

Chapter 13

Feminist Uses of Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Instagram

Stine Eckert

Wayne State University, USA

Linda Steiner

University of Maryland, USA

ABSTRACT

The internet has clearly become crucial for feminist organizing, enabling feminist associations to undertake both campaigns and counter-campaigns. Feminist groups and individuals are using social media to advocate policy, fight policy, promote discussions of problems, and argue against anti-feminist, misogynist and anti-progressive ideologies. This textual analysis of feminist accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr and Pinterest demonstrates that feminist individuals and groups used these platforms to discuss structural gender issues, aspects of identity, daily practices, provide motivational material, and both justify and defend intersectional feminisms. Few groups on and site were anti-feminist. Using the theory of fluid public clusters, this chapter argues that social media are especially significant for minority feminists and feminists of color; they enable White and majority feminists to go beyond rhetorical proclamations of intersectionality and to enact alliances.

INTRODUCTION

The internet has become crucial for feminist organizing, enabling feminist associations to undertake campaigns and counter-campaigns. Feminist groups are using social media (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, Instagram and others) to advocate and fight policies, promote discussions of problems, and argue against anti-feminist, misogynist and anti-progressive ideologies. Every major feminist organization is present online; many feminist groups organize their work entirely online. The Black Power movement slogan of the 1960s insisted “The revolution will not be televised.” But, if social media-friendly activists have their way, “the feminist revolution will be tweeted, hashtagged, Vined and Instagrammed” (Irwin, 2013, para 1).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0212-8.ch013

This chapter focuses on the extent to which Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Pinterest and Instagram enable feminists, especially collectives and organizations, to explain, critique, debate, question, challenge or push for feminist policies. Where, when, and how do social media operate for feminists? How well do social media serve digital feminists from various backgrounds, especially for advocating (whether individually or in organizations) on behalf of larger, collective goals? In recent years, the pendulum seemingly swung from huge optimism about social media's democratic potential for leveling informational playing fields to fears that the online environment was toxic for feminists and feminisms. Problems are sometimes attributed to sexist trolls or online abuse and open attacks on feminists, as seen in the #Gamergate controversy, when feminists who critiqued sexism in video games and advocated for more women in the gaming industry (Wingfield, 2014) drew highly sexist attacks – to which they responded. Internally, philosophical tensions and fights among feminists are often compounded by generational differences (in terms of age as well as in “waves” of feminisms) over the meaning, goals, and appropriate methods and strategies of feminisms.

Other explanations concern whether the design of social media itself reflects and serves men's and patriarchal interests. The fact that relatively few women work at Intel, Cisco, Google, Yahoo, LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, especially in high status executive and technology jobs, is also relevant (Khazan, 2015; Lien, 2015). Moreover, social media are not only increasingly consolidating under the umbrellas of a few corporations, but are becoming potentially colonized to suit commercial agendas. For example, in 2013 Yahoo! acquired Tumblr for \$1.1 billion in cash. Unhappy Tumblr users collected nearly 170,000 signatures in protest, but the deal went through. Famously launched in 2004 by Harvard students, Facebook turned cash-flow positive five years later; when it went public in 2012 it reached a peak market capitalization of \$104 billion, and more than doubled this by 2015. In 2012, Facebook bought Instagram for approximately \$1 billion in cash and stock. Twitter has similarly purchased many other companies and applications, such as the video sharing service Vine. In 2013, when Twitter was first traded on the New York Stock Exchange, Twitter had a valuation of around \$31 billion (BBC, 2013). Social media are becoming increasingly interlinked not only online via cross-posting settings but also in ownership structure. Not everyone will accept Fuchs's (2014) claim that participatory democracy requires ownership democracy, but ownership over-determines participation. Insisting that participation must be understood in terms of political economy, Fuchs argued that a participatory democratic public sphere requires that everyone has equal access to resources of cultural production, distribution, and visibility. Looking at Twitter in particular, he complained that social media favor corporations and powerful political figures.

Nonetheless, this does not rule out the possibility that feminists can use social media to debate feminisms, embody feminist values and engage with feminists, and, for that matter, anti-feminists. For instance, in 2014-2015, *Feminist Media Studies* (14:6, 15:1, and 15:2) carried 24 brief essays on feminist uses of Twitter. These demonstrated how feminists use hashtags to draw attention to (sexual) violence against women (especially rape and rape culture, particularly against women of color and trans women); harassment in public spaces; sexism; bias and misrepresentation of women, especially women of color in advertising, games, and news; men as feminists and allies; and victim blaming. The exploitation of people's unpaid labor and the persistence of “asymmetrical visibility,” as Fuchs (2014) put it, have not dampened activists' enthusiasm to exploit social media. Feminists have always been eager to experiment with new media. Already in 1989 Felski posited that the distinct oppositional style of feminist counter-publics in the so-called third wave was to resist the homogenizing and universalizing logic of the global culture of mass media. Now the opportunities for working both, alone and collectively, synchronously and asynchronously, within geographic areas and outside, or across them all, suggest that social media

18 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/feminist-uses-of-social-media/153215

Related Content

Financial Literacy as Strategy for Enhancing Financial Inclusion of Small Entrepreneurs

Neeta Baporikar (2021). *International Journal of Public Sociology and Sociotherapy* (pp. 1-14).

www.irma-international.org/article/financial-literacy-as-strategy-for-enhancing-financial-inclusion-of-small-entrepreneurs/280477

America in the Camera Obscura of Nigerian "Videastes": A Study of Peters Roberts' 30 Days in Atlanta and George Kalu's Life is Hard in America

Floribert Patrick C. Endong (2019). *Popular Representations of America in Non-American Media* (pp. 81-105).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/america-in-the-camera-obscura-of-nigerian-videastes/230363

Animal Cruelty and Sacrifice in Religious and Mythological Tourism: Perspective and Challenges in South Asia

Pratim Chatterjee, Debasish Batabyal, Namrata Chakraborty, Yashwant Singh Rawal, Sankar Kumar Mukherjee and Soumyadeep Roy (2023). *Exploring Culture and Heritage Through Experience Tourism* (pp. 125-138).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/animal-cruelty-and-sacrifice-in-religious-and-mythological-tourism/333040

Indigenous Conflict Resolution Systems: Building Cultural Peace and Social Solidarity Among Indigenous Communities in South Africa

Tlou Maggie Masenya (2021). *Natural Healing as Conflict Resolution* (pp. 226-241).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/indigenous-conflict-resolution-systems/265310

Finer Student Engagement via Quality and Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Education

Neeta Baporikar (2020). *International Journal of Political Activism and Engagement* (pp. 38-55).

www.irma-international.org/article/finer-student-engagement-via-quality-and-lifelong-learning-for-sustainable-education/264250