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Female activists in environmental movements on Instagram: An ecofeminism perspective in the Indonesian context

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Introduction

The emergence of new technology, such as the internet, has facilitated the distribution of information at a faster pace than ever before. With easy access to the internet, we have become increasingly reliant on it to acquire and share news. The internet provides a cost-effective platform for the dissemination of information and is capable of transmitting news instantaneously, which is particularly beneficial for people in developing regions (Abbott, 2001). Thus, it has become essential not only for spreading the message of activism but also for gathering people to carry out particular social movements. Moreover, digital technologies and the internet provide a way for activism and movements to blossom, which later creates opportunities for individuals to participate.

Garret (2006) stated that new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are potentially useful in gathering people to join in a movement and encourage the possibility of creating a new community. Nowadays, the increasing use of social media platforms also provides the easiness of participating in any activism. For example, Instagram, a popular social media platform, offers to collage and share images, videos, and narrative text (through its caption), which is very useful for providing information about activism. According to the statistics website *NapoleonCat* (NapoleonCat.com), there were around 104 million Instagram users in Indonesia in January 2022, which accounted for 37.4% of its entire population. Therefore, many organisations and activists in Indonesia utilise Instagram to obtain the audience's attention for sharing a series of activism posts, including those who work on environmental issues.

Furthermore, environmental issues have sparked a global dialogue that is closely intertwined with the urgent need to address climate change and its associated crises. This is particularly significant for nations that have been severely impacted by natural disasters, which are often a direct consequence of the environmental damage caused by human activity. According to the World Bank (2021), Indonesia is one of the most susceptible nations to the effects of climate change, including severe occurrences such as floods and droughts, and enduring consequences such as changes in rainfall patterns, increasing sea levels and warm temperatures. Consequently, Indonesian environmental organisations and activists can play a critical role in promoting sustainability and resilience movements both domestically and internationally.

Furthermore, Zelezny and Bailey (2006) stated that women are generally more concerned with environmental protection and have a natural environmental attitude compared to men; and since digital media platform is less restrictive than traditional media, it is likely that young women and girls are inclined to express and share their thoughts in participating online (Keller, 2012; Parahita, 2019). Thus, this article aims to describe the relationship between social media (Instagram) and Indonesian female activists within environmental organisations and movements from an ecofeminism perspective since the main focuses are female activists and the environment. Puleo (2017, p. 30) stated, “the term ecofeminism was first used in an article by Françoise d’Eaubonne published in 1974, which argued that the overpopulation of the planet, an issue of concern for ecologists, was the result of the patriarchal refusal of women’s right to decide on their own bodies”. Ecofeminism should also serve as the integration between women and the movements (Li, 2007) and can be used as a ‘tool’ for examining the construction between women’s experiences, environment, and justice (Asriani, 2016). Thus, despite the origin of ecofeminism, it actually seems to have a broader meaning and includes social activism done by women.

Moreover, there are studies that describe the role of environmental activists or movements fighting the climate crisis in Indonesia (e.g. Dewi, 2017; Millah et al., 2020; Regus, 2021), although very few have studied how environmental movements in Indonesia directed and run by female activists are portrayed and its relation with social media, especially Instagram. In fact, several environmental movements are led and organised by Indonesian female activists who not only toil and combat environmental problems but also educate the audience about the impact of environmental disasters. They also interweave and cooperate with other organisations operating in several countries, making transnational activism possible, especially via online networks. Although this study cannot be used to generalise female environmental activists, especially in the Indonesian context, it proposes that prevalent topic development can produce social participation and support both local and transnational environmental activism and movements in the digital sphere.

