
The Fight for Korean Abortion Rights through Social Media Activism

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How do abortion-rights activists in South Korea utilize social media to fight for reproductive rights? This research examines which strategies and frameworks were used by pro-choice social media activists to promote legal change regarding women's abortion rights in South Korea. While it was the Constitutional Court that struck down South Korea's criminal abortion law, the act followed years of extensive work by feminist NGOs in South Korea along with the emerging popularity of the #MeToo movement that began to address the need for safe, legal, and regulated abortion policy. Though previous research has examined the role of feminist movements and traditional NGOs in the reproductive rights movement, the significant role social media activism has played in the recent successes of women's reproductive health rights has been largely overlooked. This research conducts a survey of social media activists and aims to understand the role of online feminist activism in the recent advancement of Korean women's reproductive rights. Through exploring how social media activism worked cross-culturally to gain a critical mass of support to change the tide during the Constitution Court case which decriminalized abortion in 2019, the importance of social media as a tool for mobilizing and organizing activist behavior in the context of Korean society can be better understood.

Introduction to Abortion Law in South Korea

Within the past couple of years, abortion laws across the world have seen varying degrees of upheaval, most notably in South Korea. As of April 2019, South Korea's criminalization of abortion has been deemed unconstitutional by

Korea's Constitutional Court due to the efforts of pro-choice¹ non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the influence of domestic and international pro-choice movements.² Until December 31, 2020, South Korea had to revise its law to decriminalize abortion and add provisions to make the procedure more accessible for all Korean women in need of an abortion. and as of January 2021, the necessary measures were passed to ensure abortion was decriminalized, and the previous laws were repealed.³ Since 2012, suggestions of the influence of social media activism have been reflected in reproductive rights in South Korea. In the country, the Constitutional Court reversed their previous ruling, which upheld the abortion ban except in cases where the mother's life was at risk, or in cases of rape or incest.⁴ This suggests that due to the rise in social media usage and the changing political climate, social media activism may have played an important role in this reversal. Given that the abortion ban has lasted over 60 years since Korea's criminalization of abortion in 1953 and South Korea currently has one of the lowest birth rates in the world, it is remarkable that Korean pro-choice organizations have been so successful in obtaining substantial reproductive health rights over the past decade.

Moreover, a continuing trend relevant for reproductive rights, particularly in East Asia but also throughout the developed world, is the issue of diminishing birth rates.⁵ Historically, South Korea has prioritized economic security over female bodily autonomy, which has led to restricting abortion rights as fears about an aging workforce have risen. This questions how South Korea, a country with meager birth rates, utilized social media activism to promote the decriminalization of

1 For most of those who identify as pro-choice, the term pro-choice is an ideology that advocates for a woman's right to have an abortion and to support legislation that provides safe, legal, and accessible abortion services.

2 Sunhye Kim et al., "The Role of Reproductive Justice Movements in Challenging South Korea's Abortion Ban," *Health and Human Rights* 21, no. 2 (2019): 97-107.

3 Yoonjung Seo, "South Korea to Legalize Abortion after 66-Year Ban," *CNN*, April 11, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/11/health/south-korea-abortion-ban-ruling-intl/index.html>

4 Eun-Young Jeong, "Abortion Ban Overturned in South Korea After 66 Years," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/abortion-ban-overturned-in-south-korea-after-66-years-11554966548>

5 James M. Raymo, "Marriage and Family in East Asia: Continuity and Change," *Annual Review of Sociology* 41, no. 1 (April 2015): 17, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112428>

abortion in a country with a history of restricting female bodily autonomy.

Importantly, as South Korea began to re-evaluate its current anti-abortion laws, feminist pro-choice organizations started utilizing social media activism to sustain their cause and garner international support. Before the popularity of the #MeToo movement in South Korea, the issue of abortion was rarely discussed in the general public given the social stigma attached to unmarried women's sexual behavior and bodily autonomy.⁶ However, South Korea has had a long and successful history of activism. Due to the influence of South Korea's profound internet-savvy culture combined with the increased popularity of online activism, South Korean activists began to enact massive social change via social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Daum Internet Cafe.

For example, in 2016 and 2017, South Korea's president, Park Geun-Hye, was impeached due to the successful Candlelight Movement,⁷ organized oversocialmedia, resulting in one of the largest peaceful protests in South Korean history. Furthermore, in 2016, the global #MeToo Movement gained popularity in South Korea, which further developed South Korea's feminist online activist culture.⁸ Along with the #MeToo movement, Megalia, a South Korean feminist online community, emerged in 2015 and became one of the mobilizing forces that confronted misogyny in South Korean society.⁹ After feminist organizations began utilizing social media more effectively to combat misogyny and sexual assault against women, pro-choice feminists started using these online activist methods to implement their reproductive rights-focused agendas.

