

T.R.
ISTANBUL SABAHAATTIN ZAIM UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE EDUCATION INSTITUTE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

**THE ROLE OF DIGITAL ACTIVISM ON INSTAGRAM IN
EMPOWERING WOMEN IN MOROCCO: A STUDY OF
ACTIVISTS' PERCEPTIONS IN TWO CIVIL SOCIETY
ORGANIZATIONS**

MA THESIS

Rim BRAHIMI

Istanbul

July-2025

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Istanbul
July-2025

This study has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for MA Degree in Political Science and International Relations

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DECLARATION OF SCIENTIFIC ETHICS AND ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that this MA thesis dissertation titled “The Role of Digital Activism on Instagram in Empowering Women in Morocco: A Study of Activists’ Perceptions in Two Civil Society Organizations” is my own work and I have acted according to scientific ethics and academic rules while producing it. I have collected and used all information and data according to scientific ethics and guidelines on thesis writing of Sabahattin Zaim University. I have fully referenced, in both the text and bibliography, all direct and indirect quotations and all sources I have used in this work.



Rim Brahimi

Istanbul, July 2025

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Rim Brahim

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF DIGITAL ACTIVISM ON INSTAGRAM IN EMPOWERING WOMEN IN MOROCCO: A STUDY OF ACTIVISTS' PERCEPTIONS IN TWO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

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The thesis examines how feminist activists in Morocco integrate Instagram in their daily life professionally. The thesis is based on interviews with activists who represent two civil society organizations either currently or in the past. The goal is to understand how they see the platform, how they interact with it and use it, as well as what problems they face while doing so. It looks at how the stories are shared, connections made, and how awareness is raised through posts, stories, and videos. It also explains how activists deal with the very real limitations that come with being a part of the digital world such as censorship, shadow banning, and online hate. The study also looks at how online and offline activism are connected. It shows that both are needed, and that activists often move between them. As a result, this research shows how feminist Moroccan activists perceive the possibilities and limitations of Instagram for digital activism.

Key terms: Digital Activism, Women's Movements in Morocco, Moroccan Civil Society, Online Gender Advocacy, North African Feminist Movements.

ÖZET

FAS'TA KADINLARIN GÜÇLENDİRİLMESİNDE INSTAGRAM'DA DİJİTAL AKTİVİZMİN ROLÜ: İKİ SİVİL TOPLUM KURULUŞUNDAKİ AKTİVİSTLERİN ALGILARI ÜZERİNE BİR İNCELEME

Rim BRAHIMI

Yüksek Lisans, Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler

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Bu tez, Fas'taki feminist aktivistlerin Instagram'ı günlük yaşamlarına profesyonel olarak nasıl entegre ettiklerini incelemektedir. Tez iki sivil toplum kuruluşunu şu anda veya geçmişte temsil eden aktivistlerle yapılan mülakatlara dayanıyor. Burada amaç, Instagram'ı nasıl gördüklerini, onunla nasıl etkileşim kurduklarını ve nasıl kullandıklarını ve bunu yaparken hangi sorunlarla karşılaştıklarını anlamaktır. Çalışma hikayelerin nasıl paylaşıldığını, bağlantıların nasıl kurulduğunu ve gönderiler, hikayeler ve videolar aracılığıyla farkındalığın nasıl artırıldığını inceliyor. Ayrıca, aktivistlerin sansür, habersiz kısıtlama ve çevrimiçi nefret gibi dijital dünyanın bir parçası olmanın getirdiği gerçek sınırlamalarla nasıl başa çıktıklarını da açıklıyor. Çalışma ayrıca çevrimiçi ve çevrimdışı aktivizmin nasıl bağlantılı olduğunu da inceliyor. Her ikisine de ihtiyaç duyulduğunu ve aktivistlerin sıklıkla ikisi arasında geçiş yaptığını gösteriyor. Sonuç olarak, bu araştırma Faslı feminist aktivistlerin Instagram'ın dijital aktivizm için imkanlarını ve kısıtlılıklarını nasıl algıladıklarını gösteriyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Aktivizm, Fas'ta Kadın Hareketleri, Fas Sivil Toplumunu, Çevrimiçi Toplumsal Cinsiyet Savunuculuğu, Kuzey Afrika Feminist Hareketleri.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADFM:	Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (Democratic Association of Women of Morocco)
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
LGBTQ:	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organizations
USA:	United States of America
USSR:	Union Of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO:	World Trade Organization



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As it is known this day and age, the very integration of digital technologies into daily life has also led to the transformation of social movements and rights-based struggles. How? To simply dissect this, social media platforms in particular stand out as clear as day as new public spaces where individuals and communities can make their voices heard. In this context though when it comes to the digital world and social media, Instagram has become an important medium where both individual narratives and collective campaigns circulate thanks to its visual structure and all of the opportunities to interact. Women's rights advocacy has also been affected by this digital transformation, even more so as the struggle against gender inequalities gained visibility in the digital sphere, and new actors and narratives have emerged.

This visibility, however, though great and empowering, is not without complexity. The digital space, while offering opportunities for empowerment and expression, also introduces new forms of exclusion, surveillance, and algorithmic bias. Especially in socio-political contexts where traditional gender roles are deeply embedded, such as in Morocco, the digital sphere becomes a contested terrain, both enabling and constraining women's rights advocacy. Social media platforms like Instagram specifically, seeing that their formats are both accessible and interactive, provide women with tools to challenge dominant narratives, share personal experiences, and build transnational solidarities. Yet at the same time, they expose activists to new forms of digital violence, censorship, and platform-based invisibility.

On the other hand and against this backdrop, this research hopes to explore how Moroccan feminist actors actually engage with the active body of Instagram as a tool for advocacy and resistance. It wants to understand how women navigate the possibilities and limitations of digital activism within a difficult hybrid socio-cultural environment marked by both patriarchal norms and ongoing modernization. This is done through in-depth interviews with feminist digital actors, so through that, the study analyzes the strategies, challenges, and transformative potentials embedded in their online practices.

This thesis to put it simply examines Morocco, a place where modernity and tradition coexist together, to elucidate the intersection between digital technology and gendered power dynamics. It further enhances the expanding corpus of writing on digital feminism by contextualizing local activism within global narratives of rights, resistance, and visibility.

1.1. Purpose of the Research

The aim of this study here is to specifically examine Moroccan activists carry out advocacy for women's rights and issues via Instagram as well as revealing the potential and limitations of the digital sphere in empowering women. Morocco's socio-political structure, which witnesses both traditional norms and modernization processes at the same time, offers a unique ground for analyzing digital feminist practices. In particular, the increasing use of social media platforms by women's organizations and individual feminist actors in Morocco in recent years has created a remarkable context for discussing the role of digital activism in gender struggle.

Within this framework, the aim of the study is to analyze in a holistic way how digital feminist actors have transformed Instagram into an advocacy area and what opportunities and risks the digital sphere holds for women. The qualitative research method was adopted in the study; Instagram campaigns, challenges encountered, strategic usage patterns and gender-based struggles in the digital sphere were examined through in-depth interviews with feminist digital actors.

In this context, the sub-objectives of the research are as follows:

- Understanding how feminist actors in Morocco use Instagram and how they transform the digital space into a medium of resistance and visibility,
- Analysing the new risks posed by digitalisation – such as digital violence, censorship, algorithmic invisibility,
- Revealing the practices and strategies that enable women to be empowered in the digital space.

This study aims to contribute to the literature on digital feminism, not only in the Moroccan context but also on a broader scale; and to question how digital spaces can be made functional in the fight against gender-based inequalities.

1.2. Importance of the Research

Today, digital technologies play an important role in increasing the visibility of social issues and encouraging participation in public debates. Social media platforms, especially user-friendly and visually-oriented platforms such as Instagram, enable individuals and groups to convey their voices to wider audiences; in this respect, the concept of digital activism is gaining more and more importance. In this context, the study titled “The Role of Digital Activism on Instagram in Empowering Women in Morocco: A Study of Activists’ Perceptions in Two Civil Society Organizations” aims to fill an important gap both academically and practically by examining the effects of digital platforms on the social visibility, rights demands and empowerment processes of women in Morocco.

In a country like Morocco, where traditional social structures and gender roles are still strongly influential, the presence of women in digital spaces and the ways they use these spaces as a means of struggle are remarkable both locally and globally. Therefore, the findings presented by the study not only reveal how women in Morocco are empowered through social media, but also how digital activism transforms the spaces where authority is negotiated, public discourse is transformed, and new forms of women's rights advocacy are brought to the table.

In addition, this research examines how digital activism can be institutionalized through civil society organizations and how these institutions create an advocacy network with digital strategies. The effectiveness of digital tools used by civil society to raise their voices, the dissemination of activist discourses, and the analysis of the obstacles they face provide valuable insights in terms of both media studies and gender studies. In this respect, the study is an important reference point for researchers, policy makers, and activists who want to understand women's collective action practices, digital narratives, and methods of combating digital inequalities in the digitalizing world.

1.3. Scope and Limitations of the Research

Considering the impossibility of conducting research with the research universe and time and space constraints, it was deemed necessary and natural to impose limitations on the research. For this reason, 2 civil society organizations (individuals representing

the institutions) were interviewed within the scope of the research. Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM) and Politics4Her. These ones were specifically selected because they are very active on Instagram, and it is one of the main tools they utilize in raising awareness regarding women's rights and issues. Not only that, but they also had the biggest numbers in terms of reach and followers than other organizations.

Their Instagram handles are: @adfmrabat, @politics4Her

Another limitation of the research is the assumption that the individuals and institutions (individuals representing the institutions) reached between December 2024 and April 2025 will express their true thoughts and not use misleading expressions during the interview.

1.4. Sample of the Research

NGO officials interviewed for the research;

Asmae Aboulfaraj: Aboulfaraj is a program coordinator and regional manager working on women's rights, advocacy and capacity building initiatives at the Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM) in partnership with the Women's Learning Partnership (WLP). She coordinates capacity building programs through workshops and training sessions focused on leadership, women's rights, democracy, intergenerational activism and coalition work. Asmae is committed to empowering communities, promoting equality and integrating the perspectives of youth and marginalized groups into the initiatives she leads.

Walae Kasmi: Kasmi is the former Co-Director of the Policy and Advocacy Committee at Politics4Her. She has focused on digital activism in the SWANA Region, particularly in Morocco. She is currently the European Project Manager, leading initiatives on women's empowerment and combating digital disinformation. She conducts independent research on gender and migration.

Soukaina Moutaouakkil: Moutaouakkil is an international legal researcher specializing in the Euro-Mediterranean region. At ADFM, she works on human rights, social movements and press freedom. It collaborates with international organizations on advocacy and communication projects.

Amal Ouachou: Ouachou is the Regional Liaison Co-Director at Politics4Her, a researcher and a global health advocate.

1.5. Research Method

A qualitative research method was adopted in this study. The study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with NGO officials determined by the researcher. In this interview approach, a form is prepared to ensure that the interview covers all the questions intended to be examined. Apart from this, the researcher can enrich the interview with additional questions. (Yıldırım, Şimşek, 2016: 128-130).

1.5.1. Data Collection Tool

The questions asked to the participants are as follows;

1. How does your organization use Instagram to advocate for women's rights?
2. What strategies have you found most effective in raising awareness about women's rights on Instagram?
3. How effective have your campaigns been in reaching your target audience on Instagram? What are your measures of success?
4. Is digital activism more effective or limiting than your field work? How do you assess the real-world impact of activism on social media?
5. How do you assess the impact of algorithms on Instagram on the visibility of content related to women's rights?
6. What are the main challenges you face on the platform? For example, how do you deal with issues such as censorship, harassment, or the spread of misinformation?
7. Have you observed that accounts that advocate for women's rights face more pressure in male-dominated digital environments?
8. Is there an Instagram campaign that has had the most impact or success? Can you tell us about it?
9. How do you think Instagram and similar platforms can provide more support so that women can have a stronger voice in the digital world?
10. What developments would you like to see in the future regarding women's rights activism on Instagram?

1.6. Literature Review

Individuals and communities now have access to platforms that allow them to voice their concerns, question cultural norms, and campaign for equality thanks to the rise of digital activism, which has emerged as a potent weapon for bringing about social change. The purpose of this literature review is to investigate the role that digital activism, plays in enhancing the effectiveness of women's rights campaigns in Morocco.

When explaining it with disregard to any other variables, digital activism simply means the use of digital tools available, mainly social media, to either support, promote, or to even organize change across various contexts. Joyce (2010) thinks its inclusivity is broad, as it includes something as straightforward as a hashtag, but also full-on online protests. All the while, scholars like Earl and Kimport (2011) argue that digital activism challenges traditional ideas of what activism looks like, since it is often leaderless, informal, and fast. It's less about big organizations and more about individual voices coming together online. This is especially important in restrictive or patriarchal societies, where speaking out in public may not be possible.

This study aims to provide a complete overview of the possibilities and problems of using a platform like Instagram for the promotion of women's rights, and, taking Morocco as the location of this study, it evaluates various studies on related themes such as women's rights activism, social media activism and digital feminism. Below, relevant studies from different parts of the world are reviewed for reference in our study.

Inequality between the sexes, discrimination, and restricted access to rights and opportunities for women are pervasive problems in Morocco, as they are in many other nations. Like many other spots in the world, Morocco is no exception for this unfortunately. The historical context at hand here of women's rights advocacy in Morocco highlights the very prominent need of pursuing digital pathways that might lead to the empowerment of women in that country. Numerous studies (Bennani, 2012; Karayel, 2019; Sordellini, 2010; Kelly and Breslin, 2010) have been able to provide light on the unique issues that women in Morocco experience and underline the significance of advocacy, awareness, and legislative reforms to overcome these gender gaps. These studies also highlight the distinct challenges that women face in Morocco

for simply being women, and with that comes the burden of having almost little to no voice to advocate for one's personal rights and freedoms.