1. Research methodology

For this paper, five Instagram accounts are selected, as they are well-known organisations/movements with more than ten thousand followers, which discuss several environmental topics, and are managed by mostly Indonesian female environmental activists whom some co-founded and/or worked intensively in the organisations. This article uses a qualitative approach by observing posts that are openly shared on Instagram as data collection, which portrayed female activists conducting environmental activism and movements, specifically in the year 2022. All Instagram accounts in this study are open access for the public, and Instagram posts will be significant in describing narrative outlines related to environmental issues through image and video sharing, hashtags, and caption writing. Since the field of study is Instagram, image and video sharing are essential to understand the discussion of already established activism and movements. It is also important to include the writing caption in the analysis because words and sentence choices determine how reality is presented and can disclose the ideas, beliefs, and attitudes behind a text (Hansen and Machin, 2013; Wutzler, 2019). The hashtag in the caption will also give added value to the importance of the message, besides its function as keywords for search on social media. From observing their accounts, some discussed topics about environmental problems in Indonesia will be examined and put into discourse: by describing the portrayal of Indonesian female activists on Instagram and their roles in the Global South environmental movement, as well as the relation between Instagram (as part of social media platforms) and the possibility of transnational movements. In order to enrich the study of media with a focus on female activists and environmental movements, this paper uses ecofeminism as a theoretical framework. According to Serafini (2019), the ecofeminist viewpoint on media practices might facilitate an examination of media production as an activity that is often overlooked in media and communication research. In addition, secondary data collection is obtained from library research, the website of the organisations, and news/journal articles.

2. Discussion

2.1. Environmental movements and Indonesian female activists on Instagram

When talking about activism in the digital sphere in Indonesia, many activists use social media to connect, socialise, and build networks with others. The influence of Indonesian female activists on Instagram is visible in encouraging the audience to be more aware and critical by endorsing or contesting issues and policies that are related to the climate crisis, sustainability, and conservation. They can be a founder, chairperson, speaker, and mediator

in many environmental actions, such as creating programs for realisation in solving environmental problems and facilitating the communities. Later, the development of online networks and social media platforms may increase the appearance of female activists to deliver their ideas on environmental issues and can show their leadership capacities. Moreover, they encourage the audience on Instagram, especially youngsters, to be more aware and involved in fighting the climate crisis. Young people might position themselves as vigorous activists within networks that are underway both offline and online as they are conscious of environmental problems (Pickard, 2019; Nilan, 2020). They can also be the ultimate generations who will continue the mission of environmental activism. Furthermore, within the Indonesian context, many of the first environmental activists advocated environmental justice and operated at the grassroots (Tsing, 1999; Lowe, 2006; Lee Peluso et al., 2008). Likewise, many of them also collaborate with and function as part of wider transnational movements. Here, based on the observation of five selected environmental organisations/movements on each Instagram account with more than ten thousand followers, there are some main topics discussed (as shown in the table below).

Table 1

Shared Instagram posts from the respective accounts in 2022

Environmental Organisation/Movement (and their Instagram account)	Topics of Environmental Issues	Examples of Hashtag Online Movements
Zero Waste Indonesia (@zerowaste.id_official)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sustainable lifestyle 2. Green products 3. Zero waste consumption 4. Recycling movement 	<p>#Zerowasteid31days #SustainableStartsWithYou</p>
Extinction Rebellion Indonesia (@extinctionrebellion.id)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Climate justice 2. Policy reforms 3. Human rights and gender advocacy 4. Climate Artivism 	<p>#SystemChangeNotClimate-Change #PeopleNotProfit #MenolakPunah (Rebel to Extinction)</p>
Hutan Itu Indonesia (@hutanituid)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Forest and Nature Conservation 2. Green and sustainable living 3. Women empowerment 	<p>#HutanItuIbu (Forest is Mother) #JagaHutan (Protect the Forest)</p>
Bye Bye Plastic Bags (@byebyeplasticbag)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No plastic and trash movement 2. Youth empowerment/changemakers 3. Sea conservation 	<p>#ByeByePlasticBags</p>
Yayasan HAKA (@haka_sumatra)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leuser ecosystem conservation 2. Women empowerment in forest conservation 3. Sustainable living and environmental protection 	<p>#PerempuanLeuser (Woman of Leuser) #LeuserEcosystem</p>

Source: own elaboration.

