

Mediated Feminism: How Social Media Shapes the Transnational Flow of Feminist Discourses

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Abstract

The globalization of feminist movements in the twenty-first century has been profoundly shaped by the rise of digital communication technologies. This article explores the concept of mediated feminism, examining how social media platforms function as dynamic spaces that enable and constrain the transnational flow of feminist discourses. Drawing on the theories of mediatization and transnational feminism, the study analyzes how online campaigns such as #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, and #WomenLifeFreedom exemplify the ways in which digital media facilitate feminist solidarity while simultaneously reproducing structural inequalities. Through qualitative analysis of social media narratives and platform affordances, this research demonstrates that mediated feminism operates at the intersection of empowerment and algorithmic control. While social media amplify feminist voices and create new avenues for global visibility, they also impose commercial, cultural, and linguistic barriers that shape who is heard and who remains invisible. The paper argues that understanding mediated feminism requires attention to the interplay between technological mediation, cultural translation, and political agency. Ultimately, the study contends that mediated feminism represents a crucial transformation in how feminist discourse circulates and evolves in the digital public sphere.

Keywords

Digital feminism; social media; transnational communication; feminist discourse; mediatization; online activism.

1. Introduction

In the past two decades, the rapid evolution of digital communication technologies has fundamentally reshaped how feminist activism operates and circulates in the global public sphere. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have emerged as central arenas for articulating feminist concerns, mobilizing collective action, and amplifying marginalized voices. Feminism, once expressed primarily through local networks and print-based discourse, is now deeply embedded within digital infrastructures that enable the instant and transnational exchange of narratives, emotions, and resistance.

The global feminist movements that have emerged in recent years — including #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, and #WomenLifeFreedom — vividly illustrate this transformation. These online campaigns reveal how feminism in the digital age is mediated through algorithms, platform design, and transnational audience dynamics. The visibility of feminist activism now depends on how it performs within the logics of platforms that privilege speed, virality, and emotional intensity.

This dynamic gives rise to what can be described as mediated feminism — a mode of feminist discourse that is both empowered and constrained by the technological, economic, and cultural forces of digital media. As Couldry and Hepp (2017) note, mediatization extends beyond media

use; it transforms the very logic of social interaction. Applying this perspective to feminism highlights the paradoxes of the digital moment: social media have democratized feminist participation by enabling new forms of voice and community, yet they have also embedded activism within algorithmic and capitalist systems that shape what becomes visible, legitimate, and profitable.

Existing scholarship on digital feminism has emphasized the emancipatory potential of online spaces. Banet-Weiser (2018) and Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2019) describe how networked media afford new forms of affective solidarity and collective identity among women across the world. Keller (2020) further argues that online feminist cultures provide young women with tools to articulate agency and political belonging. However, other scholars such as Dobson and Kanai (2019) have cautioned against the neoliberal commodification of feminism, noting that platform economies often turn feminist expression into marketable aesthetics.

While this growing body of research has illuminated important aspects of online activism, less attention has been paid to how feminist discourse travels across cultural, linguistic, and political boundaries in the digital environment. The global reach of social media does not automatically translate into equal participation or mutual understanding.^[1] Instead, feminist narratives are constantly reframed through processes of translation, adaptation, and algorithmic filtration. The visibility of certain movements often depends on their alignment with Western media narratives, while others remain marginalized or localized.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines how social media shape the transnational circulation of feminist discourses — how mediated infrastructures enable and limit the formation of global feminist connections. By bringing together transnational feminist theory and mediatization theory, the study views digital platforms not merely as neutral tools of communication but as active agents that structure feminist expression and visibility. Through an analysis of digital campaigns such as #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, and #WomenLifeFreedom, the paper investigates the ways in which mediated feminism operates as a complex interplay between empowerment and constraint.

Ultimately, this article argues that mediated feminism signifies a crucial transformation in the landscape of feminist communication. It challenges traditional understandings of activism by revealing how feminist discourse today is produced, circulated, and contested through the intertwined logics of media technology, political ideology, and cultural translation. By interrogating these dynamics, the study contributes to ongoing debates about digital citizenship, transnational solidarity, and the politics of gendered visibility in the global digital public sphere.