Digital activism is not simply just a technological phenomenon that is happening around the world but it also needs to be -not just looked at- understood as a great socio-political evolution of activism, because the levels in which it roots for a cause are far beyond being stuck in one box; be it political, social, religious, or financial. It is a system rooted in the transformation of public spheres, and this is how digital activism redefines participation, visibility, and mobilization. Castells (2009), says that the internet works like a place where people both make and share meaning, a meaning-making vessel, similar to a digital melting pot. Tufekci (2017) on the other hand points out that even though online protests are quite quick and flexible, they are also a bit shaky, which remains one of the faults that digital activism harbors.

In Morocco, there exists a considerable gap or disparity between what is on paper regarding women's rights and their actual experiences in reality. This gap is exactly where digital platforms can engage, not by supplanting field action, but by establishing and creating new channels for women to articulate experiences that are frequently muted offline. These structural disparities that are shown, are not simply legal or institutional; they are deeply ingrained in the daily life, encompassing public areas and digital expression. Instagram, through its visual and interactive style, provides a culturally aware, as well as sophisticated means to articulate dissent without explicitly challenging institutions in manners that may require legal or societal repercussions.

At the same time, internet activism has grown to be a major force around the globe, offering a space for underrepresented voices to be heard and allowing collective action in and out. Instagram is only one example of the rise in importance of social media platforms as key locations for political and social engagement. For that, a study investigating social media activism in a variety of settings, such as the research carried out by Mary Joyce (2010) show how social media platforms such as Instagram may be used to increase awareness, facilitate relationships, and bring about positive social change.

Although worldwide case studies demonstrate the adaptability of platforms such as Instagram, Morocco's digital landscape requires understanding within its distinct sociopolitical context. Access to internet tools is ever so expanding; but, societal

conventions about gender and public expression remain traditional. As a consequence, Moroccan feminist activists utilize Instagram not merely for expression, but to negotiate visibility, balancing the delicate boundary between activism and societal acceptability.

These instances alone provide great insight on the potentially revolutionary nature of Instagram as a venue for digital activism in Morocco, revolutionary in the sense that it is flexible in every meaning this term holds. The attempt of digital activism on Instagram allows for flexibility in different ways. For one it makes the world so much smaller because those rooting for the same cause do not have to be in the same spot of the world. It's flexible in terms of planning, and in terms of resources available too. That is what makes it revolutionary.

To jump on the same conclusion, the #RIPamina campaign in Morocco has shown that law reform can be changed when digital narratives align with overarching societal ideals such as justice and protection. This is very different than Western movements that frequently emphasize autonomy or identity politics, Moroccan feminist action in Morocco instead typically highlight challenges through the lenses of family, morality, or honor, strategically harmonizing with traditional norms while simultaneously contesting patriarchal legislation.

In a study done, Ghoreishi (2018) argued that the #MyStealthyFreedom movement, that appeared as a reaction to the issue of compulsory headscarf for women in Iran, created a conscious cyber citizenship. According to her, it has become a space of appearance for women in Iran, and the voices of Iranian women have been heard not only by feminists and activists in Iran but also by people in many parts of the world.

Following that, in 2018, Yasmeen Mjalli and her followers started a hashtag named #NotYourHabibti to combat sexual harassment in Palestine, attracted great attention, and BabyFist Denim, a clothing brand that produces denim jackets and t-shirts, used #NotYourHabibti to promote it. BabyFist Denim has then later on grown into an international community organization that aims to “promote open and honest conversation and challenge the oppressive sexist structures of society wherever it occurs” (Harod, 2019). These examples demonstrate how women's voices may be amplified through digital activism, notably through Instagram and the smart use of hashtags.

Islam (2019) examined the #YourAverageMuslim movement, which Muslim women created to destroy negative narratives about themselves on social media platforms. In the study of Islam, she emphasized that Muslim women demonstrated their ability to represent themselves, taking control of their representation and speaking for themselves rather than being spoken to by others.

Digital activism is a rising trend not only in Morocco but also in the Arab world in general. During the Arab Spring, it was observed that women, especially in Egypt and Tunisia, mobilized through social media, organized online campaigns and made their voices heard in the digital sphere against the male-dominated structure. The Arab Spring represented a pivotal moment in the manner in which women around the region asserted their presence in digital spaces, however the advancements were inconsistent. In numerous instances, digital empowerment failed to convert into institutional authority. (Al-Rawi, 2014)

Nonetheless, the revolutions bequeathed a digital legacy, a generation of women more familiar with online political expression. In Morocco, despite the protest movement being more subdued, the recollection of this regional transformation has shaped the manner in which younger women utilize social media, particularly Instagram, to confront quotidian sexism and promote change with growing assurance. Newsom and Lengel (2012) conducted a study analyzing the online participation of Arab feminist activism during the citizen revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, and specifically women's use of online social networks to aid social change. Newsom and Lengel emphasized that Tunisian and Egyptian women's voices resonate more strongly online, but this echo remains within the venues.

Amezoirou (2024), in his study titled “The New Media and the Empowerment of Moroccan Women”, shows that Moroccan women have taken a step forward to empower themselves by using the latest developing technologies and social media such as the internet, blogging and networking, so that they can avoid any of the fields that are said to be male-dominated. They said that they were able to express their interests and concerns more without feeling afraid.

Instagram has a distinct function in this empowering process by providing a non-confrontational approach to activism. In contrast to conventional protests or explicitly political media such as Twitter, Instagram facilitates expression through storytelling,

aesthetics, and curated narratives. For Moroccan women, this entails participating in political discourse without explicitly designating it as such, a vital tactic in a setting where overt engagement may still entail social and personal repercussions.

Turanlı and Tahiry (2022) examined the Afghanistan women's movement #Myredline movement. When the findings obtained from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of social media posts about the #MyRedLine movement using the content analysis method were evaluated, it was seen that the movement received a significant amount of support throughout Afghanistan and that this support came not only from women but also from men. According to Turanlı and Tahiry, one of the most important conditions for the effectiveness of e-digital activism is freedom of access to the internet. In Afghanistan, which is an underdeveloped country in terms of democracy culture, it can be said that the number of users is quantitatively significant. Jaflah (2022) conducted a study in the Kingdom of Bahrain and found that social media platforms – except Snapchat and YouTube – generally have a positive impact on women's empowerment.

Gedik (2020) examined young people's digital activism experiences under the title of digital feminism in the world and in Turkey. The study found that young women follow feminist and women's content in digital environments and share them when they see fit. Although male interviewees thought that such platforms spread “male hostility” and harm society, they agreed that they created a new type of struggle for women and that they could reach the masses about women's issues.

Jouet (2018), in his study "Digital feminism" conducted in France questioned the renewal of activism. The result of the study; young activists specialize in producing visual narratives (images, videos, etc.), using unconventional repertoires of action (humor, satire, etc.) and networking. They organize events and campaigns that have a wide public impact and lead to a form of performance activism mediated by digital media. Connectivity expands the audience and contributes to the creation of virtual communities. However, according to Jouet, the high visibility of digital feminism is leading to the rise of violent cybersexism.

Bernardini (2021) examined the #MeToo movement, a social media campaign that started in October 2017 with the aim of combating sexual violence. He conducted a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the #MeToo movement, described as “a

watershed moment in sexual violence activism,” by examining a dataset of more than 2 million tweets. As a result, Bernardini argues, a theme of backlash continually emerges as the social changes suggested by #MeToo are met with resistance by those with more conservative views on gender and sexuality. In this sense, #MeToo has been interpreted as the expression of a broader struggle between “popular feminism” and “popular misogyny” that is key to understanding the gender politics of our age.

There are researchers who emphasize the negative aspects of digital activism as well as its positive aspects. McCafferty, (2011) said, “Ultimately, activism has always been and always will be about people, people showing up in person,” and noted that digital media cannot replace many real-world activities. Bimber (2001) conducted a study that found that increased communication capacity in the digital environment does not necessarily mean increased political participation. According to Bimber, individuals who are informed in the digital environment or who are not informed at all cannot act as bravely as traditional activists in taking action on the streets, even if they agree on a certain issue; This passive attitude, over time, breaks the motivation of real activists who actively struggle in the field and creates a deterrent effect on them from taking action.

These studies reveal that digital activism functions not only as a communication medium but also as a platform for identity building and negotiation, particularly for women in transitional cultures like as Morocco. It is insufficient to inquire if platforms such as Instagram effectively facilitate empowerment; we must examine its utilization, identify those who are marginalized, and consider the types of resistance they incite. The prominent rise of this digital presence when it comes to Moroccan women signifies not only technological advancement but also a great transformation in the perception, contestation, and redefinition of public gender norms.

Overall, these readings show the world the very transformative power of digital activism on Instagram, its promise to empower women in Morocco and the other countries mentioned above, as well as the importance of overcoming limitations to achieve lasting development. However, even though digital activism has been dissected in different ways in the global context, when it comes to the academic focus on how Moroccan women navigate a powerful platform like Instagram while balancing that with all the hurdles they face such as conservatism and digital openness,

the lack thereof is clear. The existing literature does not focus on Morocco specifically as much as it focuses on MENA regions and the Arab Spring, so that space remains scarce. That is why this study's aim is to help close that gap through focusing more specifically on the strategies, challenges, and localized adaptations Moroccan feminist actors employ in their digital advocacy for women or in general.



CHAPTER II

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND WOMEN'S ACTIVISM

Social movements have been one of the most dynamic elements of change and transformation in the historical processes of societies. These movements are shaped by the collective actions of individuals and groups in order to draw attention to social problems, question the existing order and produce alternative solutions. The struggle for women's rights has a special place among social movements and has manifested itself in various forms in different periods throughout history. In this section, first the general definition and historical development of social movements will be discussed, then the basic characteristics of social movements will be emphasized. Finally, how these movements are shaped and what kind of dynamics they contain will be examined in terms of women's activism.

This chapter basically explores the conceptual and historical development of social movements, focusing mainly on how they have evolved in response to political, economic, and cultural transformations. The analysis at hand here starts with giving a simple definition and key characteristics of social movements, then continues with the distinction between old and new social movements, and examines their various forms and global examples. The special focus here would be put on the relationship between social movements and women's activism, following up with the evolution of feminist mobilization given the different feminism waves. Through providing this theoretical and historical background, the chapter sets the stage for understanding the role of digital activism within broader struggles for gender equality.

2.1. The Concept of Social Movement

Throughout history, acts of resistance, rebellion, and opposition have consistently emerged as responses to injustice, inequality, and marginalization. From minor insurrections to significant political revolts, these events embody a profound human instinct to challenge systems of authority when they become oppressive or exclusive. Over time, these individual and communal acts of disobedience have transformed into more structured and ideologically motivated forms, which scholars today categorize as "social movements." This growth signifies a transformation not only in strategies

but also in awareness, where protest integrates into a sustained struggle rooted in collective identity and intent.

Social movements are typically characterized as collective acts undertaken by individuals or organizations with shared interests, collaborating to contest prevailing institutions, cultural norms, or authorities. (Tarrow, 2011:133) posits that they encompass “collective actions initiated by individuals sharing common objectives and aligned with elites, authorities, other groups, or cultural codes, engaging in continuous interaction with elites, other groups, and various elements”. The distinction between a social movement and an isolated protest lies in the aspect of continuous engagement and strategic mobilization. Social movements are not impulsive outbursts; they are intentional, sustained endeavors aimed at transforming public discourse, legislation, or cultural standards.

The notion of social movements emerged in the 18th century, especially during and following the French Revolution, which signified a pivotal shift in the understanding and execution of collective political participation. (Tilly, 2008:30) observes that during this century, movements commenced the adoption of formal organizational structures, ideological foundations, and more defined objectives. These advancements enabled movements to synchronize activities across temporal and spatial dimensions, impacting not only local communities but also national and international policies. The industrial and political revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries established the foundation for comprehending collective struggle as a fundamental aspect of societal growth.

Saint Simon was the first to use the concept of ‘social movement’. It is a concept he used to describe ordinary protests that developed in France and later in other countries (Yanık and Öztürk, 2015:1003). Over time, the scope of the concept of ‘social movement’ has expanded and different discourses have emerged.

The phrase "social movement" was initially introduced by Saint-Simon to characterize what were regarded as localized and chaotic protests in France. According to Yanık and Öztürk (2015), Saint-Simon employed the term to characterize nascent public resistance not merely as chaotic spontaneity, but as indicative of profound social transformation. This nomenclature has progressively broadened in both scope and application. Social movements are seen as essential forces that define alternative

societal visions, generate counter-narratives to prevailing ideologies, and offer marginalized communities a platform for visibility and expression.

A social movement fundamentally emerges from a shared acknowledgment that the existing conditions fail to meet the needs or values of a particular group. These movements represent the societal and emotional reaction to the unfulfilled demand for change. A social movement necessitates a distinct purpose or focus, such as legal reform, cultural representation, or structural alteration. This concentration connects individuals around a shared purpose and sustains their efforts. In the absence of a central demand or collective grievance, maintaining persistent mobilization proves challenging. Consequently, the presence of a movement signifies not only dissatisfaction but also a dedication to conceptualizing and implementing an alternative future.

It is possible to characterize social movements with three basic elements. First, it is necessary to gather and be together against a disturbing situation, in other words, to ensure a unity of identity. In addition, there must be an opposing view, and thirdly, there must be a social goal (Castells, 2008:382). If these qualities are present, a social movement can be mentioned.

Social movements have taken their place in our lives as a modern phenomenon. In the modern world, they are a series of movements that entered our lives especially with the Industrial Revolution, developed over time and came to the fore with different dimensions in new media.

In societies where processes such as modernization, urbanization, industrialization and globalization are experienced intensively, radical changes and transformations occur. Therefore, important differentiations occur in the social structure with this change. The scope, subject and actors of social movements have also changed accordingly.

