SOCIAL MEDIA'S ROLE IN WOMEN'S IDENTITY FORMATION AND FOSTERING GENDER EQUALITY:

A Case Study on Young Women in Indonesia

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Project description

Gender inequality remains a challenge in Indonesia despite democratic reforms. At the same time, globalization and the increasing use of social media expose young women to new perspectives on gender roles and empowerment.

Social media has become an important space where women engage with global ideas and reflect on their identities. However, these influences may also interact with or challenge traditional societal norms.

This study explores how young women in Indonesia experience social media as a platform for gender equality and how global influences shape identity formation and perceptions of gender equality.

By focusing on women's lived experiences, the study highlights how **global digital influences interact with traditional societal norms**..

Connection to the Swedish development cooperation strategy

Within Swedish development cooperation, one of the government's thematic priorities is "**Strengthening women's and girls' freedom and self-empowerment"**, including their right to make decisions about their lives and bodies. This priority highlights the importance of addressing social norms and structures that limit women's autonomy and opportunities.

This study contributes to that agenda by examining how **social media and global influences shape young women's identity formation and perceptions of gender equality and empowerment in Indonesia.**

By exploring women's own experiences, the research provides insights into how changing norms and digital spaces may support long-term progress toward gender equality and inclusive development.

Method

Research Design
* **Qualitative case study**
* Focus on young women's experiences of social media and gender equality
* Analytical framework: transnational feminist theory

Data Collection
- Fieldwork conducted in **Jakarta, Indonesia**
- **Two semi-structured focus group discussions**
- **11 female university students** (aged 18–30)
- Participants selected due to high social media engagement

Analysis
- **Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke)**
- Identification of recurring themes
- Key concepts: **globalization, identity formation, intersectionality, power structures**

Findings

1. Social media raises awareness but does not directly change society
Participants experienced that social media promotes discussions about gender equality and women's empowerment. However, these discussions do not always translate into real societal change because **patriarchal norms remain strong.**

2. Global influences can create tensions with traditional norms
Social media exposes women to global ideas about gender roles. When these ideas challenge local cultural expectations, conflicts may arise between global perspectives and traditional societal values.

3. Women actively navigate between global and local influences
Participants described themselves as active agents who choose which ideas to adopt or reject. Global influences and local traditions coexist and shape their identities simultaneously.

4. Social media plays a dual role in identity formation
Social media can empower women by providing role models, communities, and new perspectives. At the same time, it can also create pressure and identity struggles due to constant exposure to global expectations and comparisons.

Conclusions

Social media influences how young women in Indonesia understand gender equality, empowerment, and their own identities. While online discussions raise awareness and introduce global perspectives, traditional societal norms continue to shape how these ideas are expressed in everyday life. The findings suggest that social media contributes to **indirect societal change**, particularly by influencing **younger generations'** perceptions of gender roles and women's empowerment. However, the study focuses on a small group of urban university students in Jakarta.