Furthermore, along with social media activism, the changing political and social climate in South Korea has impacted current abortion politics in South Korea. Compared to the political environment during the 2012 Constitutional

6 Sunhye Kim et al., "The Role of Reproductive Justice Movements," 97-107.

7 Sangwon Lee, "The Role of Social Media in Protest Participation: The Case of Candlelight Vigils in South Korea," *International Journal of Communication* 12, (2018): 1523-1540, <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/7767>

8 Alice Privey. "#MeToo: South Korea's Social Revolution," *Institute for Security and Development Policy* (blog), June 20, 2018, <https://isdp.eu/metoo-south-koreas-social-revolution/>

9 Euisol Jeong and Jieun Lee, "We take the red pill, we confront the DickTrix: online feminist activism and the augmentation of gendered realities in South Korea," *Feminist Media Studies* 18, no. 4 (2018): 706-717, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1447354>

Court case where abortion politics were viewed as more taboo and discussed less in public, South Korea's government has undergone a shifting political environment since 2012. Unlike Korea's president in 2012, Lee Myung-bak, the current president, Moon Jae-in, has cultivated an avid human rights-focused image and is significantly more open to criticism regarding women's rights violations. Moon's popularity and association with human rights have allowed for a more open dialogue on women's rights, specifically regarding abortion rights. Given this increased political opportunity structure,¹⁰ Korean feminists have successfully capitalized on these changes through social media activism.

In South Korea, the first mass protest (primarily mobilized on social media) regarding abortion rights was held on October 15, 2016,¹¹ shortly after the #MeToo movement exploded in the western world. In the same period, various pro-choice rallies were held globally, most notably in Poland. Poland's protests, known as the "Black Monday Protest," circulated among Korean women via social media, and Korean feminists held their own "Black Protest Korea" shortly after. Various online communities, such as Womad, organized these Korean Black Monday Protests by adopting the Polish feminists' slogan, black dress code, and the unifying symbol of the uterus giving the middle finger, which was disseminated all over Korean social media.¹² South Korean feminists' cross-cultural approach to mimic other global activism such as the Black Monday Protests helped pave the way for Korean abortion issues to become internationally recognized and mainstream on social media.

Additionally, Korean feminists not only began to endorse Polish feminist tactics, but they also utilized the Argentinian feminists' pro-choice movement to further spread their own campaign's message and agenda. On August 8, 2018, South Korean feminists held a rally in front of the Argentina Embassy in South Korea to support #Aborto_Legal in honor of the Argentina abortion protests

10 Marco Giugni, "Political Opportunities: From Tilly to Tilly," *Swiss Political Science Review* 15, no. 2 (2009): 361–367, doi:10.1002/j.1662-6370.2009.tb00136.x.

11 Sunhye Kim et al, "The Role of Reproductive Justice Movements," 97-107.

12 Sofia Lotto Persio, "Women in South Korea Launch Polish-Inspired Pro-Choice Protest," *International Business Times*, October 24, 2016, <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/women-south-korea-launch-polish-inspired-pro-choice-campaign-fully-legalise-abortion-1587986>

occurring at the same time.¹³ Through social media, South Korean pro-choice organizations put the abortion issue into the public's consciousness while also capitalizing on the international movements co-occurring. Therefore, due to the global traction and constant exchange of cross-cultural strategic borrowing, Korean social media maintained public attention on the issue and increased international media coverage compared to the 2012 abortion court case.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of social media as a tool for activism does not solely pertain to South Korea but has impacted activism worldwide. Social media has become crucial in mobilizing people from the local, national, and international levels, and activists have begun to embrace this form of transnational online activism. The emergence of digital networks has enabled more efficient communication and protest artifacts (for example, audio-visual content relating to protests such as images and videos) that can be culturally transmitted and contribute to a collective memory to unify individual protestors.¹⁴ Over the past decade, global NGOs have increasingly begun utilizing new media tools such as social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter to promote their organizations' mission and increase mainstream media attention.¹⁵

Social movement scholarship has suggested that more activism takes place online through social media platforms. Firstly, the potential opportunities created for feminist activism due to the anonymity provided by online platforms have enabled more activists to pursue activism in a safe online space. Due to Korean society's patriarchal nature, Korean feminists are commonly labeled as radicals, which negatively depicts Korean feminists and often leads to the defamation of women's reputations and honor. One example of such defamation occurred in 2018 after Irene, a member of the K-pop group Red Velvet, shared a photo online of her reading *Kim Jiyoung Born 1982*. The novel discusses topics such as sexual harassment and the

13 Marge Berer and Lesley Hoggart, "Progress toward Decriminalization of Abortion and Universal Access to Safe Abortions: National Trends and Strategies," *Health and Human Rights Journal* 21, no. 2 (December, 2019): 79–85.