The historical evolution of what is currently termed "social movements" can be broadly categorized into two separate phases: **old social movements** and **new social movements**. This classification aids scholars in tracking the evolution of the objectives, frameworks, and members of movements in relation to fluctuating social, economic, and political circumstances. Most historical social movements, especially the ones that take place from the 18th to the mid-20th century, were mainly aimed

towards class conflicts, labor rights, and economic equity. These movements were typically hierarchical, structured through unions or political parties, and tried to achieve material enhancements through systemic reform. Opposite to that, the new social movements that emerged after the 1960s took away that attention and instead redirected it from solely economic concerns to matters of identity, culture, and representation. These initiatives are all for gender equality, environmental justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and racial justice. This slight shift from traditional to contemporary shows not merely a transformation in content but also in organizational methodologies, which means moving away from centralized authority to decentralized, networked action that flourishes in both physical and digital realms. Comprehending and truly understanding this historical transformation to see it for what it is, is crucial for examining modern digital feminist movements, particularly those emerging in situations such as Morocco.

2.2. History of Social Movements

Understanding the history of social movements for one, is very essential for contextualizing this study, because what it does is help establish the intellectual and strategic groundwork from which contemporary digital activism has developed. Social movements have historically served as instruments for marginalized communities to confront prevailing structures and advocate for justice, to allow their voices to be heard. Through examining these movements' evolution, a deeply important transformation in the mobilization and expression of collective action can be seen. These historical patterns highlight the very reasons for the success of specific techniques, the adaptability of movements under pressure, and the types of resistance that resonate with the public. Had this historical context been absent from this analysis, digital activism may be erroneously perceived as a mere fad or isolated occurrence, rather than an extension of a longstanding history of grassroots resistance modified to align with contemporary technology and social dynamics.

This thesis at hand, which looks into the feminist activism on Instagram in Morocco, uses the history of social movements under one umbrella. This umbrella includes both, an analytical framework and a standard for creativity. It illustrates how previous feminist endeavors were limited by physical, cultural, and institutional obstacles, and how those same obstacles are currently being reinterpreted and challenged through

digital technologies. The transition from the "old" to "new" social movements very clearly shows the growing significance of identity, narrative, and decentralized engagement with the causes, all of which are fundamental to digital feminism. Because it contextualizes Instagram activism within this extensive genealogy, the study demonstrates that contemporary Moroccan feminists are not functioning outside of history, but are instead changing it by altering the modalities and venues of advocacy. This continuity asserts that although the instruments may evolve, the struggle, and the essence of collective resistance, persists firmly anchored in historical precedent.

In the 19th century, positivist philosophy, which was led by natural philosophy and commented on by enlightenment, brought a different perspective to the view of man and society. With the emergence of social thought, materialist thought structure and finally modernization in the West, the attitude, behavior and mentality of people have developed (Şimşek, 2011:51). The first person that modernization put on the podium is the individual. The individual who entered the circle of modernization within the scope of social change has received his share of the change. The first concept that comes to mind when social change is mentioned is modernity. According to Giddens (1991), modernity includes the social institutions and behavior patterns that changed with the Industrial Revolution in the West. Modernization is the name given to the social change process that started with industrialization and made its weight felt worldwide in the 20th century. Globalization, which has left its mark on the era, is essentially a phenomenon of social change. One dimension of modernity is industrialization, the other is capitalism. The founders of sociology focused on Western society, compared it with other societies and classified it according to their development levels. The desire that societies with a high level of development could reach a more prosperous society was strengthened (Akpınar, 2014:3-15).

It is an undeniable fact that there are some basic historical, social, cultural, economic and political values in the background of modernity. These values feed many ideologies and understandings within themselves with concepts such as movement, change, speed, enlightenment philosophy, rationality and modern individual. Social Movements have prepared a ground for themselves in the shadow of modernity's values such as change, speed, rationalization and progress. While modernity, with its creative destruction act, managed societies as prosperity and wealth on the one hand,

it also destroyed more than it did, causing problems such as poverty, migration, social disorder and individual unrest. The collective experiences of the tensions created by these manifestations have led to the emergence of social movements (Kurtbaşı, 2017:142). The feeling of loneliness that comes with modernization pushes people to join groups that support certain ideas. The first bricks of social movements were laid by the phenomena shaped within the positive and negative framework brought about by modernization. Although the development of technology, the increase in communication opportunities and the developments in the field of transportation attracted people by offering many conveniences and innovations; negative issues such as loneliness, inequality in income distribution and alienation have prepared the ground for social movements to which individuals can convey their complaints. The dynamics of social movements and industrial society were primarily prepared by the renaissance, reform, enlightenment thought and industrialization (Dede, 2018:25).

It is claimed that the history of social movements started at the same level as the history of humanity. The way in which the society expresses this discontent and expresses its desires as a result of inequality, injustice and unmet social needs within the society is social movements (Şentürk, 2006:33).

If the relationships, interactions and common goals between individuals in a society are gathered under a single roof, social movements become possible to that extent. Social movements are based on interpersonal interaction. The quality and frequency of interaction are the pillars of social movements. Keeping these pillars standing is the ability to bring together knowledge, experience and expectations and to jointly own the results they reach as a result of the interaction and the building they obtain (Uyar, 2003:136-137). The first aim of social movements is to draw a sketch for the restless crowd that has no direction.

Social movements have already emerged as a reaction to tension, modernization and economic crisis (Çayır, 1999:7). Small communities can make their voices heard through social movements. With the interaction between individuals, a single voice turns into a plurality and as many people as possible can be reached. Modern social movements, until the beginning of the 1990s, took place in two types of movements: first and second wave, old-new movements, classical and new social movements.

According to the change and transformation of social movements over time; they are classified as old social movements and new social movements.

2.2.1. Old Social Movements

The conceptualization referred to as social or social movements in the literature is located in the process of the late 18th century and early 19th century. The classification of “old” or “new” is related to the change in collective behaviors that emerged under the influence of developing social and economic conditions. All kinds of social movements such as resistance, uprising, etc. that appeared before the 1970s are called old social movements (Demirođlu, 2014:134-135).

Old social movements consist of “class” and “nationalist” movements that emerged in the 19th century, and are compatible with the fact that industrial capitalism and the mode of production of social relations and contradictions emerged on a global scale. Both types of movements have different goals and conditions of realization, but they can be evaluated as the same type of social movement in terms of their characteristics (Çımrın, 2010:50).

Movements in the early periods of modernity are groups organized by members of a single social class that focused on economic interests to seize political power. These are best exemplified by labor movements that take shape under the shadow of a political party and are called “old” to imply that such movements belong to the industrial society type. New social movements, like the old ones, are not independent of the context from which they originate (Çayır, 2016:14).

It is often said that old social movements emerge spontaneously when pressure increases, expectations are disappointed, or the power of the government is shaken. This characteristic exhibited by old social movements has always led the social science literature to associate such social phenomena with periods of crisis, depression, and structural tension (Çayır, 2016:14).

Socialists are among those who tried to establish labor movements, which are the first representatives of old social movements. The starting point of labor movements or old social movements is the organizations formed against the inequalities in the society towards the power. Old social movements consisting of class and nationalist

movements generally include economic and political based issues such as economic growth and security of the society.

2.2.2. New Social Movements

In the 21st century, with the emergence of environments where thoughts and ideas are freely expressed, technological developments where citizens have the power to create their own media, mass movements that were previously described as popular uprisings continue to exist as social movements in the new world order. New social movements are described as actions that are directed at civil society rather than the state and are expressions of universal issues. The time when new social movements emerged is interpreted differently by sociologists. According to Offe, the relative prosperity brought by social democracy in Europe in the 70s, the rise in educational opportunities and the increase in employment in the service sector paved the way for the emergence of new social movements (Lelandais, 2009:64).

New social movements, especially the social-opposition movements that emerged in the late 1960s, are used to mobilize contradictions and conflicts in different layers of the social structure and to emphasize the problems, solutions and demands of these areas. The most important feature of defining new social movements as “new” is that they focus on more fragmented and specific issues compared to traditional mass movements. The differences between the “old” and “new” movements are not limited to interests and claims. The forms of organization, action and discourse of these movements also have a structure that differentiates them from previous mass movements. In other words, the differences between these two types of movements are not only related to the goals or demands they defend, but also to how these movements are organized, what methods they use and what discourses they adopt. While old social movements are generally class-based, focused on economic interests and have a centralized organizational structure, new social movements are interested in issues that spread to more cultural and social areas such as the environment, women’s rights, peace and identity politics. In addition, new movements adopt non-hierarchical, horizontal forms of organization and allow more space for participation, individual identity and differences. Forms of action also go beyond classical protests and include various methods such as media campaigns, artistic performances or digital activism. In these aspects, not only the demands but also the entire functioning of the movement

has changed (Sarimer, 2014:58). New social movements have emerged, especially with the weakening of the working class, which is described as class struggle, and the impact of globalization spreading all over the world.

With the actions and student movements that took place in 1968, the influence of Marxist theories decreased and social movements came to a turning point. The aims of social movements to transform society in this period ended and, in Touraine's words, this situation was also the funeral march of the labor movement. Labor movements have now lost their central role in social movements and have given way to new social movements. Touraine places new social movements in his post-industrial society paradigm and post-industrial society points to a new type of society with a new power center (Touraine, 2016:266).

The concept of new social movements can be defined as the decrease in labor movements and the social transformation experienced after the 1970s and the new movements created by the capitalist economic order, such as student, women, environmental movements and political organizations.

The emergence of new social movements is often associated with globalization and the changes in the political and social sphere it has created. The changes towards flexible production, where product variety is increased and production time is shortened, also affected the working class due to the impact of new technological developments. Class conflicts gave way to new social conflicts that emerged around environmentalism, peace and women's issues (Coşkun, 2007:108-109).

Another reason is the rapid growth of the service sector and the threat this growth poses to the manufacturing sector. For this reason, workers in the industrial and manufacturing sectors have begun to lose power. This situation, which can be called the defeat of the working class, has caused technological developments to create new classes and social problems within the capitalist system. According to Çoban, who defines new social movements as movements that temporarily fill the gap left by the class movement in the 1970s, the rejection of class struggle is the basic proposition of new social movement theorists (Çoban, 2009:31).

According to Coşkun, new social movements have been used to express primarily feminist movements, ecological movements, anti-nuclear movements, peace

movements and minority movements. The concept of “new” in this definition does not refer to a chronological order but to a point different from the “old” class-based and interest group-based movements (Coşkun, 2007:109).

There are differences in the actions and forms of organization in the worker and student uprisings in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Europe, and the women’s liberation movements, sexual freedom movements, the ecological-environmental movement and the peace movements in the early eighties. And the characteristics that make these movements “new” stem from both the quality of knowledge and the differences in social organization (Sanlı, 2003:55).

In the literature, new social movements are defined by using the word “modern” instead of the word “new”. According to Jackie Smith, modern social movements are collective actions against state authority as a result of the joint action of individual groups that generally emerge for political purposes (Smith, 2014).

As can be seen from the definitions, new social movements are movements that emerged as a result of the transition from industrial society to post-industrial society and are based on culture, identity, autonomy and peace movements, as opposed to the working class movements of the past based on class interests (Coşkun, 2007:109).

According to Johnston, Larana and Gusfield, who draw attention to the inadequacy of the theoretical framework, the main characteristics of new social movements are (Johnston, Larana & Gusfield, 1999:120):

- The emergence of new social movements is related to the crisis of confidence experienced in the traditional political participation channels of the West.
- New social movements do not focus on class structure, but on status elements such as age and gender.
- Ideologically, new social movements take a stance against the Marxist understanding, which is the unifying element of the working class movement for collective action.
- New social movements are acts of civil disobedience that use radical tactics such as sabotage and resistance, occurring as individual actions or within organized groups.

- New social movements have a perspective that advocates the coexistence of different ideas and values (pluralism). In other words, they do not focus solely on a single ideology or class; they have placed importance on the coexistence of different identities, views and social groups. In this way, they have contributed to the formation of a more democratic, participatory and inclusive environment not only in the field of politics or economics, but also in daily life practices.
- These movements help civil society to become stronger and have a greater say in social life. In other words, they pave the way for voluntary organizations (associations, foundations, activist groups, etc.) that are outside the state or the market to become more visible and effective. In this respect, they increase participation in society and encourage democracy to spread to all areas of daily life without reducing it to elections.

2.3. Characteristics of Social Movements

Social movements are always organized in a network form in terms of their general structure. The movements of groups can also differ depending on attitudes within and outside. Individuals take actions around a common goal, but the actions may end before reaching the appropriate level (Della Porta and Diani, 2012:50). In order for a movement to be accepted as a social movement, it must have certain characteristics. The common characteristics that a social movement should generally have are as follows (Kılıç, 2002:93):

1. **Natural Organization:** Social movements are dynamic groups in which individuals can express themselves in line with common goals, without a rigid hierarchy or a clearly defined organizational structure among their participants. In such movements, the identities and personal characteristics of individuals play an important role, while the organizational structure may differ according to the dynamics and goals of each group.
2. **Mobility:** Being in constant change, action and transformation is the basic characteristic of a social movement. This mobility gives social movements the flexibility to spread to different areas, attract new participants and adopt various forms of struggle, rather than just a fixed structure. In this respect,

mobility makes social movements more dynamic and multi-layered than other social formations.

3. Absolute Continuity: In order for a social movement to achieve its goal, it must show continuity.
4. A Symbolic Integration: A social movement should contain the feeling of “we”. This feeling of “we” reveals the common identity of the social movement.
5. Minimal Crossroads: Social movements do not have as complex and multi-layered structures as formal organizations, and therefore have fewer decision-making points (intersections) and a simpler structure. These movements are positioned somewhere between a fully institutionalized organization and a completely homogeneous (uniform) group. Compared to formal organizations, social movements have some differences in terms of the clarification of roles, clarity of tasks, and stability of decision-making processes. These structures are generally more flexible and participatory, which distinguishes them from classical forms of organization.
6. Purpose: Social movements emerge with the aim of changing, preventing or reducing the effects of a social event or situation. This desire for change usually becomes visible and mobilized through various actions such as protests, rallies and campaigns. Movements aim to create a social transformation by intervening in the current situation.
7. Acting as a Bridge: A social movement can inspire and guide other social movements with its own experiences, forms of struggle and discourse. In this way, it prepares the ground for the formation of new movements with different goals and acts as a bridge between these movements. In other words, the ideas and forms of action put forward by a movement can be decisive in the development of other movements. Sociologist Alain Touraine emphasizes that social conflicts are tools that arise from within society and have the potential to transform the social order. According to him, the cultural field of society is a system formed by social forces struggling with each other. These forces are shaped around different identities, interests and values and are in conflict and interaction. From this perspective, social movements wage a struggle not only against the state, but also against inequalities, injustices and cultural conflicts

between different segments of society. In other words, the target of movements can be not only state policies but also oppressive or exclusionary structures existing within society.

