

From Physical Space to Cyberspace: Hashtags, Feminist Digital Activism, and Counterpublics

Khaerul Umam Noer

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta, South Tangerang, Indonesia

umam.noer@umj.ac.id

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Abstract

The feminist movement in post-Reform Indonesia has undergone a transformation with the emergence of digital spaces as arenas for advocacy. Through digital ethnography, analysing conversations, hashtags, and interviews with survivors, members of the PPKS Task Force (Task Force on the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence) and the academic community at 28 campuses, this study shows that social media acts as an alternative public sphere. It enables people to share experiences, reduces isolation, and fosters solidarity. The #KampusAman, #NamaBaikKampus, and #SahkanRUUTPKS campaigns have raised public awareness and pressured the state to take action. However, key challenges include reliance on virality, digital security risks, and patriarchal backlash. This study highlights the importance of linking digital campaigns with grassroots structural work to ensure the movement's sustainability.

Keywords: digital feminism, sexual violence, social movements, counterpublic space

Introduction

During the pre-Reform era, the women's movement in Indonesia relied heavily on taking action in public spaces. Activism took the form of demonstrations, street protests, joint statements, and petitions submitted directly to the government. Such activities often entailed significant risks, including being silenced, intimidated and repressed by the state apparatus (Oey-Gardiner & Sulastri 2000; Suryochondro 2000; Wieringa 2010; Suryakusuma 2011; Muchtar 2016; Saptari & Holzner 2016). During the New Order era, the scope for civil society was severely restricted. Women who spoke out against the state were often labelled as disruptors of stability. This meant that much advocacy was forced to take place through informal channels, community networks or small, low-profile organisations. Resistance in the physical sphere became a symbol of courage, yet it also faced numerous constraints.

Significant changes began to be felt following the 1998 Reform. The collapse of the New Order regime created a more democratic environment, providing the women's movement with new opportunities to address marginalised issues. Topics such as sexual violence, migrant workers' rights, reproductive health and women's political representation began to enter public discourse. While the streets remained a crucial arena, as evidenced by the large-scale demonstrations

on International Women's Day, press freedom and the expansion of the media meant the women's movement's voice became increasingly audible (see Satriyo 2008; Dewi 2022; Taufiq & Ali 2023; Fahadi, Winarnita & Dirgantoro 2024; Hidayatulloh 2024; Wieringa 2024). However, at this stage, advocacy still largely relies on physical meetings, conferences, networking events, and mass demonstrations.

The widespread adoption of information technology in the early 2000s transformed the movement's landscape (Hatherell 2019; Susanto & Irwansyah 2021; Khomsani & Soetjipto 2022; Perkasa 2025). The presence of the internet and social media began to transform the way women organise and convey their messages. What previously required posters, leaflets, and long marches can now be achieved more swiftly and widely through a single online post. This change is not only about the medium but also about strategy: how to transform victims' personal experiences into a collective narrative that can be read, shared, and debated publicly. The digital space provides opportunities for women to connect across geographical and bureaucratic boundaries.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram have emerged as new spaces for activism (Engdahl, Nyman & Ekbrand 2021; Trott 2021; Rovira-Sancho 2023; Tan & Xu 2023; Werner 2023). Hashtags such

as #KampusAman or #NamaBaikKampus have become a simple yet powerful way of bringing thousands of people together around a single issue. Victims of sexual violence no longer have to fight alone or rely solely on a small support network; they can now find solidarity with people they have never met in person. This is a new form of advocacy: the digital space bears witness to the fact that previously marginalised voices can now resonate widely, putting pressure on universities, state institutions, and parliament. From here, the struggle to enact UU TPKS gains additional momentum.

The shift from physical to digital spaces does not diminish the importance of street protests; rather, it enriches the movement. While mass actions remain vital symbols of political pressure, the presence of technology expands their reach. Women can now speak out without having to be on the streets, as they can write posts, make videos or share anonymous testimonies. Advocacy now has two facets: physical and digital, local and global, swift yet profound. Post-Reform, the landscape of the women's movement in Indonesia has truly transformed, with the digital space becoming one of the strongest pillars in fostering solidarity, empowering victims and driving policy change regarding sexual violence.

The digital space that emerged after the Reform has evolved into more than just a medium of communication; it has also become a space for solidarity. For many victims of sexual violence, the online world provides a platform on which they can share their experiences without facing direct scrutiny or significant physical risk. The cases of A at UGM, MS at KPI, and NW at UB are compelling examples of how social media has become a platform for collective solidarity. Anonymous testimonies shared via social media have served as a gateway for exposing long-hidden violence. Unlike the often rigid and bureaucratic environments of university administrations or legal institutions, the digital sphere enables victims to tell their stories more honestly and swiftly. It is from here that solidarity begins to grow, as others who read these accounts can offer support, share similar experiences, or acknowledge the survivors' courage.

