



## Online Feminism on Twitter and Instagram: Perceptions and Reactions of Users Aged 18-24

Mohammad Amaan Siddiqui

American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

### Abstract

Substantial research has investigated online feminist movements, hashtags, discourse, and community-building. However, online feminism's general impacts on common people remain understudied. There is also unaddressed polarization among feminists, men, and women, and a stigma around "feminism" that causes well-meaning pro-equality individuals to dissociate from online feminism. This paper studies ordinary social media users' perceptions and reactions to online feminism via semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with 80 Instagram and/or Twitter users aged 18-24 of mixed ethnic/national backgrounds. The conversations explored their experiences with online feminism and their reactions to content that varied in elaboration, emotions, personal stories, and other factors. The findings provide great insight into online feminism and how different rhetorical strategies affect viewer perceptions/reactions. Among complex and numerous findings, the main one has been that general online feminist discussions—outside specific movements—have been harmful and created dichotomies between feminists, men, and women. I also find that feminist solidarity breeds homophily and pushes away out-group members. Content containing less elaboration and greater aggression performs negatively particularly with men. Consequently, these users have developed several negative opinions of and experiences with online feminism for reasons which are outlined in this paper. Interestingly, the most prominent causes of negative perceptions were related to the content delivery style, among others, not ideological extremism. Ultimately, this paper's findings provide a much-needed understanding of common user's online feminist digital landscape, which can guide strategic decisions and mitigate polarization and stigma surrounding "feminism," to contribute better to online gender-equality movements.

**Keywords:** feminism, digital activism, social media, social change, polarization