According to Touraine, a social movement should not be a private issue but a problem that concerns the whole society (Çayır, 1999:21). The main purpose of social movements is to influence problems and demands through various actions.

2.4. Forms of Social Movements

Social movements have emerged in various forms from the past to the present due to their structure. The foundation of old social movements is based on movements focused on economic and class values. In other words, they emerged to defend collective interests such as workers' rights, economic justice, and class struggle. These movements focused on changing economic inequalities rather than identity or cultural demands. Value-oriented movements are a type of collective behavior that questions the existence and legitimacy of the system determined by the current social structure, questions the entire system, and offers alternatives. The main target here is the functioning of the system or itself (Işık, 2015:3).

Value-oriented movements, which are divided into two as religious and secular, include nationalism, communism, idealism, socialism, anarchism, and syndicalism. In examples such as Christian socialism, which emerged in England in the 19th century, or the Harakat Islam Nationalist movement in Indonesia in the early 20th century, many belief systems contain both religious and secular elements (Türkdoğan, 2015:38).

However, many intellectual movements that have not reached the stage of social movement have not completed the necessary stages such as organizing, developing forms of action, or mobilizing large masses of people, despite having an ideological basis, and therefore have not been able to turn into an effective social movement. For example, some ideologies have remained only in the field of intellectual discussion and have not been able to develop a practical worldview that will provide mass support.

At this point, nationalism continues to exist as one of the most effective social practices, although it has not been able to develop a holistic social method (i.e., a

systematic action and organization strategy). Similarly, idealism, although it could not present a social movement method (i.e., a form of organization and action), has formed the intellectual basis of many social movements.

In contrast, anarchism has reached an independent level of ideological systematization, that is, it has developed a consistent worldview and understanding of organization. However, it has never fully realized the social revolution it envisioned. Socialist movements, on the other hand, generally adopt the values of communitarianism (a community-based understanding of society) and act in this direction.

Finally, socialism has gone beyond Marxism and dialectical or historical materialism and has become a social movement method that some worldviews have shaped with their own interpretations and tried to implement. However, the fundamental assumption of Marxism that the productive forces will change with the change in the means of production and that capitalism will evolve into socialism in this process has failed both theoretically and practically (Aktaş, 1996:48).

In general, issues such as nationalism, socialism, social movements, the structure and organization of political parties, totalitarian and communist movements, the seizure of power, divisions, the creation of a common will and public mobilization fall within the scope of intellectual methods (i.e., intellectual foundations and ideological approaches) (Türkdoğan, 2015:42). Such intellectual approaches constitute the intellectual infrastructure of social movements. However, having only an intellectual basis is not enough to make the movement permanent; these ideas must be transformed into action in order for the movement to maintain its vitality. In other words, an idea that does not take action cannot be effective in initiating change.

In this context, a relationship and balance must be established between intellectual methods (intellectual foundations) and action methods (practical applications). An original social movement method must definitely be nourished by an intellectual approach and this intellectual infrastructure must be supported by practical actions. Therefore, a healthy connection between thought and action is necessary for the success of social movements (Aktaş, 1989:29-30).

Social movement forms can be listed as follows in general (Kendall, 2012:552-554):

1. Reform Movements; are called movements that try to improve society by changing a certain aspect of the social structure.
2. Revolutionary Movements; are called movements that try to create a complete change in society. These movements do not try not to work within the current system and aim to re-establish the system by replacing existing institutions with new ones.
3. Religious Movements; Social movements that try to create radical change in individuals are typically based on spiritual and supernatural belief systems. Religious movements, also known as influencer movements, are interested in renewing people through internal change.
4. Alternative Movements; These are movements that aim to make a limited change in people's behavior.
5. Resistance Movements; Resistance movements, also known as regressive movements, are movements that try to prevent change or reverse the change that has already occurred.

There is no single answer to social movements, but it is possible to make a classification by considering examples. Examples of social movements include (Crossley, 2002:1):

1. Women's movement or feminism
2. Labor movement and trade union movements,
3. Fascist movements,
4. Anti-fascist, anti-racist movements,
5. Anti-psychiatry or survival movements with psychiatric problems,
6. Nationalist movements,
7. Solidarity movements,
8. Environmental or green movements,
9. Abortion-supporting or anti-abortion movements,
10. Animal rights movement,
11. Peace movements

Social movements generally interact on specific issues and thematic topics and want to get immediate answers to their demands (Emiroğlu, 2014:265). While social movement types are generally classified as reform, revolutionary, religious, alternative and resistance movements, in particular women, workers, fascist, nationalist, solidarity, environmentalist, abortion issues, animal rights, migration and peace movements can be counted as examples of social movements. In old social movements, there are themes that are reduced from the general to the specific in new social movements.

2.5. Examples of Social Movements from Around the World

Although this research primarily focuses on digital activism through Instagram in the context of women's empowerment in Morocco, the inclusion of a section on social movements is necessary to provide a broader theoretical foundation for understanding the dynamics of activism. Digital activism does not emerge in a vacuum; rather, it builds upon the ideological, organizational, and historical frameworks established by traditional social movements. By examining the evolution of social movements -from classical, class-based structures to fragmented, identity-based struggles-this section helps contextualize the transition of feminist advocacy into digital spaces. Thus, this chapter lays the groundwork for understanding how feminist digital activism can be seen as a contemporary extension of past movements for gender justice and social transformation. It strengthens the analytical framework of the thesis by situating digital activism within the larger continuum of social resistance and collective action.

Social movements around the world often demand equal treatment. The striking point of the demands is that they surround humanity and create a boomerang effect. The problems that come to the agenda in global social movements concern all humanity and surround the world. The demand for “New World” forms the basis of new social movements (Dede, 2019:30).

The development of new social movements is divided into three periods: The first period is the year 1968, which is considered the beginning of new social movements, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the period until the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The second period is the demonstrations held in Seattle, USA in 1999, and the third period is the actions that took place in capitalist countries such as the USA, France, Spain, Greece and Arab countries during the 2008 crisis (Güler, 2015:342-343). The Seattle

events play a major role in spreading the name of new social movements all over the world.

The protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle on November 30, 1999 have created a new social movement as a global social movement. Similar protests at the meetings of international organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank have caused the demands of the protesters to be on the agenda (Kalfa and Ataay, 2008:128).

2.6. Social Movements and Women's Activism

New social movements are built on old social movements that are their predecessors. Therefore, the fact that social movements are subject to the distinction of old and new in the literature does not mean that these movements are different and independent from each other. One of the best examples of this situation is the women's movement. The distinction made for the women's movement in the literature is not old and new movements, but first, second and third wave women's movements. However, as in old and new social movements, it is shaped around demands for freedom and equality (Budak, 2018:39).

In the context of social movements, it is important for women to organize themselves in order to express themselves, to obtain and defend their own rights. When we look at the position of women in social movements, it is possible to say that women have always been part of these movements. The general purpose of social movements is to change the social order in favor of disadvantaged individuals who are negatively affected by the order in society and to raise awareness in society about the negativities in existing power relations. From this point of view, women's activism, which is seen as a social movement, raises awareness in society, individuals, and politics about the disadvantageous and secondary issues that the patriarchal system, which exists in the form of male domination in society, has assigned to women, and to ensure social changes in favor of women.

Activism is a conscious action taken to create a positive change within society. If we explain social movements as the attitude that human existence exhibits to change an existing situation, it is possible to define women's activism as movements in which women come together for change. Actions such as organizing women's marches,

organizing campaigns against beating, rape, and violence can be given as examples of these movements.

Women's activism has been organized to eliminate inequalities between genders, to ensure that women are freed from their secondary position and to achieve equal status and rights with men. These organizations have formed their own unique ideological foundations in each geography and have been influenced by different historical processes. Therefore, although the basic purpose of the movements is common, women have experienced this struggle in different historical and political conditions in line with the cultural, political and social characteristics of each nation (Durukan, 2019:12).

The values defended by women's movements and the sensitivities they showed have varied from period to period. Influenced by the ideas of equality and freedom that emerged after the French Revolution in 1789 in the West, they started to struggle against the dissatisfaction they felt about their existing roles in society in social, political, legal and economic areas. Social movements that aimed to correct the negative situation of women and to provide women with the same rights as men began to sprout in the early 19th century, took place at regional and national levels in the mid-20th century, and later turned into a global movement. Therefore, these movements began to be seen in many parts of the world. There was an activist women's movement that developed in the first half of the 19th century, especially in England and the USA. Although there is no consensus on the definition of women's movements, there are different definitions made by researchers (Gürboğa, 2019:11). The women's movement can basically be called all the movements that women initiate and carry out as subjects, focusing on the inequalities they face (Tekeli, 1998:339).

Women's activism is organized around women's identity and advocates for women's social, economic and political equality. It aims to make women visible within the system. Although there are leaders who bring women's activism to the fore, there is no hierarchical structure within the movement (Gürboğa, 2019:16). Since the actors of social movements are often ignored by a significant part of society, these individuals aim to ensure their visibility in social movements. In this context, women are an important part of social movements in their struggle against their exclusion from social life due to their gender.

Women's movements have become a theory by feeding feminism. Feminism is a theory that examines the inequality between women and men, investigates the reasons for this inequality and advocates political, economic and social equality between the sexes (Gürboğa, 2019:12).

2.6.1. Women's Activism in Old Social Movements

The historical emergence and development of women's activism is discussed in four waves from the 19th century to the 21st century. In this section of the study; the first wave of the women's movement, which emerged in the period of old social movements, will be discussed. The main struggle area of the activists in this period was the recognition of women's rights to vote, education and be elected, have a profession and work.

Women's struggle for political and social rights also constitutes one of the main headings of the first wave women's activism. The first wave women's movement is also considered as an equality and freedom movement in terms of its starting point. The discourses of activists in this period were about the inclusion of women in the public sphere and their equal rights as both human beings and citizens.

During the periods when women were not yet seen as equal citizens, they established associations to demand the right to vote, which is a political right. The women in these associations are defined as “suffragists” and the struggles of women for the right to vote are defined as “suffragist movements”. Although women began to gain equal rights with men before the law with the first wave movement, it was understood that gaining political rights did not solve women's problems and inequalities continued (Doğancı and Tuncay, 2020:9).

One of the most important factors that accelerated the first wave women's movement was the concepts of industrialization and capitalism. The economic, political and social transformations experienced with the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of capitalist production relations led women to question their roles in society in many ways, including economically, politically and culturally (Çeşnigil, 2019:2).

Due to the changing economic balances with the Industrial Revolution, women also started to participate in business life. However, the minimum wages paid to women were lower than those paid to men (Kolay, 2015:6). Women from different countries

and different segments, started a movement in relation to their level of participation in social life and the conditions of the country they lived in by rebelling against their positions and oppression. Women workers rebelled against low wages and harsh working conditions, while bourgeois women rebelled against their deprivation of economic and political rights. As a result of these rebellions, workers' movements emerged. The workers' movement, which took place in Paris, the capital of France, in 1848, is a social movement that spread to many countries. In England, the movement focused on the demand for the right to vote under the leadership of the middle class; while in France and Germany, working-class women took the lead. In America, the women's movement developed intertwined with the anti-slavery movement (Çakır, 2006:20).

The differences in movements have brought with them some paradoxes. The most important of these is that the reasons why women from the poor segment join the struggle are based on economic reasons. The most important thing for these women is to achieve normal living standards and women's rights come second. Women from the bourgeois class, on the other hand, fought for their social, political and legal rights and did not show solidarity with women in the working class while doing so. The beginning of the 19th century, when the contradictions between women began to become apparent, was a period when the first wave movement evolved from being an intellectual movement led by women from the middle and upper classes to becoming a socialist movement (Güzelcan, 2010:14).

2.6.2. Women's Activism in New Social Movements

One of the most effective movements of new social movements in the global sense is undoubtedly the women's movement. In particular, while investigating women's activism and its role in movements, examining the new social movement theory will help in understanding the differing perception of gender and the structure of social movements in the world (Türk, 2018:38).

Women's movements targeting social change, like many other social movements, took on a different structure after the civil society concept gained importance after the 1960s. The 1960s were a period of rapid urbanization, increased production capacity, and the formation of a consumer society and culture. The agricultural sector began to decline, while the service sector began to develop; new professions such as child and

elderly care, public relations, and marketing emerged. With this new employment, many women turned to education, and universities, previously held by the bourgeoisie, were made open to everyone. The first large masses to enter universities were the young people of the 1968 generation. These young people argued that education does not actually offer a future, but only serves the continuity of the system (Sezer, 2015:78-79).

Women activists who acted together with the structures formed by revolutionary groups in the early 1960s and during the 1968 movement began to lay the foundations of the second wave movement when they realized that they were also excluded from these groups in the process. Women's movements in this period have reformist characteristics that want the change and transformation of society, have a wide range of interests, and strive to find more effective solutions to their own problems. Rather than equality in the political and economic fields, they demand the right to be different and other as women (Cohen and Arato, 1992). It is also the most successful women's movement in terms of conceptualizing issues that have not been discussed and seen as problems before and introducing them to the public (Yılmaz, 2006:15).

The second wave of the women's movement resembles new social movements in terms of goals and systems. The women's movement, which has a heterogeneous structure just like new social movements, is organized in small groups. The small group approach has been one of the most important characteristics of the second wave women's movement. There is usually activism of women's groups that unite around campaigns organized on a single issue and can disperse quickly (Cohen and Arato, 1992:551).