2. Literature Review

The intersection of feminism and digital media has become one of the most dynamic fields of inquiry within contemporary communication and cultural studies. Scholars have increasingly recognized that digital technologies do not merely provide new tools for activism but transform the epistemological foundations of feminist politics itself. Early work on cyberfeminism in the 1990s envisioned the Internet as a utopian space of gender liberation, where digital anonymity and connectivity could dismantle patriarchal hierarchies (Plant, 1997; Wilding, 1998). However, as social media evolved into profit-driven, algorithmically curated ecosystems, feminist scholars began to critically reassess this techno-optimism, shifting attention to the ambivalent politics of visibility, datafication, and surveillance (Fotopoulou, 2016; Banet-Weiser, 2018).

A central theme in the literature concerns the duality of empowerment and commodification. On one hand, platforms such as Twitter and Instagram have enabled unprecedented levels of participation and solidarity among women globally. Hashtag activism, particularly movements

like #MeToo, #TimesUp, and #NiUnaMenos, demonstrates the connective affordances of social media that allow users to transform private experiences of gendered injustice into collective political expression (Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2019). These movements illustrate how affective networks can translate personal trauma into a shared sense of feminist consciousness, producing what Gill and Orgad (2018) describe as a “networked affective public.”

On the other hand, scholars have noted that the same digital infrastructures that facilitate empowerment also commercialize and contain feminist discourse. Banet-Weiser (2018) introduces the concept of popular feminism to describe how feminist language and aesthetics are absorbed into consumer culture, rebranded through the logic of branding and influencer economies. Similarly, Dobson and Kanai (2019) argue that the neoliberalization of digital feminism privileges individual self-branding and emotional expression over collective structural critique. This tension underscores how feminist messages are often reshaped to fit the algorithmic and commercial demands of the platforms through which they circulate.^[2]

Beyond the question of commodification, the literature has also emphasized the importance of transnational and intersectional perspectives in studying digital feminism. The early wave of scholarship, often dominated by Western frameworks, tended to universalize feminist experiences and overlook the cultural and political diversity of digital activism across regions (Mohanty, 2003; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). More recent studies have challenged this tendency by examining how feminist movements in Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia use digital tools to articulate localized struggles within global networks. For example, scholars have analyzed #NiUnaMenos as a distinctly Latin American feminist articulation against femicide and state violence, rooted in local histories of resistance yet resonant with global feminist currents (Reguillo, 2020). Similarly, the #WomenLifeFreedom movement in Iran illustrates how digital activism can operate under authoritarian constraints while engaging transnational audiences through symbolic and visual tactics (Alimardani & Milan, 2022).

This growing body of research highlights the heterogeneity of mediated feminism. It suggests that the global circulation of feminist discourses is not a uniform or frictionless process but one marked by cultural translation, linguistic adaptation, and geopolitical inequality. Feminist messages travel through algorithmic infrastructures that are largely owned by Western corporations, which means that digital visibility itself becomes a contested and stratified resource (Gray, 2020). Scholars have therefore begun to conceptualize the digital sphere as a politics of mediation, where visibility, credibility, and affect are distributed unevenly across social and geographical contexts.

Another line of inquiry focuses on the role of algorithms and platform architectures in shaping feminist discourse. As Duguay (2019) and Bishop (2020) argue, algorithms function as gatekeepers that determine what forms of activism become amplified or obscured. Platform affordances such as hashtags, likes, and sharing mechanisms incentivize affective engagement while discouraging nuance or complexity, leading to what Papacharissi (2015) terms “affective publics.” Within this environment, feminist activism must constantly negotiate between emotional.^[3]

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This study integrates mediatization theory and transnational feminist theory to conceptualize mediated feminism—a framework for understanding how social media technologies shape the global circulation of feminist discourses.

From the perspective of mediatization theory, media are not neutral channels but active structures that organize and transform social communication. Couldry and Hepp (2017) describe mediatization as a meta-process through which media logics—such as connectivity, visibility, and datafication—become embedded in everyday life. Applied to feminism, this means that digital platforms do not merely transmit feminist ideas; they reshape the forms,

audiences, and affects through which activism occurs. Feminist visibility now depends on algorithmic mechanisms and platform affordances that privilege engagement, virality, and affective intensity. Consequently, feminist communication is both empowered and constrained by the technological and commercial logics of digital media.

