed by identifying recurring themes, narratives, and representational forms that framed feminist ideas as shared social meanings. Third, internalization was examined through patterns of user interaction, such as recurring forms of agreement, reinterpretation, and reinforcement visible in comment threads and reposting practices.

Coding was conducted iteratively using NVivo 12 software. Initial coding categories were derived deductively from Berger and Luckmann's theoretical concepts and refined inductively based on emerging patterns in the data. To enhance analytical rigor, the coding process emphasized transparency and consistency rather than statistical generalization.

Ethical Considerations

This study analyzed publicly accessible digital content. To maintain ethical integrity, identifiable user information, such as usernames and profile images, was anonymized in the analysis and presentation of findings. No direct interaction with account administrators or followers occurred during the research process. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for digital research and received institutional ethical approval from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, UIN Walisongo Semarang.

Results

Feminist Content Practices on Instagram

The Instagram account @indonesiabutuhfeminis operates as a digital space for feminist expression and interaction, where gender-related issues are communicated through recurring themes and platform-specific practices. Analysis of the account's content shows consistent attention to topics such as patriarchal norms, gender-based violence, everyday sexism, and public misconceptions about feminism. These issues are articulated through visual-textual formats designed to sustain audience attention and facilitate ongoing interaction.

The continuity of feminist discourse on the account is supported by the repeated use of accessible content formats, interactive features, and networked visibility mechanisms within Instagram. Rather than relying on episodic campaigns, the account maintains its presence through regular posting patterns, audience-oriented narratives, and adaptive use of platform tools.

Observational data further indicate that the account responds to platform vulnerability by diversifying its modes of presence, including the activation of a secondary account following the disappearance of the main profile. This practice enables the continuity of feminist communication and preserves audience connection despite disruptions at the platform level.

Content Creation and Distribution of Feminist Narratives

Content Creation and Presentation

Analysis of the content posted by @indonesiabutuhfeminis shows that feminist messages are primarily conveyed through visual-textual formats, particularly memes, screenshots, and short explanatory texts. These formats are used to address issues such as gender-based violence, patriarchal norms, victim-blaming narratives, and everyday sexism in ways that are accessible to a broad audience.

Memes constitute a dominant mode of presentation, combining concise language with emotionally resonant imagery. Rather than employing academic terminology, the account relies on familiar expressions, humor, and satire to communicate feminist perspectives. This approach enables complex social issues to be presented in simplified forms that are easily shared and understood by Instagram users.

Content Distribution

The dissemination of feminist content on @indonesiabutuhfeminis utilizes various Instagram features, including single-image posts, carousel posts, Stories, Highlights, and video formats. During the period of observation, single-image posts were commonly used to respond to current social issues or public discourse, while carousel posts were employed to explain more complex topics across multiple slides.

Carousel posts allow for sequential presentation of information, enabling the account to develop arguments gradually and provide contextual explanations. This format supports sustained engagement by encouraging users to swipe through content, while captions are used to elaborate on key messages and invite audience responses.

Content Reinforcement

Content reinforcement occurs through repeated thematic framing and interactive communication with followers. Feminist messages addressing similar issues, such as sexual harassment, gender stereotypes, and public misconceptions about feminism, appear consistently across different posts and formats, contributing to message continuity.

In addition, reinforcement is facilitated through audience interaction, including comment exchanges, reposting user-generated content, and resharing responses via Instagram Stories. These practices enable feminist narratives to be reiterated and circulated within the community, strengthening their visibility and presence in the digital space. Rather than functioning as one-directional communication, content circulation on the account involves reciprocal interaction between content producers and followers.

The Dialectical Construction of Feminist Discourse on Instagram

Externalization

Drawing on Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality, the feminist narratives articulated on @indonesiabutuhfeminis can be understood as a process of externalization, whereby individual and collective experiences of gender inequality are expressed within a shared digital space. The account transforms lived experiences related to sexual harassment, patriarchal norms, and gender-based discrimination into publicly accessible content through memes, screenshots, and short textual

explanations.