The table shows that environmental activism in Indonesia does not only discuss solely environmental protection but also expects some reforms, conservation, women and youth empowerment, introducing sustainable living and the *green* narrative. The *green* narrative has been popularised by many agents on social media not only as a strategy to increase engagement but also to encourage people to live more sustainably and be environmentally concerned (Kim et al., 2021). In fact, @zerowaste.id_official, which is run by mostly female activists, aims more at young female audiences to use more sustainable and ethical products and avoid a sedentary lifestyle. For instance, *skin minimalism* (in collaboration with another campaign of @lyfewithless, June 2022) to reduce the consumption of skin care products and the recycling movement of exchanging clothes. Moreover, female activists on @zerowaste.id_official, @haka_sumatra, and @hutanituid tend to promote local and sustainable products as part of their green narrative campaign on Instagram by endorsing ethical products and supporting women's hard work in micro industries.

Female activists in environmental movements position themselves as societal actors who encourage society to be more involved in environmental actions by working together on overcoming challenges and advising ideas of environmental policy and a sustainable way of life. This is in line with the vision of ecofeminism, which supports the notion of women being the agent of change in environmental sustainability (Resurrección, 2013). Usually, for involvement in actively post-sharing on Instagram, an individual can be considered an enviro-fluencer, which refers to a person who persuades and inspires the audience to participate in some movements and engage in activism as they do. Environmental influencers are the ones who advocate materials about sustainability and climate change, which is usually associated with higher offline engagement and persuading sustainable behaviours (San Cornelio et al., 2021; Dekonick and Schmuck, 2022). Meanwhile, the term influencer is not only attached to those who endorse and promote certain brands (Abidin, 2016; Leban, 2020) but also may describe an activist who has enthusiastically been upholding and educating about social issues on social media. Thus, Munoz (2021) also identified an *influencer-activist* that denotes an individual who engages in activism but is not associated with any political parties or works specifically for them. For this reason, it is presumed that some of them may also be called *influencer-activists* if they also favour showing activism engagement on their personal social media accounts. Moreover, social media platforms provide activists with the opportunity to engage in collective activism (Jeremic, 2019). For instance, the Wijzen sisters proposed the #ByeByePlasticBags movement, which aims to tackle plastic bag waste. Later on, they expanded their focus to include youth development, encouraging young people to become changemakers in environmental activism and creating programs to help communities clean their surroundings (as posted in September 2022). This demonstrates how Indonesian female environmental activists are not only taking action on environmental issues but also influencing cultural and societal transformation through their work.

Furthermore, with @extinctionrebellion.id highlighting the topic of climate justice, it is worth exploring what this concept entails. The concept of environmental justice has a significant connection with justice and how the impact of climate change on nature and people has been construed in many global issues, which has made them become a notable movement (Schlosberg and Collins, 2014). Environmental activists typically engage in discussions on protecting the Earth in a broad context, covering topics such as human resilience, nature, animals, and climate justice. On @extinctionrebellion.id, female activists shared an image with the caption “Tidak ada planet B (there is no planet B)...” in March 2022. This indicates that the discussion centres around the idea that the Earth, as the only planet containing all living matter, must be preserved, and advocates for justice for the planet. It emphasises that nothing matters anymore if people ignore climate change, which only brings more suffering to the people and nature on earth. Furthermore, @extinctionrebellion.id posts about sustainable policies, climate justice, and policy reforms are driven by the many disasters caused by the climate crisis, which have had a devastating impact on communities, especially on women and children. This suggests that their campaigns aim to convey the idea that both governments and individuals need to take more responsible and sustainable actions to protect the environment. Given the current situation of global capitalism, there is an urgent need for a revolutionary strategy of system change to support climate change movements (Satgar, 2018). Government policies need to be reformed to provide resilience and response to the climate crisis, which is often neglected, and to eliminate the domination of corporate capitalists.