Digital campaigns evolve into collective movements through the use of hashtags. For instance, the hashtag #KampusAman was used by students, lecturers, and activists alike in order to urge universities to fulfil their obligation to establish a Task Force for the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence on Campus (Mutiah 2022; Ardiani & Saraswati Putri 2023; Noer, Kusmawati & Agustian 2024; Noer 2025). Meanwhile, the hashtag

#NamaBaikKampus emerged as a sharp critique of the victim-blaming practices often employed by university bureaucracies, which frequently cover up cases of sexual violence in order to protect the institution's reputation. These hashtags united thousands of people in a single public conversation and were not merely symbols. The more frequently a hashtag is used, the greater the likelihood that the issue will enter the mainstream media and garner widespread public attention.

Digital solidarity also fosters a new sense of courage. Seeing so many others speak up gives victims who previously chose to remain silent the confidence to speak out. This creates a domino effect: one story triggers another until a collection of mutually reinforcing experiences is formed. This solidarity is not only about empathy; it is also an advocacy strategy. By uniting many voices, the feminist movement creates a moral impact that forces the public and policymakers to address the issue of sexual violence.

One of the greatest strengths of the digital feminist movement is the courage of survivors of sexual violence to share their personal yet anonymous experiences. In the past, stories like this were almost unheard of in the public sphere due to stigma, shame, and the fear of retaliation. However, social media has created new spaces where survivors can speak out more safely, even anonymously, without having to navigate lengthy bureaucratic processes that often only complicate matters further. Personal testimonies provide a human perspective on statistics, transforming the issue of sexual violence from mere numbers into real stories of suffering, courage, and resilience.

These personal narratives play a vital role in evoking public empathy. Reading first-hand accounts from survivors can create a moral shock that compels people to take action. Previously perceived as an abstract issue or distant from daily life, the issue suddenly feels close and real. This is what makes digital campaigns more powerful than formal reports: they authentically present the unvarnished, emotional voices of victims. The public does not merely observe; they feel involved because these stories touch on the most fundamental aspects of humanity.

On the other hand, personal narratives can foster a sense of solidarity among survivors. Reading about others' experiences makes victims feel they are not alone. They realise that many others have gone through similar experiences. This sense of "not being alone" is important because isolation is a common effect

of sexual violence. Digital spaces allow survivors to connect, share experiences, and offer support. This solidarity, born from personal narratives, becomes a powerful force in challenging the deeply entrenched culture of silence. These narratives act as a catalyst, spreading outward and transforming the movement's landscape, bringing it to a turning point in history.

This article explores the significant changes experienced by the feminist movement in Indonesia since the Reform era, particularly with regard to the utilisation of digital spaces to advocate against sexual violence. The key question is how the movement has used social media and digital platforms to increase its influence, foster solidarity, and put pressure on state institutions and universities. This shift from traditional strategies, such as street demonstrations and direct advocacy, to digital strategies indicates a significant transformation in women's struggles. However, the effectiveness of using digital spaces and the factors that determine its success or limitations still require further exploration.

Furthermore, this paper highlights the strategies employed by digital feminists and the challenges they have encountered. The research aims to identify effective digital campaign strategies to raise public awareness and drive the creation of new policies, such as the enactment of UU TPKS and the establishment of the PPKS Task Force in higher education institutions. However, the various forms of resistance faced by the digital feminist movement cannot be ignored, ranging from backlash from patriarchal groups and digital security issues to the phenomenon of 'slacktivism', which makes public participation appear massive yet superficial. This section will focus on how the feminist movement addresses such resistance and its implications for sustaining advocacy against sexual violence in Indonesia.

Research Methodology

This study employs a digital ethnography methodology, positioning digital spaces as the primary sites of observation and interaction. This approach was selected because the post-Reform feminist movement has predominantly evolved through digital platforms, particularly in terms of advocating for issues related to sexual violence. Rather than relying solely on written archives or documentation of physical actions, the study focuses on the dynamics of digital conversations, technology-based interactions, and narratives

constructed through social media. In this way, the study captures how digital spaces function as a new arena for advocacy, solidarity, and resistance.

Data collection was conducted using a variety of techniques. Firstly, in-depth interviews were conducted with reporters and/or survivors of violence, representatives of the Task Force for the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence, and members of the academic community at 28 Indonesian universities between July 2024 and September 2025. These interviews aimed to explore how individuals and universities responded to public pressure, much of which was driven by digital movements. Secondly, participatory observation was employed to analyse digital conversations on platforms such as Twitter/X, Threads, Instagram, and TikTok, focusing on discussions related to the #KampusAman, #NamaBaikKampus, and other pertinent hashtags. A total of 437 Twitter/X and Threads threads and 172 short videos using the hashtags #MeToo, #KekerasanSeksual, #KampusAman, and #NamaBaikKampus were examined.