While mediatization theory explains how media structures condition feminist expression, transnational feminist theory examines where and under what power relations those expressions circulate. Building on Mohanty (2003) and Grewal and Kaplan (1994), this perspective foregrounds the geopolitical asymmetries and cultural hierarchies that shape global feminist exchange. The transnational flow of feminist discourses is never neutral: English-language dominance, Western aesthetic norms, and corporate platform control often determine which voices gain visibility and which remain peripheral (Alimardani & Milan, 2022). By combining these frameworks, the study views mediated feminism as a process of technological and cultural translation. Social media afford new opportunities for feminist solidarity, yet they also reproduce structural inequalities through algorithmic visibility and platform governance. Mediated feminism thus describes a paradoxical dynamic: digital technologies expand feminist communication across borders while simultaneously embedding it within uneven global systems of power.

This integrated theoretical lens allows for a critical understanding of how social media mediate feminist discourse not merely as a tool for activism but as a transformative space where meaning, participation, and legitimacy are continually renegotiated.

2.2. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology designed to explore how feminist discourses are mediated and reconfigured across digital platforms in transnational contexts. Rather than treating social media activism as isolated digital phenomena, the research approaches it as a communicative and cultural process shaped by technological affordances and global power relations. The aim is to understand how feminism, when mediated through social media infrastructures, circulates across borders while being reframed through diverse linguistic and political environments.

The empirical focus centers on three globally visible feminist campaigns — #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, and #WomenLifeFreedom. These movements were selected because they embody distinct cultural and geopolitical contexts while sharing a commitment to gender justice and collective mobilization. Examining them together allows for a comparative understanding of how feminist discourse travels through digital infrastructures and how its meanings shift across national and linguistic boundaries.

The study draws on a corpus of approximately 1,200 publicly available posts collected from Twitter (now X), Instagram, and TikTok between 2021 and 2024. Sampling followed a purposive and theoretically informed strategy aimed at capturing discursive variation rather than statistical representation. ^[4]The selection included posts in English, Spanish, and Persian, reflecting the multilingual nature of digital feminism. Supplementary materials—such as campaign manifestos, digital art, and related news coverage—were incorporated to contextualize online narratives within their broader sociopolitical frames.

The analysis combines digital ethnography with critical discourse analysis (CDA). The ethnographic dimension provided interpretive depth by attending to the everyday communicative practices and affective dynamics of online feminist communities. Through prolonged engagement with digital spaces, the study examined how participants use hashtags, visuals, and narratives to articulate belonging and resistance. Discourse analysis, meanwhile, was used to trace recurring linguistic and visual patterns that reveal how feminist issues are framed, legitimized, and contested within algorithmically mediated environments. Iterative

coding and thematic mapping were applied to identify how feminist messages are translated and reinterpreted as they move across cultural and technological boundaries.

Ethical considerations were central to the research process. All data were obtained from publicly accessible online sources, and user identities were anonymized to protect privacy. The study followed the ethical guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), ensuring respect for contextual integrity and informed consent within digital environments. The purpose of this inquiry is not to evaluate individual users but to analyze the broader mechanisms through which social media platforms mediate feminist discourse in a transnational framework.

By combining interpretive rigor with cross-cultural sensitivity, this methodological approach situates mediated feminism as both a discursive and infrastructural phenomenon. It acknowledges that feminist communication in digital spaces is simultaneously shaped by acts of solidarity and by the algorithmic and economic forces that govern visibility in the global information order.

2.3. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of digital feminist campaigns reveals that the circulation of feminist discourse across social media operates through a dynamic interplay of empowerment, translation, and control. Across #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, and #WomenLifeFreedom, feminist actors use platforms to transform intimate experiences into collective narratives, producing what can be understood as an affective public sphere. Yet this process also demonstrates how feminist communication is mediated—technically, culturally, and politically—by the infrastructures that enable it.