14 Bart Cammaerts, "Social Media and Activism," in *The International Encyclopedia of Digital Communication and Society*, ed. Robin Mansell and Peng Hwa (Oxford, UK Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 1027-1034, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/62090/>

15 Hyunjin Seo et al, "Global Activism and New Media: A Study of Transnational NGOs' Online Public Relations," *Public Relations Review* 35, no. 2 (2009): 123–126, doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.02.002.

gender pay gap in Korea, forcing some to view the story as feminist and radical. After her post, she received online harassment from her majority male fanbase and had to remove her photo from social media to remedy the controversy she triggered by promoting a 'feminist' novel.¹⁶ Interestingly, Irene has never labeled herself as a feminist, so the unprovoked attack by her male fanbase demonstrates the patriarchal restrictions on women's freedom of speech and opinion regarding women's rights in Korea.

Considering that South Korea's abortion debate is characterized by a history of misogyny and concern with controlling women's bodies, providing anonymous social media outlets can ensure activists safe spaces to organize and protest without the risk of defamation or negative consequences. Korea's obsession with labeling feminist ideology as taboo has forced many feminists to rely on social media activism as a strategy to promote their beliefs safely and anonymously.

Secondly, social media activism has also increased organizations' success in connecting different NGOs across time and space. This model of transnationalism establishes connections between non-state actors across borders that share values and a common objective.¹⁷ These transnational advocacy networks (TANs) provide an opportunity for different transnational groups to exchange ideas, resources, and services while also creating a sense of solidarity.¹⁸ These international efforts to influence policy have been utilized since the age of globalization but have increased due to technology's ability to link international organizations together. In South Korea, online pro-choice activists reached out to Irish, Argentinian, and Polish activists who were simultaneously fighting for their reproductive rights. The similar political background in restricting abortion rights in predominately patriarchal Christian countries and the women's shared goal of decriminalizing abortion allowed these groups to partake in cross-cultural solidarity. Through online activism, these groups could pursue their common goals by using social media as a tool for social interaction, connection, and a method for exchanging resources and ideas.

16 Claire Lee, "[Feature] Feminist Novel Becomes Center of Controversy in South Korea," *The Korea Herald*, March 27, 2018, www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20180327000799.

17 Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

18 Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), doi:10.7591/9780801471292.

Overall, transnational advocacy through social media has increased activists' potential for promoting their political objectives and international solidarity. If it were not for social media activism, Korean activists would not have obtained the resources to collaborate with Polish protestors and adopt their Black Monday Protests strategy. Additionally, they would have been unable to demonstrate cross-cultural solidarity to their Argentinian and Irish Pro-Choice activists.

One of the unique mechanisms in which social media connects groups cross-culturally and enables rapid communication is by hashtags. This strategy, known as hashtag activism,¹⁹ ensures broad readership over a short time and allows cross-cultural groups to disseminate information that another group can easily find. This mechanism can be seen in South Korea, where activists consistently used hashtags in Korean and English to reach global audiences. Hashtags in English such as #MyBodyMyChoice, #ProChoice, and #MeToo have all become commonly utilized hashtags on Korean social media. This global strategy allows Korean activists' posts to be exposed to international audiences, and pro-choice online activists worldwide can be exposed to and interact with Korean activists. Without this hashtag activism, it is highly unlikely non-Korean speakers would be exposed to their social media posts, which leads to a decrease in cross-cultural solidarity and fewer media coverage on the issue.

Research Question

Social media activism has proven itself an essential alternative to traditional in-person activism in which women can ensure their anonymity and safety using social media platforms. Online activism provides safe spaces for discussion and debates and can efficiently disseminate urgent information to mobilize and organize protests. This increased protest turnout and encouraged cross-cultural networking with other successful pro-choice organizations and activists. Given past research's emphasis on social media's potential to give women a voice through safe and anonymous measures, has online activism helped activists mobilize and promote abortion rights and, if so, how?

Given the heightened media coverage on South Korean abortion-

19 Ying Xiong et al, "Hashtag Activism and Message Frames among Social Movement Organizations: Semantic Network Analysis and Thematic Analysis of Twitter during the #MeToo Movement." *Public Relations Review* 45, no. 1, (2019): 10–23. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.10.014.

related issues, this research focuses on what online strategies did reproductive health rights in Korea use to draw attention to their cause during the Constitutional Court case of 2019. This project investigates what roles South Korean social media activism played during the 2019 abortion ruling. Due to the increased presence of social media activism over the past couple of years, South Korean feminists have become more active in asserting their reproductive rights online. This resulted in the strategic organization of pro-choice protests and increased media coverage on women's reproductive rights violations that supported the decriminalization of abortion in 2019.