In addition, an analysis was conducted of technology-based interactions, such as online petitions, digital forums, and webinars, in which feminist activists discussed sexual violence. Data were collected as screenshots, uploaded archives, and documentation of hashtag trends during the research period. A thematic approach was used to analyse this data and identify patterns in the strategies employed, narratives constructed, public responses and challenges faced by the digital feminist movement. Through a combination of in-depth interviews and digital ethnography, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Indonesian feminist movement by examining the perspectives of its members and public interactions in digital spaces.

Social Media as a Space for Solidarity

Social media has become an important space for survivors of sexual violence, many of whom feel isolated and alone after experiencing trauma. For years, many survivors chose to remain silent out of fear of stigma, victim blaming, and even threats from their attackers. However, the digital space offers new opportunities: survivors can share their experiences anonymously and in their own words with people willing to listen. For some, writing their stories on platforms such as Twitter/X, Instagram, or online forums is the first step in breaking their silence.

Feminist activists use social media to support and empower victims. By sharing information about victims' rights and reporting procedures, or simply offering words of support, they create an atmosphere in which survivors know they are not alone. Simple interactions, such as comments like 'we believe you' or 'it's not your fault', can have a significant impact on rebuilding victims' self-confidence. This demonstrates how digital solidarity works: it is immediate and transcends distance to provide the emotional support that victims so desperately need.

Furthermore, social media enables victims to find each other. Often, when one person shares their story, it encourages others to do the same. This creates a chain of solidarity that grows as more stories emerge, eventually forming a strong digital community. This community is not just a place to share pain; it is also a place to learn that these experiences are part of a pattern of structural injustice rather than personal failure. Thus, the isolation that was once an inherent and personal aspect of the victim's experience begins to erode as a sense of togetherness emerges.

For activists, social media is a unifying tool that brings together disparate voices. They archive testimonies, construct collective narratives, and transform personal experiences into broader social movements. Viral stories of survivors, for example, are often used as campaign material to drive policy change on campus or at a national level. These narratives, born from individual experiences, connect with structural advocacy, ensuring that the digital space is not only a place to express oneself but also a strategic arena for political resistance.

In this way, social media has succeeded in reducing victims' isolation while strengthening networks of solidarity between survivors and activists. Although risks remain, ranging from demeaning comments to backlash from anti-feminist groups, the digital space offers victims greater opportunities to feel seen, heard and supported. The solidarity born of social media is an active force that continues to drive the Indonesian feminist movement in its challenge of the culture of silence and its demand for justice for victims of sexual violence.

Concrete examples can be seen in the cases raised through the #NamaBaikKampus campaign between 2020 and 2022. Many students chose to share their experiences on Twitter/X because they felt that formal reports to the university administration would

be ignored (Noer et al. 2022; Nurtjahyo 2024; Noer, Kusmawati & Agustian 2025). This wave of voices forced a number of initially silent universities to address issues of sexual violence and establish ad hoc teams. This shows that digital spaces are not merely places to share stories, but also tools for overcoming the inertia of slow-responding formal institutions.

Furthermore, the digital space increases access for victims facing geographical and social barriers. Many survivors from areas lacking counselling services or official support organisations turn to social media to seek help. Considerable research has examined how digital participation among women brings together victims from various regions, ranging from major cities to remote areas. This fosters solidarity through collective conversations (Riskiyah & Al-Uyun 2022; Azijah & Asriani 2023; Noer, Purwardani & Latifah 2025). Thus, the digital space overcomes limitations in access to formal services, which remain heavily concentrated in major cities.

Although digital spaces are generally considered to be safer than formal institutions, they are not risk-free. Various studies have found that victims who share their stories in these spaces may face backlash in the form of demeaning comments and online threats (Branch, Johnson & Dretsch 2015; Reich, Anderson & Maclin 2022; Nurdin 2023; Uldbjerg 2023). These risks demonstrate that digital solidarity spaces remain fragile and require stronger protective mechanisms. Our research survey found that only 9 per cent of victims reported violence, of which only 2 per cent surfaced via social media. Furthermore, 46 per cent of these individuals feared retaliation in the form of derogatory comments or threats from parties supporting the perpetrator (Noer, Kusmawati & Agustian 2024). Nevertheless, for many survivors, the digital space still offers a more restorative alternative to navigating formal channels, which are fraught with obstacles. These findings suggest that the digital space has become a sort of 'third space': neither a formal institution nor a fully private space, but rather an alternative public sphere where solidarity, validation and support can be obtained more quickly and safely.

Hashtag-based digital campaigns have become one of the most effective strategies employed by the feminist movement in Indonesia to effect policy change. One example is the #KampusAman campaign, which gained momentum from 2019 onwards as cases of sexual violence in higher education institutions became more prevalent. The hashtag is used to urge universities to establish the Task Force for the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence (Satgas PPKS), as required

by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology's Regulation No. 30/2021.