The use of Instagram as a platform for this externalization allows feminist perspectives to enter everyday digital interactions rather than remaining confined to academic or activist circles. By framing feminist issues through familiar language and culturally resonant references, the account enables individual grievances to be articulated as collectively recognized social concerns.

Objectivation

Through repeated circulation and interaction, feminist narratives on @indonesiabutuhfeminis acquire a degree of objectivity within the digital community. Objectivation occurs when meanings that originate from subjective experiences become stabilized and recognized as shared understandings. In this case, recurring themes such as the rejection of victim-blaming narratives and critiques of everyday sexism appear consistently across posts, comments, and reposted content.

The account also contributes to objectivation by addressing and correcting common misconceptions about feminism, including the notion that feminism is inherently anti-men or incompatible with cultural and religious values. As these narratives are repeatedly articulated and validated through user interaction, feminist discourse becomes normalized as a legitimate interpretive framework within the account's digital environment.

Internalization

Internalization refers to the process by which socially objectified meanings are reabsorbed into individual consciousness. Within the context of @indonesiabutuhfeminis, this process is reflected in follower engagement patterns, such as comments expressing agreement, personal reflection, and the sharing of content within users' own networks.

Interactions on the account indicate that followers do not merely consume feminist messages but actively incorporate them into their understanding of social reality. This is evident in user responses that reinterpret feminist narratives in relation to personal experiences or extend discussions beyond the original post. Through ongoing exposure and participation, feminist perspectives become part of users' interpretive resources, influencing how gender-related issues are understood and discussed in everyday contexts.

Platform Practices Supporting Content Continuity

Analysis of @indonesiabutuhfeminis indicates the use of several platform-based practices that support the continuity of feminist content on Instagram. One such practice is the recurring use of hashtags, particularly #indonesiabutuhfeminis, which appears across multiple posts. Although not applied consistently in every upload, the hashtag functions as a marker that links individual posts to a broader stream of feminist-related content on the platform.

The presence of this hashtag enables posts to be grouped thematically and facilitates content discoverability beyond the account's immediate follower base. In addition, followers occasionally use the same hashtag in their own posts or Stories, allowing feminist narratives associated with the account to circulate within a wider network of Instagram users.

Beyond hashtag usage, continuity is also supported through ongoing interaction with followers. The account regularly engages with audience responses through

comment exchanges, reposting user-generated content, and resharing feedback via Instagram Stories. These interactions contribute to sustained visibility and reinforce the presence of feminist discourse within the account's digital environment.

Rather than functioning as isolated content uploads, these practices indicate a pattern of repeated interaction and networked circulation that allows feminist messages to persist over time on the platform.

Secondary Account as a Digital Resilience Strategy

Observational data show that @indonesiabutuhfeminis expanded its digital presence through the activation of a secondary Instagram account, @indonesia.butuhfeminisme, created on October 29, 2021. This account became fully active following the disappearance of the original account on January 15, 2022. Within six months, it accumulated 12.4k followers, published 129 posts, and received over 145,000 likes.

Unlike common secondary accounts that operate anonymously or for private use, @indonesia.butuhfeminisme remained publicly accessible and maintained continuity in visual identity and feminist messaging. The activation of this account enabled the continuation of content dissemination and audience interaction despite disruptions at the platform level, indicating an adaptive response to platform vulnerability.

Discussion

The findings presented in the Results section illustrate how the Instagram account @indonesiabutuhfeminis adapts its platform practices to sustain feminist discourse and maintain its digital presence. This discussion integrates empirical observations with relevant theoretical frameworks to examine the sociotechnical dynamics that enable feminist activism to persist within the competitive and often volatile digital platform environment.