The second wave of the women's movement began with women's movements aimed at eliminating social and legal dynamics that cause inequality in public life, work, culture and education (Doğancı and Tuncay, 2020:1332). Second wave women's movements differ from the first wave women's movement in terms of their perspective on gender, solution proposals and actions. The problems of the distinction between private and public spheres, women being pushed into the private sphere and the secondary position they were deemed worthy of in social life, which the first wave movement did not focus on, also began to be expressed.

The statement of Simone de Beauvoir (2019:13), one of the leading women of the period, “one does not become a woman, one is born a woman” became the principle that summarized the second wave women's movement. Private and public spheres, human rights, gender equality, equal pay, abortion, female sexuality, and the exploitation of women's labor within the patriarchal family are issues addressed and discussed by the second wave women's movement.

Beauvoir emphasizes that being a woman is socially adopted with the words “one does not become a woman, one is born a woman” (Özüdoğru and Erdoğan, 2021). This quote indicates that society teaches the genders their roles and that these roles are imposed on women (Oğurtanı, 2020:27).

In this struggle, which is based on Donovan's (2014:266) view that “the personal is political”, the existence of women between the private and public spheres is questioned. Women are excluded from the state and market system, and their main areas of responsibility are defined by their roles in the private sphere, such as housework and childcare. Men, on the other hand, are dominant in both the private and public spheres. Therefore, while women's labor is devalued, it is also subordinated by taking away their power in social, political and economic terms (Adaçay, 2018:349).

Activists and feminist researchers predominantly recognize **patriarchy** as the essential framework that supports women's subjugation in many societies (Avcil, 2020:591). Patriarchy, as a power structure that favors men and marginalizes women, functions through legal and political institutions as well as ingrained cultural norms, societal expectations, and interpersonal dynamics. Understanding the structural basis of oppression, women in many groups began to recognize that their fights were not isolated or merely personal, but rather part of a **common collective experience**. This insight led to the profound notion of **sisterhood**, a cohesive principle rooted in solidarity and reciprocal assistance among women. Akan and Gürhan (2020:8) assert that sisterhood emerged as a fundamental tenet of feminist organizing, based on the conviction that opposition against exploitation and inequality must be collective rather than individualistic. This concept persists in digital feminist spheres, where women globally establish networks of solidarity and mobilize against systemic injustices, frequently with unprecedented immediacy and impact. Sisterhood has

transitioned from a theoretical notion to a pragmatic approach for contemporary activism.

The main emphasis in the second wave women's movement is that all women have the same values and worldview, the same beliefs, the same perceptions and attitudes, and the same interests. However, there are also women in the world with different perspectives, different perceptions, and different ideologies (Özüdoğru, 2021:114).

Third wave women's movements emerged in the early 1990s as a reaction to the practices of second wave women's activism and the perception of women. In this period when postmodernism and difference are evident, different races, identities, and ethnic characteristics are emphasized (Sevim, 2005:90). Focusing on the basis of differences, the third wave movement draws attention to the different situations of women and the fact that the problems they experience may be different (Özüdoğru, 2021:115).

The intellectual perceptions of third wave activists reject a single type of universal perception of women and emphasize that women should be dealt with individually on a universal level. Activists in this period were more interested in women's micro problems such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, violence and mobbing, and unlike previous movements, they existed more in the cultural field (Heywood and Drake, 2002:6-7). They also focused on much more diverse topics in terms of content compared to the other two waves.

The third wave feminist movement, like all feminists, argues that inequality between women and men is socially constructed. At the same time, this movement argues that the struggle should be waged not only against open discrimination, but also against all gender codes such as the roles that society attributes to women and men, norms and patterns of behavior, language and thought, the male-dominated perspective of scientific theories, in short, against all institutions and structures dominated by men. There is a greater emphasis on the concept of identity, and it is opposed to ignoring the differences between women. It is emphasized that there is not only one type of female identity. For this reason, it is emphasized that these differences between women should be addressed and solutions should be produced that are appropriate for the problems of each different group (Gürboğa, 2019:14).

The last wave, the fourth wave of women's activism, emerged in a period when internet use and social media tools became widespread, also known as the age of technology (Özüdođru Erdoğan, 2021:115). It is seen that the Internet and social media tools have given new momentum to women's movements and opened a new space for activism (Akan and Gürhan, 2020: 6). During this period, social media platforms created a new form of activism on the internet to raise awareness of women's issues.

Women's movements aim to mobilize society, bring women's issues to the agenda and raise awareness in society. Women activists who actively use social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have carried out their actions by establishing virtual groups and have created a reaction in the public (Özüdođru, 2021:116).

Social networks send all kinds of content very quickly and easily without time and space limitations. At the same time, it is important for the organization of society in the virtual environment and the formation of awareness. The fact that the masses can easily reach each other and communicate with each other faster through social media has caused a significant transformation in social movements (Koç, 2017:1568).

Thanks to the interaction and easy access to data provided by social networks, the target audience can reach the original of the photo, image or message in a very short time (Eraydın, 2020:150). Women activists who can organize and interact much more easily with social media tools act much more widely with less costs compared to old social movements.

In this context, women's movements have benefited from all the possibilities of technology and organized themselves through the internet and social media. Thus, the area of action and discussion of women activists has shifted to social media. At the same time, women all over the world have both become aware of each other and started to work in technological fields (Hileman, 2014:2).

Women were provided with the opportunity to easily communicate through different social networks regardless of their religion, class and origins, thanks to all the technological developments made. In this context specifically, according to a study done, social networks are the most effective means through which women can reach the public in a short time (Şeşen, 2019:982). While women's activism is increasing its impact on digital platforms, the inability to access information and the invisibility

experienced by women without internet access is considered one of the important social problems of our day (Kaya, 2018:4).

Recently throughout the years, the use of the internet and social media has played an important key role in social movements all over the world (Akan and Gürhan, 2020:9). From the Arab Spring to the Yellow Vests Movement, from the Indignados Movement to the Gezi Events, the rapid and easy spread of images through the internet has enabled movements to spread all over the world.

That is why in this chapter, the concept of social movements as a whole was examined in detail, focusing mainly on their historical development, structural characteristics, and typologies. Starting from the classical definitions and historical foundations of social movements, the chapter traced the evolution from “old” to “new” social movements, and emphasized the shift from class-based and economic struggles to identity-based and value-oriented movements. Special attention was given to the transformation of women's activism within this broader framework of social movements.

Women have historically played an essential role in social movements, both as participants and as initiators of their own struggles. All those discoveries made through exploring the waves of women's activism from the 19th century to the present, the chapter underscored how feminist demands have evolved over time, from legal equality to issues such as identity, intersectionality, and digital activism. The analysis provided above has clearly shown that women's activism is not isolated but deeply intertwined with the dynamics of bigger social movements, it starts there and integrates itself in the cycle, this way it reflects both continuity and transformation in the fight for equality and justice.

This chapter exists within the thesis for two reasons: the first one is to provide a strong theoretical as well as the historical foundation for understanding the current forms of digital activism led by women, especially in the context of Morocco. This chapter lays the groundwork for analyzing the digital feminist activism discussed in the following chapters through presenting the conceptual framework of social movements and examining the progression of women's activism. That's not the only aim for it, because it also shows that contemporary digital activism is part of a larger historical and

ideological continued movement, shaped by the values, challenges, and strategies of past movements.



CHAPTER III

DIGITAL ACTIVISM

With the increasing impact of digital technologies on social life, activism has also gained a new dimension by moving to digital media. Traditional forms of protest and organization have begun to be replaced by campaigns, awareness-raising activities and solidarity networks conducted through digital tools. In this context, digital activism offers a struggle area where especially marginalized groups can make their voices heard, transcend borders and can be mobilized rapidly.

This chapter analyzes the rise and evolution of digital activism as a novel mode of collective and individual resistance in the digital era. The chapter commences by delineating digital activism and examining its methodologies, instruments, as well as the prospects and constraints it offers, especially with the advocacy of women's rights. The chapter examines the distinct roles of prevalent digital platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, and WhatsApp, with an emphasis on their influence on feminist initiatives. Ultimately, it showcases specific instances of digital women's activism in Morocco, emphasizing both the transformative possibilities and systemic obstacles inside the digital realm. This chapter establishes the foundation for examining Instagram as a platform for feminist digital resistance in the subsequent sections.

3.1. Definition and Scope of Digital Activism

As digital technologies transform public life, social movements have also been affected by this transformation, and digital activism has emerged as a new form of struggle. Digital activism is the strategic use of the internet and digital tools by individuals and communities to create social, political and cultural change. These tools cover a wide range of topics such as social media platforms, blogs, online petitions, campaign sites, forums, e-mail chains and video content sharing channels.

According to Joyce (2010:6), digital activism is “the use of the internet to create political and social transformation”. This definition emphasizes that the digital sphere is not only a means of communication, but also functions as a space for action. Earl and Kimport (2011: 8) state that digital activism offers a more cost-effective, flexible and time-independent form of action compared to traditional forms of organization and

protest. In this way, individuals can unite on the same digital ground and carry out powerful campaigns even if they are not spatially together.

Bennett and Segerberg (2012:742) state that digital activism is characterized by the “logic of connective action”. In this understanding, individuals participate in campaigns through content that reflects their personal identities and values. This makes digital activism not only a part of organized collective movements but also a field of individual resistance and daily life struggles. This way, individuals become way more interested in the political issues which therefore allows voices from different geographies gain visibility.

Digital activism does not just have opportunities, but limitations too. Threats such as surveillance mechanisms, digital censorship, data security problems, algorithmic inequalities and online gender-based violence make the digital space a liberating but also risky ground. Studies have shown that women in particular are targeted in online environments and face gender-based violence facilitated by technology (Amnesty International, 2024). And not just that, the algorithms of social media platforms amplify misogynist content, further exacerbating online violence, leading to the normalization of harmful ideologies among young users. Therefore, this leads to the belief that the scope of digital activism requires a multi-layered analysis that takes into account both technological possibilities and the unequal distribution of these possibilities (The Guardian, 2024).

3.2. Opportunities and Limits Offered by Digital Activism

The digital world, on the other hand, has a structure that is not always clear, and it has both pros and cons when it comes to women's rights and gender-based issues. This area has both good and bad things about it. On the one hand, it gives people the chance to be seen, quickly organise, and engage with people all over the world. On the other side, it has problems like surveillance, online aggression, algorithmic inequity, and the digital gap. So, the digital world has two sides that should be looked at in terms of both its freeing and limiting effects on activism.

One of the most important opportunities offered by digital activism in this conversation is the incredibly rapid mobilization and access to large audiences. Thanks to hashtag campaigns carried out on social media platforms (for example #MeToo, #BenDe),

online signature sites (such as Change.org), digital content production and live broadcasts, social issues can transcend national borders and gain global visibility. For example, the #Nirbhaya campaign launched after a group rape case in India has not only led to local reactions but has also turned into a digital solidarity chain against gender-based violence worldwide (Keller, Mendes & Ringrose, 2018:236).

Similarly, the #ChallengeAccepted campaign launched in Turkey in 2020 after the murder of Pınar Gültekin has spread in the digital environment, paving the way for women to share messages of solidarity on social media and draw attention to male violence (UN Women, 2022:17). These examples demonstrate the power of the digital sphere to bring issues ignored by traditional media to the agenda and to mobilize individuals to take action.

However, the digital sphere does not only offer opportunities; it also contains serious limitations and threats. Women in particular are frequently exposed to forms of digital violence such as hate speech, harassment, doxing, and cyberstalking on online platforms. Jane (2014:559) states that online misogyny has become commonplace and causes women to be silenced in digital environments. This situation leads many women activists to limit their online expressions, practice self-censorship or withdraw from the digital sphere altogether in order to protect themselves.

Moreover, the visibility of digital activism is not always equal. Social media algorithms can prioritize content based on users' previous interactions, while systematically pushing certain voices to the background. Noble (2018:88) reveals that search engines and algorithms inherently contain sexist and racist biases, and therefore the potential of digital activism is restricted by these invisible filters.

Another important limitation is the digital divide. Access to technology, digital literacy and internet connectivity opportunities are not equal for all women. When women living in rural areas, economically disadvantaged or older have limited access to these media, equal representation in the field of digital activism cannot be achieved. UN Women (United Nations Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Unit) (2022:17) emphasizes that the continuing inequality in women's participation in digital spaces deepens gender-based digital discrimination, and that women, especially in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, face serious obstacles to accessing online tools.

When viewed from all these aspects, the digital sphere offers a dynamic platform where women can make their voices heard and create social transformation, while on the other hand, this sphere carries the risk of reinforcing structural inequalities. Therefore, in order for digital activism to be effective, both the instrumental possibilities of this field must be used strategically and a critical awareness must be developed against the dynamics that produce inequality.

3.3. Methods and Tools of Digital Activism

Digital activism has developed its own methods and strategies by departing from traditional forms of protest with the opportunities provided by technological tools. These methods are carried out through various digital tools in order to increase individual participation, spread collective movements, create social awareness and create direct political pressure. Social media, blogs, online petitions, digital mapping, video content and virtual campaigns are among the main ones (Earl & Kimport, 2011: 10).

One of the most common digital activism methods is hashtag activism. This method, which is used to create interaction on social media platforms and make a certain agenda visible, is based on users producing and sharing content using the same hashtag. For example, the #MeToo movement, which has resonated globally, has transformed the digital space into a powerful ground for disclosure and solidarity by allowing women to share their experiences of sexual harassment and abuse (Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, 2019:44). In Turkey, hashtags such as #KadınaViolenceNo, #BenDe and #İstanbulSözlenmesiYaşatır are examples of the forms of organization of the digital feminist movement.

Another method is online petitions and campaign sites. Especially through platforms such as Change.org, Avaaz and WeMove.eu, public opinion is created against social problems and direct pressure can be exerted on state institutions or private companies. Earl and Kimport (2011:72) state that these methods lower the participation thresholds and enable more individuals to participate in digital activism. For example, in Morocco, after a 17-year-old woman was sexually assaulted in 2018, an online campaign launched on Change.org created a strong digital public opinion that forced the Moroccan government to reform violence laws.