The #NamaBaikKampus hashtag originated from a single hashtag: #KitaAgni, which emerged from UGM after the university mishandled a female student's report of harassment during a community service programme (Titah 2018). The public perceived the university as prioritising its own image over the victim's protection. In mid-2019, the #NamaBaikKampus hashtag emerged, triggered by stories from other students whose cases of sexual harassment had also been covered up by the university to protect its reputation. Posts related to these cases were widely shared under the #NamaBaikKampus hashtag, prompting thousands of responses indicating that similar patterns were occurring at many other Indonesian universities.

The issue was not confined to UGM: cases from the University of Indonesia (UI) and Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) also emerged in digital conversations under the same hashtag. Students reported that the mechanisms for reporting sexual violence on their campuses were ineffective and that victims were often blamed. For instance, at UI, a student was pressured not to file a report because the perpetrator held an important academic position. Meanwhile, at ITB, several posts highlighted how victims were asked to protect the faculty's reputation and prevent the case from becoming public knowledge. This hashtag has made the public increasingly aware that institutional betrayal is not confined to a single campus but is a systemic problem across various universities.

The issue became even more complex when complainants reported being intimidated by lecturers or the university administration when attempting to report harassment (Dema UIN Saizu 2025; Komnas Perempuan 2025). In many posts, students stated that sanctions were more often imposed on the victim — for example, by restricting their academic rights — than on the perpetrator. The hashtag #NamaBaikKampus, therefore, symbolised resistance and serves as a collective archive documenting how universities in Indonesia continue to fail to protect their students from sexual violence.

Many of these posts revealed a recurring pattern: victims' reports were ignored, they were blamed for the way they dressed or behaved, and some were even threatened with having their studies obstructed if they continued to report incidents. Voices highlighting the seriousness of victim-blaming within Indonesia's higher education bureaucracy quickly filled the digital space. This institutional betrayal demonstrates that

the problem lies not only with individual perpetrators, but also with a system that protects perpetrators and silences victims (Renn 2020; Pinciotti & Orcutt 2021; Prior & de Heer 2021; Gómez 2022; Reinke 2022). This digital pressure has forced a number of universities to issue official statements and establish dedicated reporting channels. Unsurprisingly, there is a public perception that many cases would likely remain unreported without such digital pressure, in the interest of 'the university's reputation' (Noer 2025; Noer Kusmawati & Khusnaeny 2025).

The hashtag movement was also closely linked to the enactment of UU TPKS in 2022, when the consolidation of digital campaigns played a key role in accelerating the legislative process (Pratiwi 2023; Setyarahayu, Ekantoro & Pratiwi 2023; Silalahi 2023; Arnez & Nisa 2024). Hashtags such as #SahkanRUUTPKS received widespread support from students, academics, and public figures, with over 25,000 posts in a single month. This digital pressure made it difficult for the House of Representatives (DPR), which had repeatedly postponed discussions on the TPKS issue, to ignore it. Thus, hashtags proved capable of serving a dual purpose: providing a space for survivors to show solidarity and pressuring the state to take concrete action.

However, hashtag-based campaigns also have limitations. Not all universities that were initially supportive ultimately established effective PPKS Task Forces. Our research data indicates that only around 28 per cent of higher education institutions have PPKS regulations, and just 12 per cent have clear standard operating procedures (Noer, Kusmawati & Agustian 2024). This means that, while the hashtag successfully opened the door to advocacy, sustained effort is still required for implementation on the ground.

Nevertheless, these findings confirm that hashtags such as #KampusAman and #NamaBaikKampus have become crucial for linking victims' voices to public policy and bridging the digital and bureaucratic spheres, which were often previously disconnected. Limitations in campus-level implementation do not diminish the importance of the digital feminist movement as part of a global trend. Indeed, despite the obstacles they face, these local experiences demonstrate how digital campaigns in Indonesia are connected to a broader international struggle. Cyberspace is being used to expose sexual violence and demand institutional accountability.

The feminist digital movement in Indonesia is inextricably linked to broader global dynamics,

particularly the #MeToo movement, which has spread worldwide since 2017. Inspired by this hashtag, many women in various countries have revealed experiences of sexual violence that were previously hidden (Engdahl, Nyman & Ekbrand 2021; Shin 2021; Trott 2021; Nath 2023; Rovira-Sancho 2023; Tan & Xu 2023). In Indonesia, the resonance of #MeToo is evident in digital campaigns such as #KampusAman, #NamaBaikKampus and #SahkanRUUTPKS. Although these campaigns originated in a local context, they share a common goal: to create a space where victims can speak out, challenge the culture of silence, and pressure institutions to take responsibility. Thus, global interconnectedness provides additional impetus for local feminist movements to further strengthen their advocacy.

However, the Indonesian movement is not just a replication of #MeToo. Feminist activists adapt their strategies to the country's unique social, cultural and political conditions. For instance, the #NamaBaikKampus campaign addressed the issue of institutional betrayal by university authorities — an issue that is highly specific to the context of higher education in Indonesia. Similarly, when advocating for UU TPKS, hashtags were used to put pressure on legislators, which was something rarely seen in #MeToo campaigns in Western countries. This shows that global connectivity drives adaptations that enhance the movement's relevance in Indonesia.