Research Methods

This research was conducted online using an anonymous Google Forms survey to interview various pro-choice feminist social media activists' accounts. The activists were chosen based on those utilizing their page to primarily promote abortion rights-related content using pro-choice hashtags or content on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. The applied survey gathered demographic information as well as strategies that these online activist accounts utilized to promote abortion rights-related content. An anonymous 19-question google forms survey consisted of activist-related questions that investigated what types of methods were used during the abortion protests in 2019. The survey includes a range of multiple-choice questions and one short answer question. The majority of questions were multiple choice because of the ability to compare and analyze the results using a number system. The survey link and an introduction of the interviewer and their research were sent to the pro-choice activists' accounts on various social media platforms. These accounts were found using specific popular hashtags relating to abortion rights in Korea such as #mybodymychoice, #blackmondayprotest, #imsinjungdanhapbeophwa (Legalization of pregnancy termination), #naktajejopyejei (abolish anti-abortion law).

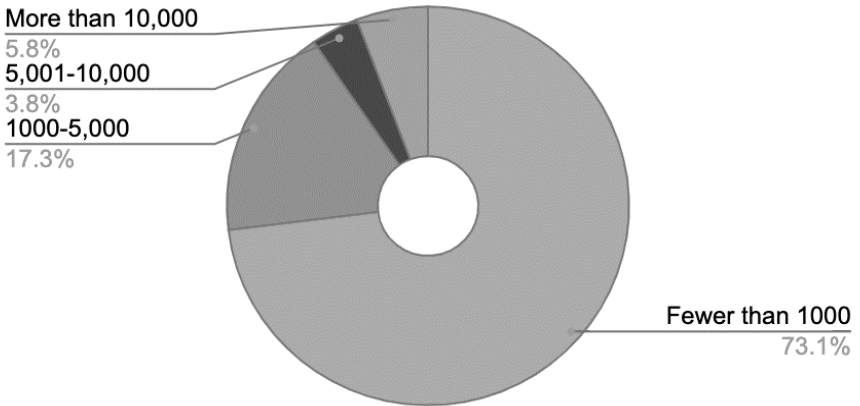
Then, the activists using these popular abortion-related hashtags were privately contacted via direct message on the social media users' accounts. After the survey was sent out to approximately 150 online feminist accounts, 52 responses were anonymously collected from Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Daum Cafe. This research method proved the most efficient as the sample was as big as desired. While the original survey was conducted in Korean, the survey questions have been translated into English for this research paper.

Results

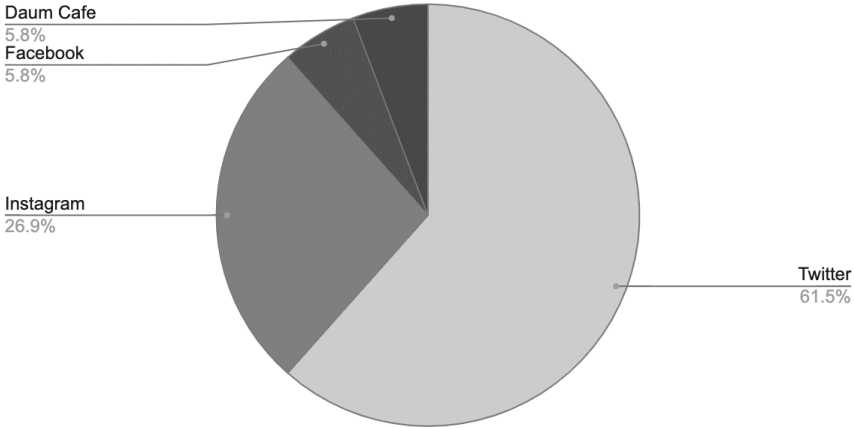
Survey Demographics

The results collected from this survey can be divided into two categories. The first aspect of the survey focused mainly on the demographics of the respondents. Regarding the platforms used most prevalently among the respondents, most online feminist accounts hailed from Twitter (61.5%), then Instagram (26.9%), followed by Facebook (5.8%), and Daum Cafe (5.8%). Most social media activist accounts had a tight-knit community, with 73.1% of accounts with less than 1,000 followers. However, 17.3% of accounts had between 1,000-5,000 followers. Overall, while only a minority of respondents had a large following of over 5,000 followers, most of the accounts relied on a reliable yet small platform to spread their activism, highlighting the importance of the informal networks and tight-knit communities provided through social media platforms.

On average, how many followers did each social media account have?



Which social media platforms did social media activists utilize the most to promote feminism and reproductive rights?