Moreover, activism on Instagram often uses powerful images that are supported by strong messages of activism. This is known as ‘visual activism,’ which refers to creative movements and activism that showcase visual and performance abilities to work for a cause (San Cornelio et al., 2021). By combining images and powerful captions, environmental activists aim to stir the emotions and reactions of viewers and awaken their sense of responsibility towards protecting the environment. Additionally, digital pictures provide evidence and context for actual events, which can potentially make protests safer for vulnerable individuals such as women (Highfield and Leaver, 2016; Tuli and Danish, 2021). The use of strong words such as “people not profit” and “no planet B” in the captions highlights the urgency of the climate crisis and the need for a wider audience to pay attention to the interconnectedness of people, the system, and climate change.

It appears that the textual narrative, by selecting specific environmental terms, can increase audience awareness and understanding, meaning that environmental activists might not only speak out about activism and movements but also educate others about the discussion surrounding the climate crisis. Delivering messages about environmental issues can also be shown by carrying a board in a rally, wearing a t-shirt that supports environmental reforms, and writing specific hashtag movements. It is done in order to familiarise the audience with the political and environmental context by displaying their

actions and captions, also collaborating with other social actors to address the issues. Additionally, creating hashtags to initiate environmental movements can contribute to social change by collecting support with the desire to inform, identify, and persuade people to participate in activism. According to Moscato (2016), hashtags may be used in online activism to alter public perception and to increase activism's position on social media in the public sphere, especially in environmental issues. It is required to be added to online activities and movements with a persuasive and influencing message in the media in order to attract audience attention (Haßler et al., 2021). For example, #HutanItuIbu (Forest is Mother) by @hutanituid and #PerempuanLeuser by @haka_sumatra are used to represent the forest (nature) as a woman (mother), which has the nurturing power and the protector for the human being. In addition, emphasising the term "woman" or "female" in their activism is to signify that women are central and at the core of activism. The hashtag movement as part of online activism is also useful to grow their engagement on social media and even create mobilisation. In addition, social media is not only used to showcase the environmental movement that activists have initiated but also to support other past and present movements. This is illustrated by the use of specific hashtags related to women and the environment, highlighting the need to position them as central to achieving sustainability and finding solutions for environmental problems.

2.2. Indonesian female activists in the global south environmental activism

Environmental activism has gained significant attention due to the increasing number of environmental disasters that have occurred, leading to the formation of movements demanding action and justice from authorities. In regions such as the Global South, for instance, in Indonesia, various issues such as deforestation, forest fires, waste problems, pollution, and land acquisition by big corporations have arisen. Female activists in the Global South play a vital role in combating the climate crisis as they can initiate actions and disseminate information about environmental issues, making the voices of Global South women heard, especially on social media.

Ecofeminism goes beyond the connection between oppressed women and the degradation of nature; it emphasises the central role of women in ecological and environmental movements (see Moore, 2004; Alaimo, 2008) and highlights the leadership qualities of women in environmental movements (Zelezny and Bailey, 2006). As disadvantaged women in the Global South are the first to suffer from environmental degradation caused by the industrialised and patriarchal world (Puleo, 2017), the significance of female activists in protecting the environment and women is crucial. The correlation between the dominance of women and nature lies in the role of women in tackling environmental problems (Momsen,

2000; Swain and Swain, 2004). For example, female activists in the resistance movement against the cement industry in the Kendeng Mountains of Central Java, Indonesia, were mostly females from local communities (Nawiyanto and Endrayadi, 2019). Female activists may also position themselves as front-runners who will develop an invigorating vision and advance the cause of saving the planet by battling climate change, where they can collaborate with decision-makers for more sustainable policies. This illustrates the ecofeminist tenet that women are the protectors, always trying to save the damaged environment on this “broken” earth.