Video-based activism is also very effective among digital tools. Platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram Reels allow both individual stories to be told and systematic problems to be visualized and conveyed to a wider audience. Younger generations, in particular, are creatively spreading feminist messages through short video content, combining elements such as humor, performance, and irony to reach wider and more heterogeneous audiences (Clark-Parsons, 2021: 88).

Digital mapping and the use of open data play an important role in making social problems spatially visible. For example, the digital map called “HarassMap” marks the harassment cases experienced by women on the streets in Egypt, both raising awareness and producing concrete data against local governments (Radsch, 2016:129). Such data-based digital tools place women’s experiences within the framework of a collective struggle for rights, rather than individual complaints.

Blogging and digital publishing are also important tools in the production of alternative knowledge and the development of counter-narratives. Women and feminist groups who cannot find representation in traditional media can determine their own agendas through blogs and digital magazines, thus having a say in the production of discourse in digital media (Jackson, Bailey & Foucault Welles, 2020:109). These areas also serve as a bridge between academia and social movements, bringing theory and practice together in the digital environment.

These methods of digital activism offer tools that facilitate, multiply and carry participation to different scales. However, using these tools effectively requires technical skills as well as practice in developing political strategies and building safe digital spaces.

3.4. Digital Media Platforms

There are many digital media platforms used around the world. The most common of these are Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, TikTok, WhatsApp, and are briefly reviewed below.

Facebook: Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, who was still a student at Harvard University. At first, it was a free website designed for students to communicate with each other. Users would register on this site with their e-mails and

try to find their friends from high school and university. In a short period of time, “Facebook” started to be widely used in the states of the United States.

The initial purpose of Facebook was for university friends to socialize via e-mail. Over time, students from different universities and schools became members, causing it to quickly become a social platform site used all over the world. Facebook was initially used by a certain audience with content such as “status updates”, “photos” and “videos”, but it currently has more than 2 billion users worldwide and is the most frequently used platform today.

Users can set their profile photos, share statuses, chat, become members of groups, and share video content with the profile they open. Facebook, which is free to use, generates its revenues through “Facebook ads”.

Facebook is one of the platforms that most clearly demonstrates the power of digital activism to organize mass protests. During the Arab Spring in 2011, Facebook pages played an important role in organizing protests, especially in Tunisia and Egypt. Activists used this platform to publicize the dates, locations, and goals of anti-government protests. At the same time, women’s rights advocates used Facebook groups to expose gender-based violence and raise awareness, demonstrating digital resistance to social oppression.

Facebook Messenger: Facebook Messenger is a messaging application developed by Facebook. Messenger.com has become a kind of interface for Facebook. Access to Facebook Messenger has also been provided through mobile applications, creating a separate usage area from Facebook. Users can send messages and video chat via Facebook Messenger, and they can also join group correspondence by sending videos and stickers to each other. In short, Facebook Messenger provides its users with written and visual communication.

Although Facebook Messenger is not a directly public platform, it is important for closed group coordination and secure communication of activist networks. Against the risk of being targeted on public platforms, activists have made strategic plans via Messenger and carried out their action coordination in a safer environment. In countries such as Morocco and Tunisia, in particular, organizations have been organized via Messenger in order to avoid state control.

X: X has recently emerged as a popular social system where users share and discuss everything, including news, jokes, opinions on events, and even their moods (Fabricio, etc., 2010), and was launched in 2006. Users register with their e-mails on X via the address “www.twitter.com”. Then, they send short internet messages (tweets) with 140 characters on this platform. Users interact with other people by sharing their ideas with the tweets they send, creating an agenda. In addition, the most talked about topics on the Twitter application, “trending topics”, are expressed with the hashtag symbol “#”. Users can share each other’s tweets with the “re-tweet” option and like each other’s tweets by clicking on the heart symbol. In short, X, one of the most frequently used social media applications in the world, allows its users to follow the agenda and contribute.

X is the platform where digital activism spreads most rapidly and instant reactions can be organized. Hashtag activism is particularly prominent here. For example, the campaign launched with the hashtag #Masaktach (I Will Not Be Silent) against violence against women in public spaces in Morocco quickly gained global support and was also covered in the local press. This platform also enables feminist thinkers, civil society organizations and individual activists to spread their content and make their voices heard.

Instagram: Instagram, which started working as a filtered photo sharing application, was founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. Instagram was founded in 2010. Users upload their photos and videos via Instagram, filter them and share by adding various edits. Users can follow each other, like and comment on each other. The Instagram application is free and has 2 billion active users today.

Instagram, as a medium where visuals are at the forefront, is frequently used to raise awareness in digital activism. For example, global campaigns such as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, and #MyDressMyChoice have received significant interaction on this platform. Similarly, in Morocco, women use Instagram to anonymously share the harassment they have been subjected to and to raise public awareness. Activists use the story format to create agendas and conduct awareness campaigns with infographics and videos.

YouTube: Youtube was founded in California in 2005 by former Pay Pal employees. Google bought it in 2006. It became the fastest growing website after Google bought

it. Youtube is one of the top sites that come to mind when it comes to video sharing over the internet. Users can log in via the address “www.youtube.com” (Source, 2020). Youtube users can find content on the topics they are looking for on various YouTube channels. In addition, people who create content on YouTube and open their own channels are called YouTubers. YouTube provides these people with the opportunity to earn money.

YouTube is a medium where documentary-style activist content is shared with long-form narratives and visual testimonies. For example, documentaries on the inequalities women face in Morocco, individual testimonial videos or educational content have been published on YouTube to raise awareness both locally and internationally. In addition, activist groups archive and disseminate protest footage or interviews on this platform.

WhatsApp: Whatsapp is a messaging application carried out over the internet. It is downloaded to IOS and Android based mobile phones and registered with a phone number. WhatsApp, which initially provided only messaging services, has also developed a video call option with a new update. Users can send documents, photos, videos, and audio recordings to each other via WhatsApp. In addition, groups can be established and correspondence can be made. With the “Whatsapp web” feature, access is also provided via computer by scanning the barcode on the phone with the computer camera.

WhatsApp is a secret coordination space for digital activism through closed-circuit messaging. In Morocco, women’s rights advocates have organized themselves by sharing online campaign plans, protest schedules, or relocation information in WhatsApp groups. Furthermore, trusted chain messaging is widely used to disseminate information in oppressive environments via WhatsApp. WhatsApp has also been an important tool for accessing information for individuals with limited internet access in rural areas.

This chapter has explored how digital technologies have transformed the landscape of activism, giving rise to new forms of resistance and advocacy, especially within the domain of women's rights. Beginning with the conceptual definition and historical emergence of digital activism, the chapter highlighted its strategic use through various tools such as social media, online petitions, video platforms, and digital mapping.

There is a dual nature of the digital space and this has been emphasized here. The digital space is not just empowering but it offers visibility, rapid mobilization which leads to a global reach. That space however is still not perfect as it deals with limitations like surveillance, online violence, algorithmic discrimination, as well as unequal access.

The chapter has also further outlined key methods of digital activism, including hashtag campaigns, visual storytelling, video-based content, and anonymous digital coordination. These tools were shown to facilitate individual expression and collective mobilization, particularly for marginalized voices. A close and detailed examination of digital media platforms-such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), YouTube, WhatsApp, and Messenger-demonstrated how each contributes differently to feminist digital activism.

Last but not least, some examples of activism from Morocco have also shown exactly how digital activism spreads its root to intersect with local socio-political dynamics. At the same time, it sheds light on the challenges Moroccan women face, including digital surveillance, censorship, and limited internet access. The creative and resilient strategies developed by activists reveal how digital spaces can function as arenas of resistance and empowerment even in restrictive environments.

Digital activism is a dynamic and complex element of modern feminist movements, and this is what this chapter was meant to reveal. What this does is it offers a crucial basis, as well as context, for understanding how Instagram functions as a platform for advocacy, resistance, and empowerment, specifically in hybrid cultural contexts like Morocco, which will be discussed further in much greater detail in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER IV

DIGITAL ACTIVISM ON INSTAGRAM: A STUDY WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN MOROCCO

It is now the time to build upon the existing material from the previous chapters regarding the conceptual and contextual framework. This section first mentions major examples of women's digital activism in Morocco. Then it presents what this qualitative study has found as it was conducted with two Moroccan civil society organizations that are very active and engaged in women's rights advocacy. The sole goal of this last chapter is to see how this social media platform, being Instagram, is being used as a digital space feminist activism, as well as how it helps with the empowerment of women in Morocco through its findings. This chapter looks at the strategies used on this platform, the challenges within the space, and the perceived impact of online campaigns on local gender dynamics, all through in-depth interviews with professionals who represent these organizations, because they can provide actual insight on what works and what doesn't. Because it links theoretical insights to real-world practices, this chapter offers a more basic and grounded understanding of digital feminist activism in a multifaceted socio-cultural context like Morocco's.

4.1. Women's Digital Activism in Morocco

Even though the struggle for women's rights in Morocco has happened using traditional methods for many years, recently around the last decade it has gained new momentum with the development of digital technologies. The proliferation of social media platforms in particular has created alternative public spaces where women can make their voices heard and has made women's activism visible both locally and globally. Moroccan women activists have been able to create a broader public opinion against gender inequalities, acts of violence and legal discrimination by using digital tools (Sadiqi, 2016:145).

A great example here that can bring the power of digital activism and potential to light in Morocco specifically would be the case of Amina Filali. This case took place back in 2012 when a 16 year-old teenager sadly took her own life by consuming rat poison after being forced to marry her aggressor, one that brutally stripped her of her dignity

not just one, but twice when she was forced to marry him. The anger that resulted from this case spread like wild fire, it provoked an outrage that spread across the country and beyond. It was immediately followed by digital mobilization through both Facebook and Twitter, where the hashtags #JusticeForAmina and #RIP Amina were launched by activists. The pressure from this wave was crucial in forcing the Moroccan government to finally repeal Article 475 of the Penal Code in 2014, a law that had allowed rapists to escape punishment by marrying their victims (Badran, 2014; Skalli, 2014). The success this campaign managed to bring not only shows the emotional and political force of online collective action, but it has also clearly marked one of the first moments where digital activism actually brought about real-life change and contributed to legal reform that has potentially saved the lives of many others.

The effect is not just felt locally as it has resonated across the world too when women in Iran launched their own hashtag #MyStealthyFreedom campaign. In this one, women in Iran went in public to remove their veils, took pictures of themselves and shared them online as a way to protest the compulsory hijab laws. That same campaign later then evolved into #WhiteWednesday movement, there, a special attention to women's bodily autonomy and digital resistance was drawn, on an international level (Nassim, 2017). These campaigns together bring about a critical insight, and it is that digital activism's aim is not to replace the traditional methods of protesting, but rather compliment them, amplify marginalized voices, broaden outreach, and put pressure on institutions that might otherwise remain unmoved and continue to harbor behavior, laws, and actions that do not strive for the wellbeing of women.

Marocains Pluriels (“Pluralistic Moroccans”) movement that emerged in 2018 is another great example of how digital activism can unfold. This movement's goal was to protect and raise awareness for issues like women's rights, freedom of expression and LGBTI+ rights on more than one platform, this time being Facebook and Instagram, while also pushing out campaigns on a regular basis online. This movement did not stop there, because Marocains Pluriels has also given another feminist language that can be used within the traditionally male-dominated public discourses through enabling young women so they can be an active participant in digital environments (Benkirane, 2020:223).

Last but not least is the “Outlaws” (Hors-la-loi) campaign. This has launched in 2019, this movement has drawn attention to the oppression experienced by women, particularly on issues such as sexuality, abortion, and individual freedoms. Thanks to the signatures collected on Change.org and the story sharing on Instagram, more than 15,000 people quickly joined the digital petition demanding the expansion of personal freedoms in Morocco (Human Rights Watch, 2019:5). The campaign, which was carried out with the slogan “I am a criminal” (#JeSuisHorsLaLoi), had a great impact especially among young women.

Another dimension of digital activism is personal branding strategies. In a study conducted by Chaimae El Idrissi Amiri and Tayeb Ghourdou (2024:300-312), it was emphasized that five prominent Moroccan female bloggers achieved social/economic freedom through online personal branding; these methods increased women's self-confidence, visibility and economic independence.

In addition, social content digital initiatives attract attention. For example, Qandisha (2011) pioneered the visibility of women in the public sphere in Morocco as a French-language webzine, and in this process, it played a leading role in digital activism by producing articles, videos and reader-participated content on "scandalous" topics. Graphic artist Zainab Fasiki's Hshouma project resisted the culture of restriction and censorship by presenting the female body, sexuality and social taboos in a critical language on digital platforms such as Instagram (Fasiki, 2018).

The Free Feminist Union (UFL) has developed a mobile application called “Manchoufouch” (2018) that maps complaints about sexual harassment in the digital environment in Morocco. This tool has enabled mobile users to make anonymous reports and receive legal and psychological support, bringing a technology-based innovation to digital activism.

All these examples illustrate the basic strategies of digital activism in Morocco: emotional mobilization, rapid dissemination of information, access to global solidarity networks, and demands for legal reform. However, the digital space is not all perfect especially in Morocco, as there are also important limitations to keep in mind and consider when using it. The first being internet access, especially in the more rural areas, followed by digital literacy rates, and of course the most obvious ones being online surveillance mechanisms as they are important factors that limit the impact of

digital activism (UN Women Arab States, 2020:18). The Moroccan government occasionally increases digital surveillance to censor online content or to put activists under legal pressure, which poses risks to freedom of expression (Freedom House, 2022: 6). On the other hand, Moroccan women activists develop digital strategies based on creativity and solidarity despite these limitations. For example, methods such as campaigning through anonymous accounts, bypassing access barriers by using VPNs, or collaborating with global human rights organizations to bring local pressures to the international public opinion ensure the survival of digital activism in Morocco (Abdel-Samad, 2022:74).