Lastly, all respondents were asked when they first began using social media as a form of feminist activism. Most respondents (76.9%) said that they started their social media accounts between 2016 and 2019, which further emphasizes the contention that #MeToo was a mobilizing force for feminism (since 2016 was the year the #MeToo movement became mainstream globally). Only one user (1.9%) had created an account during 2012 when the first Constitutional Court case on decriminalizing abortion occurred, while the last four other respondents (9.6%) had an online feminist account before 2012. Furthermore, Twitter had no trending hashtags during the 2012 abortion debate, and there was significantly lower hashtag usage than during the 2019 case.

However, the possibility that more 2012 posts were later deleted should be acknowledged. Instagram was a relatively new platform during the 2012 trial. Specialized functions such as hashtags were not as common of a feature, making it more challenging to use hashtag activism and make one’s posts viral. Nevertheless, given the lack of hashtags used for abortion rights and abortion-rights-related posts during 2012, these demographics support the findings that there was a lack of a social media presence during the 2012 Constitutional Court case compared to the 2019 Court case. While attributing the possibility that there could have been more 2012 social media users active during the 2012 court case who are no longer active, the main findings support that there was still a noticeable lack of social

media presence regarding the 2012 court case. This suggests a heightened mobilization surrounding the 2019 court case as there was a sharp increase in the number of feminist activists' accounts covering abortion-rights politics.

Social Media Activist Accounts' Strategies

The second phase of the research was analyzing the strategies utilized by these feminist accounts to promote abortion rights on social media. The most common strategies were publicizing upcoming protests or events regarding abortion rights, sharing relevant news articles and headlines, posting relevant hashtags and webtoon comics, and strategic mirroring. In this case, strategic mirroring is a common strategy that Korean feminists often use to mock misogynistic slurs under a comedic light to emphasize the shallowness of sexist behavior that men often portray online. Mirroring allows feminists to react to online misogyny through trolling, sarcasm, linguistic violence, and parodying misogynistic discourse.²⁰ An example of this would be feminists using purposefully offensive sexist terms and switching their meaning to offend men. This tactic puts men in a vulnerable position and highlights the absurdness of misogynistic behavior. Lastly, participants added that posting pictures of participants at abortion rights protest events was another heavily used strategy. This tactic accurately and actively captures the overwhelming support from women at demonstrations and encourages more women to participate when they physically see other women protesting in pictures distributed online. While some of the women's faces were covered in the photos to protect their identities, this tactic was effective as it demonstrated how massive the support was in protest turn-out. In essence, social media has become essential for mobilizing followers to attend in-person protests and giving people an outlet to support their cause from the comfort of their homes.

As mentioned above, for South Korean users, social media functions as one of the most prevalent methods of disseminating abortion event-related information, especially regarding rallies and protests. According to the survey, social media was considered the most popular method for acquiring specific details about upcoming abortion-rights events, such as the location, time, and expected dress code (usually black for the Black Monday Protests). Specifically, 88.5% of activists claimed that social media was the most common tool to learn detailed information about upcoming events. In comparison, resources such as Daum Cafe (25%) and internet search engines (23.1%)

20 Euisol Jeong and Jieun Lee, "We take the red pill," 708.

were other popular means of obtaining event-related information. Surprisingly, only four respondents (7.7%) reported using women's organizations' websites and offices to access this information. This data highlights that social media has become a more relied upon resource for obtaining activist information as compared to traditional women's organizations, since social media platforms can readily and efficiently disseminate information.

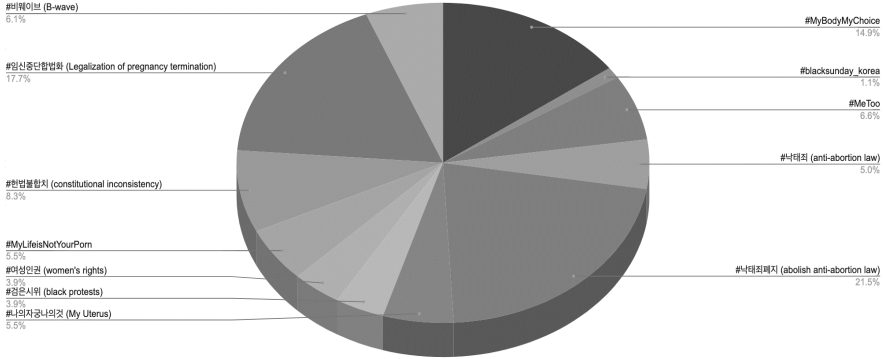
In addition, when asked what they do in situation when they need to find more information about an upcoming abortion-rights-related protest, the majority of activists (42.3%) claimed that they use social media very often to acquire more information. Furthermore, 34.6% of activists noted that they use social media 'almost every time' to obtain information on abortion-related events or protests. Only 5.8% of respondents stated that they rarely use social media to find information. These responses amplify social media's role as an organizational unit for collectively and efficiently disseminating events regarding abortion rights and explaining the successful and timely protests organized over social media throughout 2019.