While global interconnectedness fosters solidarity, it also presents challenges. Feminist narratives from abroad are sometimes seen as incompatible with Indonesian cultural or religious values. Conservative groups often accuse the digital feminist movement of being a mere 'Western import' that undermines the nation's morals. Such counter-attacks highlight the tension between global solidarity and local resistance. However, Indonesian feminist activists have often successfully countered these accusations by emphasising the real-life experiences of victims and adapting campaign narratives to make them relevant to the Indonesian context.

Cyberfeminism and the Democratisation of the Public Sphere

In the context of the post-Reform feminist movement, the digital space can be understood as a form of 'counter-public sphere' (Mulyaningrum, Ahmad & Sahib, 2007; Daniels 2009; Alatas & Sutanto 2019; Toto & Scarinci 2022; Noer 2025). While state institutions and universities have long been biased towards patriarchy,

tending to silence victims, cover up cases for the sake of reputation or reinforce the status quo, the digital space offers an alternative in which women can create their own narratives. On social media, survivors and activists can craft their own language, symbols and strategies, free from the bureaucracy that is often discriminatory and which they would otherwise have to navigate. Thus, the digital space challenges the state's monopoly on defining the official discourse surrounding sexual violence.

The purpose of this counter-space becomes clear when cases of sexual violence covered up by institutions are first exposed on social media. In a university context, for example, the #NamaBaikKampus movement demonstrated how digital spaces could highlight institutional betrayal. Issues that could not be revealed through official channels could spark widespread conversations in digital spaces. Therefore, digital spaces are not just an additional tool; they form a counter-current that forces the state and universities to address issues they have ignored. Without public pressure from these spaces, many cases would likely remain buried within a patriarchal system that blocks access to justice.

Furthermore, digital spaces also facilitate the development of new collective identities among women (Milan 2015; Treré 2015; Khazraee & Novak 2018). According to social movement theory, solidarity often arises from publicly articulated shared experiences (Polletta & Jasper 2001; Tilly 2004). Digital spaces accelerate this process: victims' testimonies, hashtag campaigns and advocacy visuals create a collective narrative that challenges the state's official narrative, which tends to normalise violence. This collective identity confers political power by transforming scattered individual voices into a solid, hard-to-ignore community. Thus, digital spaces expand the arena of feminist politics from closed spaces to the open public sphere.

As a counter-public sphere, the digital space is not without its challenges. It is shaped by broader power dynamics, including social media algorithms, backlash from conservative groups, and limited access to technology for women in remote areas. In many cases, the digital space reflects the socio-economic inequalities present in society. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the digital space offers more opportunities than the state's highly restricted official sphere. The strength of the counter-public sphere lies in the fact that, while it is not entirely free from repression, it provides a more democratic space in which to

champion marginalised issues. In this context, I refer to it as a 'contested public sphere.'

Prior to the existence of social media, feminist discourse in Indonesia was largely confined to academic circles, NGOs, and senior activists. Advocacy took place through seminars, limited discussions or policy reports, which were often inaccessible to the wider public. The younger generation, particularly students, generally occupied a peripheral position, acting merely as supporters rather than key drivers of the movement. However, the emergence of social media post-Reform transformed the movement's landscape. Digital platforms enabled students to engage directly in feminist discourse, share personal experiences, and forge connections independently of formal organisations or academic authorities.

The #KampusAman and #NamaBaikKampus campaigns are concrete examples of students becoming the primary driving force. These campaigns were not just fleeting reactions; they were collective movements that united diverse student communities across campuses. By using social media, students succeeded in turning previously taboo issues into a national conversation and even compelled ministries and university administrations to respond. Student involvement became increasingly evident, with on-campus organisations taking strategic positions in anti-sexual violence campaigns. The UI Student Executive Board (BEM UI), for instance, launched a digital campaign to raise awareness of harassment on campus. Through their official Instagram and Twitter accounts, they have shared infographics on victims' rights and reporting guidelines, as well as openly criticising the university administration for being slow to handle cases. In 2021, BEM UI organised a campaign titled #ReformasiDikorupsi, which incorporated the issue of sexual violence and signalled that gender advocacy had become an integral part of the student political agenda. Students' creativity in using social media has also enriched the strategies of the digital feminist movement. They utilise critical memes, short TikTok videos, and educational Twitter/X threads to communicate issues of sexual violence in a lighter and more accessible way.

One of the most tangible achievements of the digital feminist movement in Indonesia was the passing of UU TPKS in 2022, after almost a decade of deadlock in the DPR (Lita & Siscawati 2022; Fridayani 2023). The #SahkanRUUTPKS campaign, which generated over 25,000 posts in just one month, succeeded in creating

significant public pressure. Support from students, academics, activists, and public figures meant that discussions about the TPKS dominated both online conversations and the mainstream media. This created a legitimacy crisis for the DPR, which was under pressure not to delay deliberations any further. Ultimately, this digital pressure accelerated the passage of the TPKS Bill in April 2022. At the university level, the #KampusAman hashtag also played a key role in driving the implementation of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology's Regulation No. 30/2021.