In conclusion, the Moroccan example clearly demonstrates how digital activism is integrated into local gender struggles and how these digital tools at hand play a critical role in making women's demands for rights visible. Digital environments have become not just a means of communication for Moroccan women, but also definitely a place of resistance, political action, and demands for social transformation.

4.2. Findings of the Study

In this section, the answers given by the interviewed NGO officials to the questions were examined.

4.2.1. Use of Instagram in Women's Rights Advocacy

The interviews indicate a uniform trend among all engaged civil society organizations: Instagram is employed not casually, but as a calculated and purposeful instrument for advocating women's rights. Instagram as a platform in the digital world is seen as important not just because it reaches a lot of people, specifically young people, but also because it's flexible and works well for sharing information, telling stories through images, and allowing people to interact quickly. Instagram makes it easier to tell stories and gain visibility. The people involved in these initiatives said they chose to focus on Instagram because it fits well with who they are trying to reach and what they want to achieve. As Aboulfaraj explains, "We chose Instagram strategically because challenging patriarchal mindsets requires innovative approaches... we work independently in some initiatives and collaborate with partner organizations in others." What she says shows that Instagram is not only a place where people can be seen and

heard, but also a space where feminist groups can work together, share ideas, and find new ways to connect with others while also building strong partnerships.

A big reason people use the platform for ads is because it's really popular with younger users. Kasmi points this out when she says "Given its popularity among our target audience... we increase engagement with Reels, blog links and stories." This shows that they try to use the features of the app in smart ways to get more people to see and react to their content. It's not just about making posts, but also about knowing how the app works and who they're talking to. Ouachou explains their plan clearly when she says "We share three posts per week, which include strong calls on different feminist issues... we use the platform to amplify the voices of young activists." This shows that Instagram is not only for posting, but also helps young people, especially those new to feminism, share their voices and be heard.

Besides posting often and trying to get people to interact, Instagram is also used to support more than just women's rights. It's used to talk about other connected issues like LGBTQI+ rights too. Moutaouakkil explains this when she says "We tried to use this to talk more about women's rights and LGBTQI+ rights and raise awareness, we shared daily posts on different topics." This shows that Instagram helps groups talk about different issues at the same time, and it helps them reach more people by being more inclusive.

To sum it all up, all of these quotes show that Instagram isn't just a regular social media app. It plays a big role in the feminist movement in Morocco. It works well because it's flexible, young people like it, and it helps tell stories that can grab the attention of people who would not usually be interested about normal political methods.

4.2.2. Awareness Raising Strategies: Visual Narrative, Storytelling and Partnerships

Looking at what the interviewees said, it becomes very clear that Instagram is used not just to spread messages but also to be creative and connect with people in different ways, who may not even exist in the same space in real life. One thing all the participants talked about was how important visuals and emotional stories are. Instead of using long texts or hard-to-understand posts, groups try to make their content feel

more personal by sharing real stories and emotional moments. Kasmi says “Using real people helps us personalize our content... we find visual narration very effective for creating engagement..” This shows that making people feel something helps get more attention and makes them think more about tough topics like women’s rights.

They also talked a lot about using things like infographics, Reels, and carousels. These help break down hard legal or social ideas so that they’re easier for young people to understand and share. Ouachou says “Storytelling adds an emotional layer to advocacy messages... staying up to date with trending formats makes content more shareable.” This shows that if the message is emotional and uses formats people like right now, more people are likely to see and share it. Connecting to people’s feelings and also giving them facts, allows feminist groups to keep people interested while teaching them about big issues like gender inequality.

One important part of the strategy that the participants also talked about was using different types of content. Instead of only posting pictures or articles, groups also use things like podcasts, animations, short films, book suggestions, and live sessions. This helps them connect with different kinds of people who like different ways of learning. Aboulfaraj gives an example when she says “We are expanding our activism approach with animation projects that blend artistic expression with activism.” Mixing art and activism like this makes the content more creative and emotional, showing that how you share a message is just as important as what the message is.

Planning when to post is also a big part of their strategy. Groups try to match their posts with important events like campaign seasons or awareness days, or they follow a weekly plan. Moutaouakkil explains this when she says “We published three posts a day on different topics, which varied from day to day. For example, on Fridays we would share UFLFILM and UFLBOOK; on other days this was not the case.” This shows that having a regular and organized posting plan helps keep the audience interested and makes sure the content gets seen more often.

Working together with other groups was seen as a really important part of doing well in online activism. When organizations team up with others who believe in the same things, they can reach more people and make their messages stronger. This kind of teamwork helps them speak louder and be heard more. By using visual stories, emotional posts, different types of content, planned schedules, and these kinds of

partnerships, it's clear that Instagram is being used on purpose in many ways to keep feminist work going strong.

4.2.3. Effectiveness of Campaigns and Success Criteria

The participants made it clear with their answers that Instagram campaigns for women's rights actually reach the people they want to and lead to real results, not just online numbers. Activists do not just look at likes, shares, or followers, they care more about how their work leads to real change in society and politics, across a multitude of contexts. The campaigns have different goals like spreading awareness, getting people to talk about the issues, and most importantly, getting them to take action in real life, so that change can happen. Aboulfaraj explains this when she says "We evaluate campaigns not only on social media, but also on participation in offline actions, policy change and resource mobilization." This shows that good online work can also lead to things like people showing up at events, signing petitions, or pushing for new laws. Kasmi also talks about how they use both numbers and people's actions to see if a campaign is working. She says "Web traffic from event registrations and referrals from Instagram also helps us measure success." This shows that Instagram is not just used to spread messages. It helps move people from just watching to actually doing something. It proves to be a smart way of using social media to turn interest into action. Moutaouakkil talks about how some campaign topics have a strong emotional and social effect. She says "Sensitive topics like femicides or rape news get more attention, and engagement increases." This shows that even though Instagram often pushes good-looking posts, a lot of people still care deeply about serious and emotional stories, especially when they deal with violence against women. This kinds of posts do not just get a lot of reactions, they also make people emotional, start public conversations, and sometimes push for new laws. This proves that Instagram can be used to spark real social change that anyone can see and feel.

Even though there are problems like content rules or shadow banning, Ouachou says their work still reaches a lot of people. She says "We measure success with engagement indicators like likes, shares, saves and follower growth from different backgrounds." This shows that more activists now understand that doing well online means reaching all kinds of people, especially since Instagram is used by people from all over the world.

Together, these points show that people now look at digital activism in many different ways. The people interviewed measure success not just by numbers but also by how people react and what changes happen because of it. This includes more online action, people talking about the issues, and calls for new laws. This way of thinking shows that being seen online should lead to real action in society and politics, helping feminist movements grow not just in Morocco but wherever else where a voice and change are needed.

4.2.4. Effectiveness of Digital Activism and Its Relationship with Fieldwork

The results here show that all the participants have collectively agreed that online activism is not enough by itself, but it is still a very important part of today's feminist work. Being online helps bring attention to issues, change the way people think, and build pressure for real change in the world. Most of the people interviewed said that online and offline activism have to work together. Aboulfaraj explains it clearly when she says "Social media has made our work visible and effective, but change does not only happen online... the two must go together." What she means is that real change happens when the attention you get on Instagram also leads to things like showing up in person, pushing for new laws, or working directly in communities.

The participants said that work done in the field and content made for social media now go hand in hand, helping each other. Kasmi explains this by saying "Insights from fieldwork drive digital content and create a strong feedback loop." This shows that what they learn from real-life work helps shape what they post online, which then reaches more people and often gets more people involved in person too, making it a cycle. Moutaouakkil gives a clear example of this when she says "The new family code project was born in the wake of online protests... digital activism is everything now." Her words show how online protests can actually help start big things like changes to the law in Morocco, which was seen with Amina Filali's case that took place back in 2012.

Despite being grateful for the existence of digital activism, they still understand that it has its problems, as they have talked about how platforms like Instagram can sometimes promote harmful content and do not always support feminist posts because of how the algorithm works. These platforms usually show posts that get a lot of likes and shares, not the ones that talk about serious issues. Still, Ouachou believes that

digital activism helps more than it hurts. She says “I don’t think digital activism is limiting at all. It complements our fieldwork and activism projects perfectly.” This shows that feminist groups are learning how to use both online and offline work together. They are using the internet to reach more people and stay active while still focusing on what is happening in real life. The participants also believe that digital activism is not just about using tools. It is a space where they build strategies, share stories, and get people involved. It helps spread awareness and also pushes people to act. It does not replace fieldwork by any means, but it undeniably helps make it stronger by offering new ways to connect and motivate others. Today, if feminist work in Morocco wants to stay strong and make a difference, it has to happen both online and in person.

4.2.5. Algorithms’ Impact on Content Visibility

Many of the participants have expressed their worry when it comes to Instagram’s algorithm, as they mentioned it makes it hard for people to see posts about women’s rights, especially when the posts are about sensitive or political topics. The algorithm isn’t just a neutral system. It actually decides what gets seen and what doesn’t, and this can stop important feminist content from reaching people. Aboulfaraj explains it clearly when she says “Instagram’s algorithm... significantly affects the visibility of our content. Advocacy posts are left behind if they don’t get enough engagement.” This shows that posts that don’t get a lot of likes or shares get pushed down, even if the message is important. The algorithm favors posts that are popular or trendy instead of ones that talk about serious or emotional topics.

Other participants expressed the same thing and talked about being shadow banned or getting fewer views when they talk about gender issues. Kasmi said this happens often when they post about things like abortion or women’s rights in Palestine. She says “When we post about issues like abortion or women’s rights in Palestine, our reach drops. Shadow banning is very common.” This also shows that the system used by platforms like Instagram often hides or ignores feminist content on purpose. The algorithm supports content that is easy to sell or safe for most people, not content that brings up important political or social problems.

Moutaouakkil points out the problem clearly when she says “it’s hard for feminist content to stand out”. This shows that the issue is built into the system itself. Feminist

groups are stuck in a tough spot. They either have to change their message to fit what the platform wants, or they risk being blocked or ignored. Ouachou also adds something important to this. She says “It’s hard to get more visibility without adapting to Western feminism that doesn’t align with our values... the algorithms block feminist content.” This means that platforms don’t just block political messages, they also push certain kinds of feminism that match Western ideas. This makes it even harder for local or culturally different feminist voices to be heard.

These responses show that algorithms are not just technical tools but also shape what can and cannot be said online, especially in a complicated context like that of Morocco. They create a kind of “algorithmic normalcy” that pushes certain messages to the front while hiding others. This often makes strong advocacy weak and limits cultural variety. Feminist activists in Morocco are not only facing challenges from society and institutions, but also from the platforms themselves. The tools they use to spread their message come with built-in limits. This makes it clear that the problems with digital activism are not just caused by outside forces, but are also part of how these platforms are designed and controlled, which means changes from the inside out are needed.

4.2.6. Challenges in Digital Activism: Harassment, Censorship, and Misinformation

The challenges faced by feminist activists on Instagram are not just about how the platform works, and this was made clear by the participants. These problems are deeply connected to politics, beliefs, and personal risks that they take on. Online feminist work takes place in a difficult space where there is backlash, very close and uncomfortable monitoring, and a lot of hate. Activists have to deal with both the limits set by the algorithm and the direct efforts of people who want to shut down or twist feminist discussions. Aboulfaraj explains this clearly when she says “This backlash is in the form of violence in comments, death threats in private messages, and digital campaigns pushed by conservative parties.” Her words show just how serious online attacks can be and how they often reflect the same systems of control and sexism that activists are trying to fight in real life.

Along with online abuse, the participants also talked about safety risks and how they have to protect their image and their teams. Kasmi gives a clear example when she says “We had to remove the names and photos of some members for security reasons...

we are trying to produce expert-backed content against misinformation.” This shows that while the internet helps them reach people, it can also put them in danger. Activists are forced to make hard choices about how much to share and how to keep people safe. At the same time, they also work to fight lies by sharing information that is backed by facts. This means they are not just defending themselves but are also actively trying to teach and inform others as part of their advocacy.

The emotional pressure of this environment can be seen in the ways activists in Morocco try to protect themselves. Moutaouakkil says “I try to protect myself by keeping my personal account private”, showing how the line between being an activist and being a private person often disappears online especially as the opposing parties seems to lose sight of that fine line. Feminist work on Instagram is not just political, it becomes very personal and can take a serious emotional toll on the parties involved, especially if they have no support system. Because of the constant threat of backlash, activists have to find ways to stay safe while still speaking out on important issues. Ouachou gives a clear picture of how complex these threats are when she says “The biggest challenges on Instagram are combating censorship, harassment, and misinformation about feminist movements.” Her words prove that feminist content is not only ignored by platforms but is also attacked by users who want to silence it. Feminist work online is not stable or easy. It is always a process of dealing with the platform’s limits, cultural expectations, and political pushback. What the participants described is not just the result of being online. These problems are built into the structure of the internet and are connected to power, politics, and how society responds to gender equality. Their stories show that feminist activism in places like Morocco has to deal with digital violence as part of a larger effort to control or stop political change. To keep going, activists need not only strong digital skills but also emotional strength, in order to keep themselves and the cause they are fighting for safe.

4.2.7. The Experience of Suppression in Male-Dominated Digital Environments

Activists are not just dealing with technical issues, they are also working in an environment filled with backlash, censorship, false information, and harassment. Using Instagram for feminist activism is not just a way to communicate, it is a form of

resistance that is constantly being pushed back by unfair platform systems and difficult political and social conditions.

Many participants said that online harassment and digital violence are some of the most urgent problems they face. These attacks are not just single rude comments. They often come as planned efforts to scare and silence activists. These include death threats, doxxing, and personal attacks. Aboulfaraj talks about this clearly when she says “Logical fallacies and false narratives are used to distort the conversation and distract from real issues... we even encounter doxxing.” This means that online spaces are being used to attack feminist voices on purpose. Because of this, many organizations have put rules in place for moderating comments, reporting abuse, and working with groups that protect digital rights. Kasmi shared that her team had to remove pictures and names from their pages to stay safe, while Moutaouakkil said she keeps her personal account private for the same reason. These examples show that doing feminist work online can come with serious risks, not just to individuals but also to entire organizations.