Another interesting aspect of social media's role in disseminating event-related news was how the users communicated upcoming in-person abortion-related events. Specifically, when asked if they have ever attended and participated in abortion rights events promoted through social media (protests, discussions, fundraising, etc.), most users (53.8%) claimed that they have somewhat often or very often experienced this. On the other hand, a significant portion of respondents (32.7%) noted that they had not experienced a time where they attended an abortion rights event that they previously saw advertised on social media. Despite a substantial number of respondents not being mobilized to participate in events via social media, most have occasionally mobilized to attend protests and other events via social media posts, demonstrating social media's potential for mobilizing followers to be involved activists.

However, when the activists were asked if they ever posted or advertised about abortion rights events, they attended themselves to encourage in-person involvement among their followers, there was a much higher number of respondents who posted advertisements about their own experiences attending abortion rights protests. Twenty-four respondents (46.2%) claimed that they sometimes used this strategy to promote abortion rights, while 12 respondents (23.1%) claimed that they often used it. Also, it should be noted that one of the most cited strategies regarding a post's content was to upload pictures of women at abortion-rights rallies to mobilize the social media

accounts’ followers to attend these events. Despite social media not always mobilizing the online activists themselves, the activists were often involved in advertising their own experiences at rallies to mobilize their followers.

Most Popular Hashtags Used



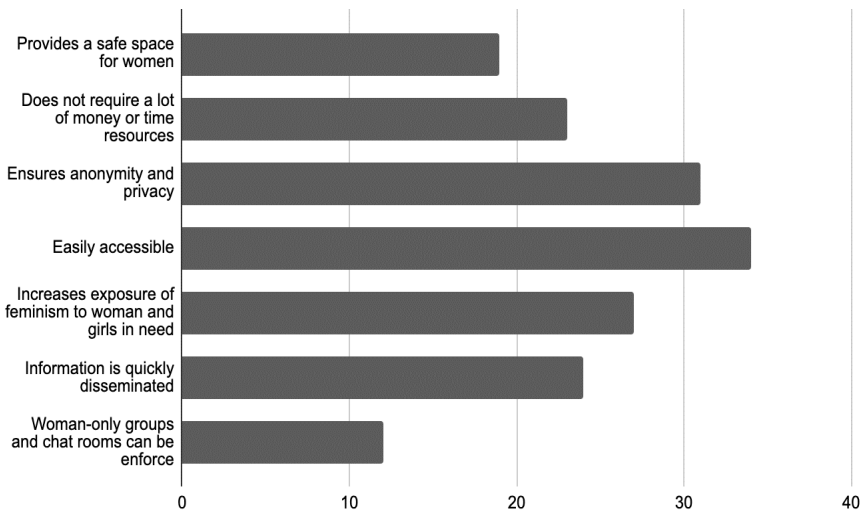
Lack of social media activism prior to 2019

Even compared to 2018, there seemed to have been a significant increase in exposure to abortion rights-related posts on social media. One question asked in the survey was how many more abortion rights-related posts users saw in comparison to 2018. 50% of respondents claimed it increased somewhat since 2018, while 28.8% claimed that the number of posts increased immensely compared to 2018. However, given the demographics, while most respondents (76.9%) became active feminists on social media between 2016-2019, there was still a noted increase in exposure to abortion-rights related posts compared to just the year before the Constitutional Court case. Given that over 90% of activists have an account since 2018 or before, the activists’ perception in an increase in social media activism is evident. Beyond the difference in social media attention towards abortion rights between 2018 and 2019, there has been a remarkable increase in social media usage as a form of activism compared to the 2012 Constitutional Court case, as most participants (84.6%) became activists in 2013 or later. It is important to note that the perceived increase in posts does not inherently mean an increase in actual numbers of posts but that these activists themselves have become more aware of them.

Advantages of Social Media Activism

Overall, social media has been a substantial factor in the increase of abortion rights activism. Given South Korea’s rampant and negative public opinion about feminists, social media has acted as a necessary tool for feminists to stay safe yet actively promote women’s rights. When asked why these activists used social media as a platform for activism, among the respondents’ most popular answers were that social media was extremely accessible (59.6%), it effectively disseminated information (51.9%), it easily maintains anonymity (57.7%), and it provides a safe space for women (34.6%). For example, resources such as Daum Cafe and Kakao talk can provide women-only chat rooms where ideas can be safely exchanged, which ultimately protects the safety of anyone participating in these chats. Facebook groups can also accept or decline pending members, where groups often vet the pending member before being admitted to the group’s page. Additionally, many respondents noted that, unlike in-person organizations, social media could educate women unaware of sexism and misogyny more readily by being exposed to their posts that have started trending or gone viral on their platforms. Often, trending social media posts appear on popular pages through hashtags or several likes, exposing young girls and women to these safe resources without purposefully searching for them.