Digital pressure also prompted a faster response from the bureaucracy, which typically acts slowly. The #NamaBaikKampus campaign of 2020 was a case in point: thousands of student testimonies forced major universities to issue official statements and set up ad hoc teams, albeit largely for show. Without public pressure, such cases would probably have been ignored in the name of safeguarding reputation. Furthermore, the digital space served as both a tool for pressuring institutions and a medium for public education. Infographics detailing the contents of UU TPKS, victims' rights, and technical guidelines for setting up the PPKS Task Force have been widely shared on Instagram and Twitter/X. This shows that the digital space not only encourages the state and universities to act, but also fosters a wider public understanding of the law.

Public pressure in the form of digital campaigns has transformed the relationship between civil society and the government. Issues of sexual violence, which were previously often regarded as marginal concerns discussed only in limited forums, have now become a national topic that is difficult to ignore. With thousands of victims' testimonies circulating via hashtags such as #NamaBaikKampus and #SahkanRUUTPKS, the government risks losing legitimacy by remaining passive. The collective voice of victims in the digital sphere provides tangible evidence that sexual violence is systemic and requires state intervention. Beyond shaping policy, digital pressure also accelerates the government's response to individual cases. For instance, after a student's testimony went viral following her harassment by a supervising lecturer at a state university, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology promptly established a special investigation team to support the victim. However, in many previous cases, victims' reports were often ignored or drawn out. This demonstrates how virality in the digital sphere can function as a social alarm, forcing institutions to act swiftly.

Redefining the Women's Movement

In theory, a social movement is defined as a collective effort by a group of people to challenge, oppose or drive change in social, political or cultural conditions that they perceive as unjust. According to Tilly, social movements emerge when there is tension between societal demands and the state's or institutions' perceived inadequate response. The primary aim of social movements is therefore to create new spaces in which marginalised groups can voice their interests. They also foster critical awareness within society, ensuring that the changes achieved touch upon perspectives and social values, not just policy (Tilly 2004; 2019).

In addition to their structural objectives, social movements also have a cultural dimension. Modern social movements demand policy changes and seek to create new meanings and redefine collective identities (Polletta & Jasper 2001; Fominaya 2010; Milan 2015). In other words, social movements aim to change how society interprets certain issues. For instance, sexual violence was once considered a private matter, but is now recognised as a public issue requiring state intervention. This dual purpose of structural and cultural change is what makes social movements dynamic, multi-layered, and sustainable.

From a sociological perspective, social movements possess several key characteristics: organised collectivity; rooted in collective identity; a primary objective of either effecting change or maintaining the status quo; and long-term sustainability (Buechler 1995; Morris 2000; Sen & Avcı 2016). Based on this, feminist social movements also possess a number of specific characteristics. Firstly, they are based on collective action involving the solidarity of many individuals with shared experiences or goals. Secondly, they typically operate outside formal political mechanisms, yet can significantly influence the course of state policy. Thirdly, social movements present a counter-narrative that challenges the dominant ideology; for example, the feminist movement challenges patriarchy. Finally, social movements tend to be long-term, though they may emerge in waves or brief moments of momentum that subsequently transform into more permanent change.

According to Tarrow, social movements evolve through a 'repertoire of collective action' (Nash 2014; Minkenberg 2022; Riedl et al. 2024). This encompasses demonstrations, public campaigns, the use of symbols, and the formation of cross-group coalitions. In the digital age, this repertoire has expanded further with

the presence of social media. Activities that were previously confined to the streets have now migrated to the digital realm, taking the form of hashtags, infographics, personal narratives, and online petitions. This shows the flexibility of social movements in adapting to technological developments while retaining their primary function of mobilising and advocating. Furthermore, the development of this repertoire of collective action in the digital sphere has laid the groundwork for a new framework of thought within feminism.

Although social media has undoubtedly changed the way social movements are organised, cyberfeminist theory provides a valuable perspective for examining how women, in particular, use digital technology as a political arena to challenge patriarchy, not merely as a communication tool. The theoretical framework of cyberfeminism first emerged in the 1990s in response to the rise of the internet and digital technology. The term was popularised by activist groups such as Sadie Plant and VNS Matrix, which was founded by Virginia Barrett, Francesca da Rimini, Julianne Pierce, and Josephine Starrs. These groups viewed cyberspace as a potential arena for dismantling patriarchal domination (Daniels 2009; Paasonen 2011; Toto & Scarinci 2022). Cyberfeminism emphasises that digital technology is not neutral, but rather a political arena that can be used to challenge existing power structures. In other words, the digital realm opens up new possibilities for women to create discourse, solidarity and identities that were previously difficult to realise in physically controlled spaces.