Many of the participants said that censorship, especially through shadow banning, is a major problem. Posts about things like reproductive rights, sexual violence, or gender inequality are often marked as “sensitive” and then hidden from followers. Kasmi explains this by saying “engagement drops on controversial topics, which points to systemic bias”. Her comment shows that the algorithm filters out feminist content more than other topics, making it harder for these messages to reach people. This brings about serious questions about how platform rules may be silencing important voices, especially in places outside the West where feminism already faces a lot of extra pressure from society.

Another big issue here is the spread of false information, and how fast it can happen, especially online, because just like important information can spread quickly for visibility, so can false information. This is why feminist groups are often wrongly described as extreme, anti-religious, or disconnected from local culture. This is done on purpose to make their work seem less valid. So to fight this, participants said they rely on trusted sources and make sure their content is backed by experts. This includes checking facts and making sure their messages are strong enough to resist false claims.

Aboulfaraj shared that these kinds of lies are used to confuse the public and block open discussion about what feminism actually stands for.

The participants also said that many people still have the wrong idea about feminism. It is often seen as an attack on religion or traditional values, which creates a hostile environment both online and offline. Ouachou summed it up when she said “We have been attacked, received death threats, humiliated for defending women’s rights.” Her words show how deeply social norms shape what happens online. Instead of being a neutral space, the internet can actually make things worse by allowing attacks to spread more easily and by giving people the chance to act anonymously.

While Instagram gives feminist activists a decent space where they can share ideas and reach more people to amplify them, it is still affected by the same problems found in society nonetheless. These are limits caused by the technology itself, the way platforms are run, and the beliefs held by many users. The participants made it clear that success in digital activism is not just about being creative or getting lots of views. It also depends on how well they handle the risks that come with working online. That means creating safety plans, checking facts carefully, and working with others to push back against unfair platform rules and harmful ideas. In Morocco, these steps are necessary not only to keep going online, but also to build a strong and respected feminist movement in a difficult and often hostile space.

4.2.8. Instagram Campaigns That Make an Impact: Digital Evidence of Transformation

The answers from the participants show that Instagram is not just used for communication. It is also a space where feminist activism can lead to real change in society, politics, and law. Everyone interviewed mentioned specific campaigns that went beyond just raising awareness. These efforts had clear, real-world outcomes. Their examples support the main point of the study, which is that Instagram, through its visual and interactive design, can be a strong tool for advocacy and change in Morocco.

One strong example is the “Mamhkouch” campaign, led by Aboulfaraj, which focused on fighting gender-based violence online. She explained “The Mamhkouch campaign received over 300,000 views... it sparked important conversations, raised

awareness of TFGBV”. The success of the campaign was not just about getting views. Its real power was in opening up public conversations around a topic that is often ignored. Working with media groups like Jawjab, allows the campaign to reach a wider audience, showing how partnerships help make messages stronger and more effective beyond activist spaces.

Moutaouakkil pointed to the “Moroccan Outlaws 490” campaign as a key moment in her belief in digital activism. She said “The Moroccan Outlaws 490 campaign made me believe in digital activism... It contributed to the freedom of Hajar Raissouni”. This campaign gained a lot of support online and was connected to a legal outcome. It helped bring attention to individual rights and laws that many see as unfair, because it talked about hard topics like sexuality and bodily rights, it was both controversial and powerful. It helped take private struggles and turn them into public debate.

Ouachou talked about the “End Child Marriage” campaign, done with Project Soar, and called it a major success. She said “The ‘End Child Marriage’ campaign... had a strong impact... it was very important in terms of advocacy for children’s rights”. This campaign showed how digital work could bring attention to an important and often hidden issue. It linked the rights of women and children and proved that social media could be used to talk about complex cultural problems. Working with both local and global partners also helped give the campaign more trust and a wider reach.

Kasmi said that campaigns about very emotional topics like femicide and reproductive rights often get the most attention and create the biggest impact. She said “Our campaigns... have had tangible effects, attracting the attention of media outlets and lawmakers”. This proves that when campaign topics are linked to serious problems or current events, they can lead to real change, including media attention and political response, all in real life.

All of these campaigns followed a similar approach, they raised awareness, made good use of Instagram’s visual tools, built strong partnerships, and turned online attention into real-world results, that can actually be seen, not just felt or liked on a post. The experiences shared by the participants show that when used with purpose and teamwork, Instagram can be a powerful tool for feminist action in Morocco. These testimonies prove that digital activism is not just about being visible online. When

done well, it can help change laws, shift how people think, and bring people together to act.

4.2.9. Expected Support from Instagram and Similar Platforms

What came through in many of the interviews is a clear tension: while Instagram offers real opportunities for feminist expression, the platform itself is not built to fully support that kind of advocacy, especially in places like Morocco, where political and social constraints are more intense. Several participants made it clear that the problem isn't just how users adapt to the platform, but the need for the platform itself to evolve. They want changes that reflect the specific challenges faced by feminist communities online, changes that go beyond adding new features. As Aboulfaraj put it, "Instagram should develop tools to report harmful behavior and respond more quickly... prioritize educational content." Her words speak to something many others echoed: the urgent need for systems that can actually protect users from digital violence, things like hate speech, harassment, and threats, which came up again and again.

But it is not just about safety. Many also pointed to how Instagram's algorithm seems to work against them. Posts with feminist messages, especially the more political ones, often disappear from people's feeds. Ouachou said it directly: "Policies that protect feminist content and transparency in algorithms are needed." There's a growing feeling that visibility isn't shaped by the relevance of the message, but by how clickable or commercial it is. And that makes it harder for serious, rights-based content to reach the audience it deserves. Some spoke about the need for the algorithm to actively support this kind of work, not bury it under entertainment-driven posts.

There's also the issue of resources. Many of these activists and organizations are working with almost nothing, no consistent funding, no technical support, often not even formal recognition. Kasmi summed it up well: "For marginalized voices, safety tools, educational content and financial support mechanisms should be provided." It's not just about money. It is about valuing the emotional labor and risk involved in doing this kind of work online. Without structural support, even the most committed efforts can fade into exhaustion or invisibility.

All of this points to a shift in how activists see platforms like Instagram. It is no longer just a place to post, it is a powerful player that shapes what gets seen, and what doesn't.

Moutaouakkil noted, “You can reach many people and create change with an Instagram account, but the platform should make more room for this.” That tension, between what’s possible and what’s blocked, came up in every conversation. For these women, change isn’t just about being louder or more creative. It’s also about pushing the platform to take responsibility. Making space for feminist voices online is not a tech upgrade, it is a matter of justice, care, and visibility.

4.2.10. Future Expectations: Safer and Fairer Digital Spaces

The participants clearly stated that Instagram needs to take more responsibility and make serious changes to better support feminist activism online. They said that the current tools for dealing with online abuse, threats, and harassment are not enough. Activists working in increasingly hostile online spaces are left without proper protection. Aboulfaraj shared her concern through one of her answers saying “My friends received death threats in 2024... Instagram needs to cooperate more effectively with the police and develop protective systems.” Her comment shows that the risks of speaking up online are real and growing. It also points to a need for Instagram to do more than just delete harmful comments, it needs to work with legal and civil institutions to protect its users.

Participants have also talked about how important it is to support grassroots feminist groups. Many of these groups do not have enough funding or technical support. Some suggestions included adding tools to the platform like donation buttons, easy-to-use campaign features, and better ways for their posts to be seen in the algorithm. Kasmī said “Donation buttons and campaign tools would be very useful, especially for advocacy groups”, and Moutaouakkil added “I would like to see clearer and stronger frameworks on this issue, especially supporting tools for young activists.” These ideas go beyond minor changes, they suggest that platforms like Instagram could become real sources of support for feminist organizing, not just places to post content.

Another major issue raised was how the platform’s algorithm makes it harder for feminist content to reach people. Ouachou said “I hope that big tech companies will be more in line with feminist values and proactively support gender justice movements.” She and others explained that posts about gender equality are often hidden or shown less, especially when they do not get quick engagement. This leads to the same types of voices always being centered, while activist content becomes

harder to find. The participants said the platform needs to be more transparent about how these systems work and more committed to supporting content that promotes social change.

The participants also made it clear that running successful feminist campaigns online should not depend on how well individual posts perform or how strong individual activists are. Real change will only come if platforms commit to building a safer and more fair online space, that means working directly with feminist groups to create better rules, design useful tools, and support messages that challenge inequality. In their view, for digital feminist work to truly grow, tech companies must help build a space that values safety, fairness, and shared responsibility.

All of this goes to show that feminist activists are not just creating content online and looking for some likes or shares of hashtags, they are shaping public policy, building networks, and standing up for the digital rights of those who cannot fight for theirs. Their push for change shows that they fully understand how technology, politics, and culture are all connected and part of the same conversation, as they also know that the real power to change these systems lies within the platforms themselves.

This chapter looked at how Moroccan feminist activists and organizations use Instagram to carry out their work. According to the interviews, Instagram is seen as a valuable tool because it is visual, interactive, and appeals to younger audiences. Activists use it to raise awareness and make complicated topics like gender violence, child marriage, and reproductive rights easier to talk about and understand. Campaigns like “Mamhkoumch” and “Moroccan Outlaws 490” proved that this kind of work can lead to real results, including public conversations and legal responses.

At the same time, they described serious problems. These include digital violence, biased algorithms, and political opposition. These are not just tech-related issues, they reflect deeper inequalities that also exist in society. The people interviewed called for better tools from the platform, more support for underfunded groups, and real transparency about how Instagram works. In short, while Instagram has become a useful platform for feminist activism, its full potential will only be reached if the digital space becomes more equal, safer, and more willing to support social change.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated how women's rights advocacy takes shape on Instagram and the effects of this digital activism on women's empowerment in Morocco, with the aim of understanding the role of digital platforms in social transformation. It analyzed how the digital space has become a field of struggle at both individual and collective levels, focusing particularly on the experiences of digital feminist actors.

Instagram is a powerful tool that allows both individual stories to be shared in the public sphere and collective campaigns to reach a wide audience. Its visual nature increases the emotional power of the narrative; it enables the dissemination of feminist discourses through storytelling, visuals and hashtag strategies. This potential of digital platforms was clearly seen in the interviews conducted within the scope of the study: Thanks to the campaigns, cases that attracted public attention were brought to the agenda, gender-based violence became visible, and the level of awareness of women's legal rights increased.

However, this potential is limited by the platform's policies and digital patriarchy. Problems such as shadowbanning, loss of visibility on sensitive issues, hate speech and digital harassment, which were frequently mentioned in the interviews, push digital feminist activism into a constant defensive position. In this context, Instagram is a space of empowerment as well as a conflict area where the risks of censorship, attacks and exclusion are intense.

The activists interviewed in this study emphasized that the digital sphere plays an important role in conveying demands for legal reform (such as the reform of the Penal Code and the Family Code) to a wide audience. Digital campaigns have become a mechanism for making women's voices heard, sharing experiences and generating collective solidarity through not only the production of information but also “storytelling”.

As activists have previously mentioned, women's rights advocacy in Morocco often encounters cultural, religious and political resistance. In this context, digital platforms are not only a place where activists produce content; they have also become channels for discursive and strategic negotiations. The exclusion of feminist content by labeling local values as “Western” results in the marginalization of women's rights discourses.

At this point, digital activism is shaped not only by demands for rights, but also by the struggle to legitimize these demands.

The Mamhkoumch, 490 (Moroccan Outlaws) and End Child Marriage campaigns highlighted in the research are examples of the capacity of digital activism to create tangible transformation. These campaigns have both reached large audiences and created an effective counter-narrative against legal and social pressures. The 490 campaign, which led to the release of Hajar Raissouni in particular, has shown that digital activism can have direct political consequences.

To guarantee the future resilience and durability of the digital feminist movement, particularly on platforms such as Instagram, it is imperative to confront the difficulties identified by activists. Based on the interviews, the subsequent proposals delineate pragmatic and strategic measures to enhance the movement's security, inclusivity, and efficacy:

1. Platform Transparency and Algorithmic Justice: New regulations are needed to make Instagram's algorithms transparent, explain why content has lost visibility, and prevent feminist content from being arbitrarily suppressed.
2. Security Policies and Platform Responsibility: Platforms like Instagram need to establish more active security mechanisms in the face of threats, harassment and organized attacks against digital feminist activists. Cooperation protocols with law enforcement agencies and user support lines can be developed.
3. Resource and Visibility Support: Grassroots can provide Instagram, technical and financial support for organizations and individual activists to gain more visibility. In addition, activism-friendly features such as customization of campaign tools and donation buttons can strengthen digital struggle.
4. Bridges Between Digital and Physical Struggle: Combining digital campaigns with physical actions will create more lasting social impacts. In this context, digital activism should not remain only online; it should find a response in the streets, in the courts, and in parliament.

5. Partnerships for Social Transformation: Increasing dialogue between digital rights advocates, feminist networks, and technology companies is critical to building a more equitable digital space.

To conclude, this research shows that Instagram is both a useful tool and a difficult space for feminist activism. On the one hand, it helps raise awareness and gives people a platform to speak. On the other, it can also be a place where feminist voices are ignored, silenced, or attacked. The digital world brings new chances for change, but also new problems. A fairer and more supportive digital space will only be possible if feminist groups recognize these challenges and find smart ways to respond to them.

This study focuses on a group of civil society organizations in Morocco and how they use Instagram to support women's rights. It does not try to speak for the whole country but instead looks at the real experiences of these specific organizations. The results show that Instagram helps them reach young people, use creative forms of activism, and bring people together through planned campaigns.

The research also looks at problems like biased algorithms, shadowbanning, and online abuse. These are serious issues that affect how activists work online and whether their messages are seen. Exploring these problems, helps the study add to what is known about feminist activism on social media and asks important questions about who gets to be heard, what is seen, and how digital spaces can be made more equal for the better of everyone.

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