One notable adaptive practice identified in this study is the use of dual Instagram accounts (16). The creation and subsequent activation of the secondary account, @indonesia.butuhfeminisme, following the disappearance of the primary account, can be understood as a response to platform-related risks such as account suspension, content moderation, or algorithmic suppression (17). This practice resonates with findings by Bahar, who reported that a substantial proportion of young Instagram users maintain multiple accounts to manage privacy, identity, and audience segmentation (18). However, unlike secondary accounts that typically operate anonymously or for private purposes, the secondary account associated with @indonesiabutuhfeminis maintained public accessibility, consistent branding, and continuity in feminist messaging (19). This continuity suggests a form of digital resilience, whereby collective identity and discourse are preserved despite structural disruptions at the platform level. From the perspective of Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality, such adaptation reflects a process through which socially constructed meanings are reasserted and sustained through organizational adjustment (20).

Another important finding concerns the role of hashtags in facilitating engagement and visibility. The hashtag #indonesiabutuhfeminis operates beyond its technical function as a content-indexing tool by acting as a symbolic

connector that links individual expressions to a shared feminist identity (21). This interpretation aligns with studies on hashtag activism that conceptualize hashtags as performative markers and networked identity devices (22). Despite its inconsistent use, the hashtag still contributes to the account's discoverability and reinforces feminist discourse within Instagram's algorithmic space. Through this function, hashtags enhance discoverability, support participatory dialogue, and contribute to the formation of collective memory within digital movements. Although the use of #indonesiabutuhfeminis is not entirely consistent across posts, it nonetheless contributes to the circulation and persistence of feminist discourse within Instagram's algorithmic environment (23).

User interaction patterns observed on the account can be further interpreted through the customer engagement framework proposed by Pansari and Kumar (24). Rather than positioning engagement solely as a strategic outcome, the findings indicate that repeated interaction points, such as comment exchanges, reposting follower-generated content, and resharing audience responses, function as relational mechanisms that sustain participation over time (12). Hashtags, visual content, memes, and interactive features collectively serve as dialogic tools that enable followers to co-construct meaning, express solidarity, and identify with feminist values (25). In this sense, engagement emerges as a socially constructed process shaped by ongoing interaction rather than a predefined managerial strategy (7).

Taken together, these findings highlight the hybrid nature of feminist digital activism, which combines sociocultural processes with platform-specific communication practices (26). The account does not merely disseminate feminist messages but facilitates a digital environment in which feminist identities and interpretations can be negotiated and reinforced through repeated interaction (27). By utilizing platform affordances such as hashtags, interactive features, and multiple accounts, grassroots feminist movements are able to sustain visibility, navigate platform politics, and counteract structural constraints in online spaces.

Overall, this study demonstrates how feminist activism on Instagram operates through adaptive practices that support the circulation and stabilization of feminist discourse in digital environments. Despite algorithmic constraints and risks of censorship, @indonesiabutuhfeminis maintains ideological coherence and active participation through community interaction and platform adaptation. While the findings are limited to a single case study, they contribute to broader discussions on platform-based activism in Indonesia and point to the need for future research focusing on follower perspectives and comparative analyses of feminist digital movements.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that feminist digital activism on Instagram, as exemplified by @indonesiabutuhfeminis, is sustained not through isolated campaigns or visibility metrics alone, but through continuous and adaptive platform practices. Feminist discourse is maintained via accessible visual-textual content, repeated thematic framing, networked interaction through hashtags, active engagement with followers, and strategic adaptation to platform vulnerability, including the activation of a secondary account. These practices enable feminist narratives to

circulate, persist, and remain socially recognizable within a digital environment shaped by patriarchal resistance, algorithmic governance, and content moderation risks.

Theoretically, this research contributes to digital feminism and platform studies by applying Berger and Luckmann's social construction of reality to Instagram-based activism, showing how feminist meanings are externalized through content creation, stabilized through repeated interaction, and internalized through participatory engagement. By conceptualizing engagement as a socially constructed and relational process rather than a managerial outcome, the study highlights how grassroots feminist communities negotiate structural constraints while sustaining ideological continuity. Although limited to a single case study and content-based analysis, the findings offer insights into the resilience of digital feminist movements in Indonesia and provide a foundation for future research incorporating audience perspectives, ethnographic approaches, and comparative analyses across activist platforms.

Declarations

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicting interest.

Data Availability

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article.

Ethics Statement

Ethical approval was not required for this study.

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