Furthermore, both feminism and environmental justice emerged from women’s experience of unfairness as being inextricably linked with the well-being of others (Gaard, 2017). This is very correlated to the ecological perspective of many environmental activists who seek climate justice. Female activists in @extinctionrebellion.id, from a shared Instagram post in March 2022, wrote that ecological issues cannot be separated from gender issues; it means that women have a significant part in restructuring the system to achieve equality and sustainability. Meanwhile, several female activists are portrayed and honoured as forest conservators in @hutanituid, which can mean escaping the stereotype in considered of a male-dominated job, as most conservationist jobs are normally taken by men (McGuire et al., 2012; Poor et al., 2021). Similarly, in @haka_sumatra, “Perempuan Leuser Award” serves to give special recognition to female conservationists for protecting forests in the Leuser Mountains ecosystem (posted in November 2022). In fact, Indonesian female activists are also involved in think-tank conferences, public speeches, and online seminars alongside other social environmental agents from various NGOs, government institutions, and prominent people. For instance, @zerowaste.id_official formed a seminar with female activists and influencers who promote sustainable products and recycling for sustainable fashion. Thus, it is assumed that extending the engagement of activism in other forms (talks, advertorials, and documentaries) carried out by the female activists from the Global South will be useful for expanding the message to the audience about the importance of the environment and ecosystem which may motivate and empower other women to do the same.

According to Sturgeon (1999), ecofeminists argue that Western patriarchal philosophers tend to view women and nature as inferior to men and culture. The idea of nature as feminine has resulted in its continued exploitation and environmental destruction. Similarly, women in the Global South have experienced gender oppression and have been silenced, making it difficult for them to demand equality in some contexts. It is essential for women to establish their position and be considered equal and appreciated, rather than excluded, while attempting to solve environmental issues. Social media provides a platform for female activists to disseminate information and engage with a larger audience in environmental activism. As Cortese (2015, p. 219) stated, “the assumption is that the more involved one is in a movement, the more likely one would see themselves as activists and consider what they do as activism”.

Being recognised, included, listened to, and inspiring others, is an approach to achieving equality. The leadership of female activists may encourage other young women to initiate similar environmental campaigns. Therefore, it is crucial to invigorate the position of female activists in leading environmental activism and movements, given the severe environmental devastation and unjust system towards women in Indonesia.

2.3. Instagram, female activists, and transnational environmental movements

Social media has played a significant role in amplifying the voices of young female activists and spreading awareness about environmental issues. Greta Thunberg's School Strike for the Climate is one such example of how social media can be used to draw public attention to ecological concerns. Many other young people have also engaged in similar actions, expressing the importance of climate change to the public. In addition to spreading awareness, social media also allows activists to organise collective actions and mobilisations regionally and internationally, start online movements, educate the public, and create awareness of the importance of fighting against the climate crisis. Social media can also facilitate transnational activism by connecting activists from different nations who share similar visions and ideas. Therefore, uploading compelling images and using social media platforms like Instagram can help environmental organisations and activists acquire more action on environmental issues from the public. This can make transnational movements happen and, ultimately, contribute to a more sustainable future for all.

There are several reasons why social media, specifically Instagram, has facilitated the growth of transnational environmental activism. Firstly, the rapid development of electronic communication has enabled previously isolated movements and organisations to interact and collaborate across borders (Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Caouette, 2007). Instagram, which is free to install, has become a crucial communication tool for environmental activists, enabling them to connect and work together with individuals and organisations from other regions. For example, Extinction Rebellion Indonesia is part of the global Extinction Rebellion movement, which successfully organised similar campaigns across Europe, inspiring activists worldwide to take action (Harsa, 2020).

Secondly, the increasing involvement of multinational agents and the growing influence of transnational enterprises and international organisations (Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Caouette, 2007) has played a role in expanding the reach of environmental movements on Instagram. For instance, Bye Bye Plastic Bags has 60 global teams, with Bali serving as its headquarters, demonstrating the global expansion of the movement. Furthermore, female activists in Indonesia can leverage social media to gain international recognition and audience, particularly on Instagram, which offers unique features that allow

for creative expression and engagement with audiences. Instagram enables activists to curate visually compelling posts, create Instastories, and engage in online discussions and live broadcasts that connect individuals and build transnational coalitions, facilitating the exchange of information across borders. Moreover, the solidarity among Indonesian female activists on Instagram is a significant aspect of their support for one another, as they share knowledge and collaborate with other environmental and feminist organisations to empower other activists, particularly women, in Indonesia and other countries. Ecofeminism, as a diverse movement with varying political, social, and cultural stances that evolve over time and space, is reflected in this position. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, have facilitated the establishment and strengthening of transnational networks connecting activists and organisations from the Global North and South, as well as encouraged alliances between movements and key actors (Smith, 2012). Such coalitions between women are necessary to develop and implement sustainable policies and actions for the environment. Transnational movements provide an opportunity for Indonesian female activists to communicate their ideas and actions, and their leadership is crucial to guide and mobilise the public in collective efforts to combat the severe impacts of the global climate crisis.