In the context of campaigning against sexual violence, cyberfeminism is important because it shows how women use digital spaces to raise their voices and foster a sense of solidarity. While formal institutions often silence victims' voices, digital spaces offer a more democratic alternative. The #NamaBaikKampus campaign, for example, shows how survivors can share their experiences directly, bypassing the complex, convoluted reporting mechanisms that often lead to secondary victimisation. From a cyberfeminism perspective, this practice shows that digital technology can serve as a tool of resistance, enabling victims to challenge the culture of silence and encourage the public to engage in broader conversations.

Furthermore, cyberfeminism emphasises the formation of collective identity through digital spaces. Social media enables victims and feminist activists to build mutually supportive virtual communities, even

if they never meet in person. This shows that feminist identity is not only formed within formal organisations or academia, but also flourishes within fluid, inclusive digital networks. It is this collective identity that provides political power by transforming personal experiences into structural issues that garner public attention and drive policy demands.

However, cyberfeminism also reminds us that digital spaces still pose risks. For example, the internet is still influenced by patriarchal power relations in the form of cyber-harassment, doxing, and the dissemination of misogynistic narratives (SAFEnet & OXFAM 2022; Bintari 2024). Cyberfeminism, therefore, not only celebrates the potential of technology but also critiques how it can become a new arena of repression. In the Indonesian context, this is evident in the backlash against digital feminist campaigns, where many victims have faced renewed online harassment. Consequently, cyberfeminism demands digital security strategies and ethical safeguards in all advocacy practices.

This theoretical framework helps us understand that the digital feminist movement in post-Reform Indonesia is part of a broader political strategy, not merely a new form of communication. Campaigns such as #KampusAman, #NamaBaikKampus, and #SahkanRUUTPKS are manifestations of cyberfeminism. Technology is used to challenge patriarchy, build solidarity and push for policy change. Put simply, cyberfeminism enables us to view the digital space as a feminist arena — a counter-public sphere created, maintained and utilised by women to fight for justice.

One of the main challenges facing the digital feminist movement in Indonesia is the perception of fragmentation. Although hashtag campaigns such as #KampusAman, #NamaBaikKampus, and #SahkanRUUTPKS have succeeded in generating significant momentum, the strategies employed by each group have differed. Some emphasise policy advocacy, some focus on survivor solidarity, and some highlight education and public engagement. These differences in approach are evident among large NGOs, grassroots communities and student groups. For instance, during the debate on the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology's Regulation No. 30/2021, some groups emphasised the consistent implementation of the regulation on campus, while others countered conservative narratives accusing the regulation of 'legalising adultery'. The fast-paced and reactive nature of social media exacerbates this issue, as new campaigns can emerge spontaneously and without

proper coordination, resulting in an overwhelming amount of information that risks confusing the public.

Fragmentation can have a number of negative consequences. Inconsistent messaging can make it difficult for the public to understand a movement's priorities, thereby reducing collective pressure. In political advocacy, the strategic differences between political compromise and moral pressure can create an exhausting tug-of-war, as was evident in the discussions surrounding the TPKS Bill. Internal friction between organisations can manifest as criticism of strategies deemed too symbolic or lacking in substance. Although these tensions are rarely exposed, they can slow down collaboration. Therefore, fragmentation must be carefully managed to prevent it from turning into counterproductive conflict.

However, fragmentation is not always negative. In literature on social movements, different strategies are often seen as a diversity that enriches the narrative and broadens participation. This seems to be deeply rooted in the tradition of feminism itself: contradictory and at odds with one another, yet overlapping. This also aligns with the multidimensional nature of sexual violence—which is legal, cultural, psychological and educational—making it only natural that it be approached in diverse ways. This plurality enables advocacy to occur on multiple levels simultaneously, such as lobbying parliament, monitoring campus regulations or educating the public. With a variety of strategies, more people can contribute according to their abilities, whether through street protests or academic research. This makes the digital feminist movement more inclusive and resilient: if one avenue is blocked, others can still proceed. Therefore, diversity is a strength, not a weakness, in the fight against deeply entrenched patriarchy.

One of the greatest challenges facing the digital feminist movement is its reliance on viral momentum. Campaigns based on hashtags, personal narratives, or visuals often depend on how quickly the issue can attract public attention. When a victim's story or a hashtag goes viral, public support pours in, the mainstream media covers the story, and institutions are pressured to respond. However, once the initial wave of attention subsides, public interest tends to shift to other issues. This leaves the movement vulnerable to losing momentum, even though substantial issues such as case handling or policy implementation remain unresolved. This phenomenon was clearly evident in the #NamaBaikKampus campaign. Initially, students' posts sharing their testimonies sparked a wave of

criticism against universities perceived to be covering up cases of sexual violence. However, after a few weeks, the intensity of the conversation dropped dramatically whilst many universities still lacked adequate reporting mechanisms (Tirto 2020; Dema UIN Saizu 2025; Noer, Kusmawati & Khusnaeny 2025).