In the #MeToo campaign, the logic of virality was both a source of visibility and a mechanism of constraint. The hashtag enabled survivors of sexual harassment and assault to transform private experiences into a globally recognized discourse of resistance. The immediacy and emotional resonance of these testimonies produced transnational solidarity that transcended geography and language. However, the campaign's reach was also shaped by the algorithmic structures of Western-dominated platforms. English-language narratives and celebrity endorsements received disproportionate amplification, while stories from the Global South often remained peripheral. This asymmetry illustrates how mediated feminism simultaneously democratizes and stratifies visibility.

In contrast, #NiUnaMenos emerged as a distinctly Latin American feminist articulation rooted in local struggles against femicide and state violence. Its digital presence expanded the reach of Latin American feminism, yet the movement's transnational visibility required continuous translation into discursive forms legible to global audiences. Visual aesthetics—such as the use of protest art, symbolic color palettes, and the performative body—became key tools for negotiating global attention. However, these same translations often diluted the movement's radical critique of colonial and economic violence, highlighting the tension between local authenticity and global legibility within mediated feminism.^[5]

The #WomenLifeFreedom campaign further complicates the notion of digital feminist solidarity. Originating in Iran amid state repression, the movement relied heavily on digital networks to mobilize transnational attention. Yet, within the algorithmic architectures of Western platforms, its visibility was mediated through geopolitical and linguistic barriers. Visual symbols—particularly the image of women cutting their hair—became globally viral, but often stripped of the complex political meanings they carried in the Iranian context. This selective amplification reveals how platform algorithms and global news logics can aestheticize activism, turning acts of resistance into consumable digital imagery.

Taken together, these cases illustrate that mediated feminism functions as both a space of connection and a site of contestation. Social media enable the circulation of feminist narratives beyond national borders, but the very infrastructures that make this circulation possible also reproduce hierarchies of attention and representation. The “platformization” of feminist activism embeds political struggle within the commercial and algorithmic logic of digital capitalism. Feminist actors must therefore perform constant negotiation—between authenticity and visibility, affect and strategy, resistance and marketability.

This tension underscores the central paradox of mediated feminism: the same technologies that expand feminist communication also delimit its radical potential. The mediatization of feminism produces new publics and solidarities, yet it also subjects activism to the metrics of engagement, the economies of attention, and the aesthetics of shareability. What emerges is a reconfigured feminist politics that is simultaneously local and global, material and symbolic, resistant and commodified.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that mediated feminism is not merely a new mode of activism but a transformation in the conditions under which feminism itself is practiced and perceived. Digital infrastructures shape not only how feminist messages travel but also how they acquire legitimacy and emotional force. Understanding this mediated condition is crucial for developing more inclusive, critically aware, and transnationally resonant feminist strategies in the digital age.

3. Conclusion

The study has examined how social media platforms mediate the transnational circulation of feminist discourses, transforming both the form and politics of global feminist activism. Through the analysis of #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, and #WomenLifeFreedom, it becomes evident that digital networks enable new forms of feminist visibility and solidarity while simultaneously embedding activism within algorithmic, commercial, and geopolitical constraints.

Mediated feminism, as conceptualized in this paper, captures this duality. It represents a mode of feminist communication that is inherently shaped by the logics of mediation—visibility, virality, and datafication—while also functioning as a space for reimagining feminist agency across borders. The digital environment allows feminism to travel further than ever before, but not without friction. As feminist messages are translated across linguistic and cultural boundaries, they are reframed within power structures that determine what becomes legible, shareable, or valuable in the global information economy.

The findings suggest that future feminist strategies must engage critically with the infrastructures that enable their communication. Building sustainable feminist solidarity in the digital age requires more than networked visibility; it demands an awareness of how algorithms, corporate ownership, and geopolitical hierarchies shape the very conditions of voice and representation.

In recognizing mediation as both constraint and possibility, feminist scholars and activists can move toward a more reflexive and inclusive understanding of transnational digital activism. Mediated feminism is thus not only a description of how feminism circulates online, but an invitation to rethink what feminist politics can become when communication itself is the site of struggle.

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