Conclusion

Indonesian female activists utilise social media platforms, mainly Instagram, to campaign and stimulate environmental activism and movements. Rapid access to the digital sphere enables female activists who focus on activism by forming organisations and movements to conserve the environment, especially in addressing climate change. Moreover, their activism in other social acts may affect cultural and social change by influencing audiences with their activism via digital platforms like Instagram. Accordingly, based on the observation of the five Instagram accounts of environmental organisations/movements mentioned in this paper, Indonesian female activists not only encourage audiences to engage more but also transfer knowledge and motivate others to participate in environmental activism and movements that lead to social change. Due to its limitations, further studies can be done later in order to explore and analyse the motivation of female activists.

Furthermore, ecofeminism transcends the discussion of the environment and women and encompasses notions of system change, sustainability, and social reform. As part of the Global South, Indonesian female activists play a crucial role in advocating for sustainable visions and expanding networks with other activists working on various issues by joining or even initiating transnational movements. Positioning women as leaders in environmental organisations is crucial for society, as they bring diverse perspectives and can work towards achieving common goals, such as combating climate change, promoting sus-

tainable lifestyles, advocating for environmental justice and conservation, and empowering women while promoting gender equality. Despite differences in their individual stances on environmental issues, female activists share a common ground of fighting for a better future for the planet and its inhabitants.

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S u m m a r y

Social media has become an essential instrument for activists and organisations to campaign and share their activism in the digital sphere. In Indonesia, many activists utilise social media to create and interact with the audience; and expand their networks, including in environmental activism. Numerous studies have analysed the importance of environmental organisations and activists in combating the climate issue; however, only a few have examined how female activists depict and discuss environmental activism on social media from an ecofeminist viewpoint, particularly on Instagram. The contributions of female activists may provide broader and more critical views that link environmental challenges with other issues. Therefore, the growth of online networks not only opens the chance to participate in transnational activism and movements but also may lead to a rise in the number of female activists who can voice their opinions and campaign on environmental concerns, particularly in the Indonesian context.

Kobiety-aktywistki w ponadnarodowym aktywizmie ekologicznym na Instagramie: perspektywa ekofeministyczna w kontekście indonezyjskim

Streszczenie

Media społecznościowe stały się dla aktywistów i organizacji ekologicznych podstawowym narzędziem prowadzenia kampanii i informowania o swoich działaniach. Jeśli chodzi o cyfrowy aktywizm w Indonezji, wielu tamtejszych działaczy wykorzystuje media społecznościowe do tworzenia i rozszerzania swoich sieci kontaktów, a także interakcji w ich ramach. Choć działania grup i działaczy ekologicznych na rzecz ochrony klimatu są przedmiotem licznych badań, niewiele z nich zostało poświęconych kobietom-aktywistkom oraz sposobom, w jaki przedstawiają one kwestie ekologii i dyskutują o nich w mediach społecznościowych – szczególnie na Instagramie – zapewne przyjmując ekofeministyczny punkt widzenia. Uwzględnienie wkładu aktywistek w zapobieganie zmianom klimatycznym może ukazać szerszą i krytyczniej ujmowaną problematykę, w której wyzwania ekologiczne łączą się z innymi tematami. Coraz większy dostęp do internetu i platform społecznościowych może prowadzić do wzrostu liczby ekoaktywistek, które mogą wyrażać swoje opinie i prowadzić kampanię na rzecz ochrony środowiska, szczególnie w Indonezji.