Why is Social Media a Popular Form of Reproductive Rights Activism?



Cultural Aspects of South Korean Feminist Activism

While Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are all internationally recognized platforms, Daum Cafe and Kakao Talk are Korean-owned social media platforms that also played a significant role in feminist activism. Daum Cafe, a South Korean internet cafe, and Kakao Talk, a Korean text messaging system, were other resources to create female-only feminist online chatrooms. These platforms are a pillar of Korean internet culture and have allowed activists an outlet for spreading their message to a Korean audience.

In one question, the respondents were explicitly asked if they have ever gone on to a Daum Cafe to promote upcoming events and protest regarding abortion rights. Twenty-three respondents (44.2%) responded that they had used Daum Cafe to promote abortion rights events. In addition, Daum Cafe has been deemed the second most accessible method of acquiring feminist-related news and event information after Twitter. Furthermore, female-only chat rooms are easily accessible on Daum Cafe, which ensures a private and safe space for women to meet and organize. Activists have also used Kakao Talk to share event information about upcoming abortion rights protests and the platform as a place to share news updates to female-only chat rooms. Overall, the combination of global platforms such as Twitter and Instagram with culturally Korean platforms such as Daum Cafe and Kakao Talk has allowed activists to effectively reach out to a Korean and a global audience, which helped increase international and national awareness and solidarity of Korean women's rights.

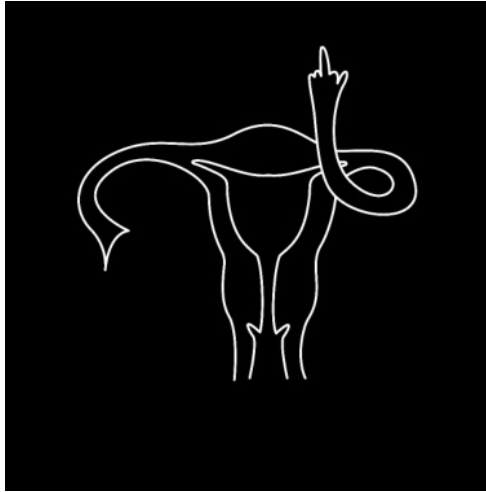
International Solidarity Approach

As mentioned previously, South Korean feminists often linked their cause to other global pro-choice movements. South Korea was not only inspired by global pro-choice movements (specifically in Argentina, Poland, and Ireland), but they also capitalized on their successes through the form of international solidarity. By recognizing these global movements, whether the adoption of Polish pro-choice activism or the protests in front of the Argentinian embassy to show solidarity during the Argentinian pro-choice protests, South Korean feminists were able to force their country's abortion ban into the international community's scrutinizing light. Not only did Korean activists' show their support to international groups, but pro-choice activists in Poland, Ireland, and Argentina all interacted with Korean activists' posts. Activists from around the world have created their posts giving updates on the status of the movement in Korea and using phrases such as "with you," and referring to Korean feminists

as their “Korean sisters” fighting for the same rights. These international social media accounts’ references and even sharing of the Korean abortion movement demonstrated how social media promoted cross-cultural solidarity and communication through linking culturally and geologically distant groups.

The survey asked feminist accounts if they had seen or been exposed to news or posts about international abortion rights movements outside Korea during the 2019 Constitutional Court case (for example, the abortion protests in Ireland, Poland, or Argentina). This question aimed to understand the effects of international pro-choice movements in South Korean social media activism. Among the participants, 11.5% of activists said they were exposed to this media daily in 2019, while the majority (30.8%) claimed they were exposed to this type of media a few times a week. A quarter of respondents claimed that they were exposed to news and posts about international abortion movements a few times a month. The strategic and concurrent timing of various global abortion movements increased international coverage on these causes and cultivated a global solidarity for women’s abortion rights.

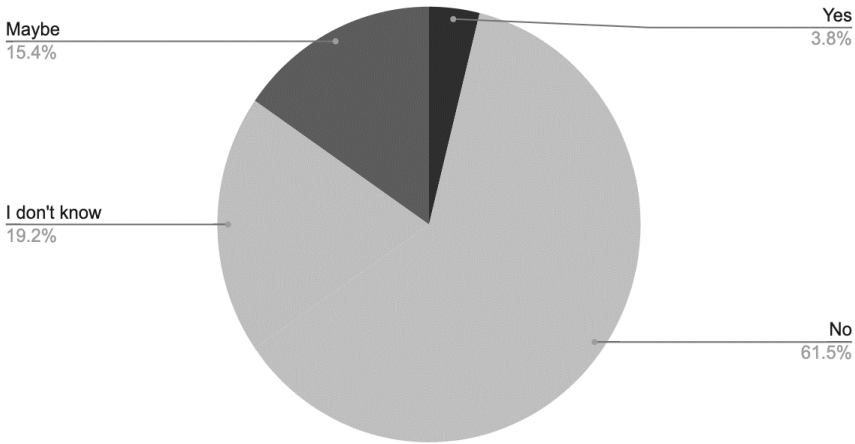
Moreover, participants were shown the image below created during the Polish pro-choice movement and were asked how often they saw this in their social media feed. 51.9% of respondents said they saw the photo often over the past year, while 23.1% claimed they somewhat often saw it. Only 9.6% of respondents claimed they never saw that picture on social media. These results reiterate that references to international pro-choice movements were a common strategy utilized on social media platforms in 2019.