Reliance on viral momentum also risks the issue being dismissed as a “fleeting trend”. While dramatic, emotional stories can easily move the public, long-term commitment is often lacking. Consequently, the digital feminist movement faces challenges in maintaining consistent support. It is not uncommon for survivors to feel abandoned once their stories are no longer widely discussed. This raises the serious question of how we can ensure that victims’ voices continue to be heard, even when they are no longer trending on social media.

Furthermore, reliance on virality leaves the feminist movement vulnerable to manipulation by social media algorithms. Changes to these algorithms can affect the reach of posts, meaning an overwhelming amount of information can drown out important campaigns. Even worse, issues that are not considered emotionally engaging enough may struggle to gain traction, despite their critical importance. Technical debates about implementing the PPKS Task Force, for example, rarely go viral, even though they are crucial for protecting victims on campus. This demonstrates that movement strategies cannot rely solely on virality, but must also involve consistent structural work.

The digital feminist movement has enjoyed some success in creating momentum, but this will not be enough without a long-term strategy to underpin it. While going viral is effective in opening public conversations and putting pressure on institutions, resolving the issue of sexual violence requires more in-depth work. It is essential that the digital movement is linked to grassroots, structural work such as supporting victims, providing community-based gender education, and campaigning for local policies. This integration is essential to ensure that the energy generated by digital campaigns translates into tangible changes in survivors’ daily lives rather than merely symbolic solidarity.

One way to build this bridge is to strengthen the collaboration between digital communities and local civil society organisations. Online campaigns can identify issues and raise awareness, while local organisations can provide concrete support, such as counselling services, legal assistance, and training for campus-based sexual violence prevention task forces. A strategy that bridges the gap between viral momentum and long-term

advocacy work is required for the sustainability of the digital feminist movement. Virality must be viewed as an entry point, not an end in itself. Once an issue has successfully captured public attention, the next step is to channel the energy of solidarity into institutional mechanisms. This could involve advocating for the formation of task forces, monitoring the implementation of UU TPKS or establishing victim support services. This ensures that the energy from digital campaigns is not quickly forgotten, but instead becomes part of a more systematic struggle. Sustainability poses a major challenge for the digital feminist movement: will it be a mere fleeting wave, or will it instil long-term change?

Furthermore, a long-term strategy requires capacity-building mechanisms for young people who are active in the digital sphere. To ensure their influence is sustained over time, students, community activists and social media volunteers must be provided with legal literacy, digital security skills and formal advocacy capabilities. This will prevent the digital feminist movement from relying solely on virality and will help it to establish a network of empowered grassroots supporters. This will connect the energy of solidarity in the virtual space to the real-world struggle, ensuring the resulting change is firmly rooted in the social structure rather than merely symbolic.

Conclusion

The digital feminist movement in Indonesia has proven itself to be a key force in advocating against sexual violence in the post-Reform era. By using social media, survivors and activists have successfully created a new advocacy space that is more democratic, faster, and more inclusive than the formal mechanisms that have long been slow and often restricted in access. Hashtag-based campaigns, such as #KampusAman, #NamaBaikKampus, and #SahkanRUUTPKS, demonstrate that the digital space can function as a counter-public sphere that challenges patriarchal dominance within state institutions and higher education. Here, the digital space provides opportunities for victims to be heard, for activists to speak out, and for the public to demand justice.

Although the digital feminist movement in Indonesia has succeeded in creating new spaces for advocating against sexual violence, there are still a number of serious challenges that cannot be ignored. Digital security is a key concern. Survivors and activists often face cyber harassment, doxxing, and online threats, which exacerbate their trauma. Furthermore,

patriarchal backlash from conservative groups often attempts to delegitimise the feminist movement by using moral or cultural narratives, which slows down its consolidation. Additionally, the risk of fragmentation among groups with different strategies can make the movement appear less cohesive, ultimately diminishing the effectiveness of collective pressure on state institutions and universities.

Rather than dampening the movement's spirit, these challenges underscore the need for a more robust consolidation strategy. Moving forward, the digital feminist movement cannot rely solely on viral momentum or symbolic solidarity. A bridge is needed to connect digital energy with practical work on the ground, such as supporting victims, providing gender education, and monitoring policy implementation on campuses and in communities. This will ensure that every digital campaign has a direct impact on social behaviour change and victim protection mechanisms, rather than merely existing as public discourse.

For the long-term success of feminist advocacy in Indonesia, it is essential to integrate digital activism with grassroots community work and strengthen public policy. The digital space must continue to be cultivated as a platform for solidarity and resistance. Local communities must be empowered to provide support, and public policy must be monitored to ensure that victims are genuinely prioritised. This synergy will ensure that feminist advocacy remains strong not only when issues go viral, but also becomes deeply rooted in the social, legal and cultural structures of society. With an integrative strategy, feminist advocacy in Indonesia could become a sustainable movement capable of challenging patriarchal dominance while strengthening democracy.¹

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Footnote

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