Source: Jim Cooke, *Illustration. Guidelines about women and alcohol*, 2016. From Jim Cooke's illustration website. <https://www.jimcookeart.com/new-project>

While the entire survey unearthed surprising data, the most unexpected response was the last multiple-choice question. The question asked if the users did not have access to social media as a resource, would they still be avid advocates for women's rights. Surprisingly, 61.5% of respondents claimed they would not be activists without social media as an outlet. On the contrary, 3.8% of respondents claimed they would still be activists, while the remainder claimed they were unsure (34.6%). These stark results emphasize that social media is an important outlet for activism on issues such as women's rights. Given the minuscule number of social media activists in 2012 among our participants compared to 2019, the lack of in-person and online organized protest and overall media coverage on the Constitutional Court case in 2012 can be better understood. Because social media was not as commonly used in 2012, many current activists were less able to mobilize themselves and supporters because social media was often the spark that initiated further involvement in this movement. Without social media, many women would not have become mobilized to be activists for fear of reputational setbacks and negative associations with feminism. Therefore, there could have been an immensely lower turnout for the abortion rights protests due to a lack of social media activism. While women in the past have made great strides to fight for their rights without the convenience of safety online activism provides, social media activism provided an outlet for women who may not have been comfortable with in-person activism for several of reasons.

Without social media as a form of activism, would you still be an active feminist?



Conclusion

Due to the nature of feminist activism’s creating social stigma and reputational setbacks for activists, social media activism has acted as a bridge and its platforms a shelter where women can freely express ideas and escape the fear of being publicly labeled a feminist. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Daum Cafe can develop communities that include emotional support systems that also effectively disseminate helpful information and provide organized activism. Unlike during the 2012 court case, the 2019 court case had increased media attention and public opinion due to social media publicizing the issue of abortion rights.

Through the strategies influenced by past domestic and international social media activism, these feminist activists had more accessibility to online activism. Strategies such as hashtag activism, online mirroring, webtoons, and female-only group chats have increased exposure to abortion rights activism, leading to more reproductive rights activists. In addition, social media was heavily relied on to strategically organize protests as well as a space to encourage and mobilize followers to become activists. These tactics helped increase in-person protests turnouts, which raised public consciousness on the issue of abortion and increased women to mobilize online and in person. This, in turn, led to the increase of protests and grassroots pushback that increased media coverage globally on South

Korea's anti-abortion law. In addition, the combination of South Korean strategies such as the use of social media platforms such as Daum Cafe and Kakao Talk, as well as the use of mirroring and webtoons, helped make the abortion rights campaign culturally relevant to South Korean society.

Even while cultural relevance was fostered through social media, the network features of these platforms also allowed for the incorporation of internationally minded strategies such as the adoption of Polish pro-choice movement tactics and the avid solidarity protests with Argentina's pro-choice movement. Additionally, South Korea's use of the Polish term "Black Monday Protest," along with the adopted symbol of the uterus as a unifying symbol of women's reproductive rights, encouraged cross-cultural solidarity. These cross-cultural solidarity tactics increased international media coverage of Korea's and other countries' reproductive rights issues by creating a global support system of pro-choice advocates. South Korean social media activism helped foster a new generation of social media activists that bridged the gap between traditional and online activism through cultural and cross-cultural strategies. Social media activism has given more Korean women the ability to open up discussions on abortion rights using internet portals, along with the tools to organize online petitions and in-person protests better to publicly draw the media and the government's attention for legal change. The utilization of social media for event organization, providing safe spaces for discussion and debates, hashtag activism, and resource allocation has impacted the turnout of the Korean decriminalization of abortion in 2019. Further research on social media's role in women's activism will help us better understand how social media activists use of their platforms to increase mobilization and media attention for their cause.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to my research mentor, Professor Kate Hunt, at Indiana University for her guidance and feedback. Professor Hunt not only aided me with the research process but also in sharing her expertise on abortion rights and activism studies and her continuous support throughout the years. Secondly, I would like to thank the Advanced Summer Research Scholarship at Indiana University for their financial support for funding this research project.