KUPI's Gender Campaigns, Digital Activism, and a Counterpublic in the Making

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SHORT BIO

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ABSTRACT

The expansion of the Internet and social media platforms over the past decades has empowered many progressive Muslim women's groups associated with the Congress of Indonesian Women Ulama (KUPI) to leverage digital realms for their Islamic feminist campaigns. However, their digital initiatives often remain undervalued due to the marginalization of their gender discourses compared to the dominant conservative narratives surrounding women's issues in the country. The aim of this article is to examine the last four years of the KUPI's online feminist campaigns, especially those from after its second congress in November 2022. I focus on the KUPI's creative endeavors to expand their feminist ideas through activities in online spaces and the potential of these endeavors to create an environment where they can articulate and increase their voices against the patriarchal discourses on women prevalent in Indonesian society. I draw my data from a combination of online observation from the KUPI's media networks, interviews with individuals involved in the KUPI's digital initiatives, and desk research on KUPI-related topics. I frame the data with a theoretical approach that examines the intersection of women's digital activism and the creation of counterpublics in contemporary society. This framework acknowledges the capacity of these Islamic feminist activists to publicly discuss women-related issues, raise awareness about gender justice, and foster collective action aimed at improving women's health and well-being.

KEYWORDS
Women ulama; Islamic feminism; gendered counter-publics; women's digital activism

Introduction

With the expansion of the Internet and social media platforms over the past few decades, digital realms in Indonesia have become a significant field for gender campaigns among progressive women Muslim groups affiliated with the Congress of Indonesian Women Ulama (*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, henceforth the KUPI). However, in her study about the KUPI's digital movement published in 2019, only two years after its founding, feminist anthropologist Eva F. Nisa half-lamented about its deficiency to reach wider audiences, especially among non-progressive Muslim

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majorities.[1] Although Nisa's study offered valuable insights into the KUPI's digital efforts, it was conducted during the movement's incipient stages when its digital potential was only beginning to take shape. Additionally, despite many advancements in the KUPI's digital initiatives since Nisa's research, its Islamic feminist ideas have still not penetrated conservative majority groups in Indonesia.[2] This indicates that comprehending this phenomenon requires a broader temporal perspective, actively considering the ongoing evolution of the KUPI's efforts to amplify gender voices through online actions beyond their immediate reception within prevailing gender discourses in Indonesian society.

In this article, I examine the KUPI's online campaigns over the past four years, starting from the conclusion of its second congress in November 2022. I focus on how the KUPI has strategically expanded its digital initiatives and how this effort can facilitate the creation of a counterpublic supporting the amplification of Islamic feminist ideas. I collected my data through a combination of online observation on the KUPI's media networks, interviews with individuals involved in the KUPI's digital initiatives, and desk research on KUPI-related topics. I frame the data through the lens of women's digital activism that emphasizes the significance of the Internet and social media in feminist endeavors to amplify gender discourses and drive social change through activities in digital realms.[3] I combine this perspective with Warner's concept of "counterpublics" that refers to a public devised by marginalized groups to challenge dominant discourses, while being reflective of its subordinate status.[4]

I start this article by discussing the role of new media technologies in the development of Islamic feminism around the globe and in Indonesia. I then explore media strategies employed by the KUPI organizers to expand their gender discourse, focusing on how they devised a social media strategy to enhance their digital presence. Last, I analyze the KUPI's Instagram posts concerning its fatwa on female circumcision practices and explore how KUPI's digital activism helps establish an Islamic feminist counterpublic that

1 Eva F. Nisa, "Muslim Women in Contemporary Indonesia: Online Conflicting Narratives behind the Women Ulama Congress," *Asian Studies Review* 43, No. 3 (2019): 434-54.

2 See Pieternella van Doorn-Harder's contribution to this special issue.

3 Carmit Wiesslitz, ed., *Women's Activism Online and the Global Struggle for Social Change*. (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 1.

4 Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, No. 1 (2002): 49-90.

runs against the country's conservative and patriarchal Muslim-majority discourses on gender issues.

Islamic Feminism After the Media Age

The spread of Islamic feminism is largely shaped by the advance of media technology and its proliferation in Muslim societies. In a world dominated by patriarchy, women's voices are often confined to spaces where they are effectively silenced. However, with the rise of the media age, which connects individuals through democratic logics of mediation practices, Islamic feminist activists are able to amplify their voices and reach audiences previously inaccessible to them. This section will examine the intersection of the media and Muslim women's movements, before doing so, however, it will clarify the concept of Islamic feminism and its development in an Indonesian context.

Islamic feminism is a highly contested term.[5] I approach it here as an analytical category to comprehend any "feminist discourses and practices articulated within an Islamic paradigm".[6] This approach encompasses various initiatives that, irrespective of their stance on feminist labels, attempt to produce a progressive interpretation of Islamic texts promoting gender reform in society. An Islamic feminist project systematically engages with the Qur'an and other textual genres of Islamic interpretive tradition, complemented with the secular sciences, such as linguistics, history, psychology, and anthropology. While men can be part of the project, it is predominantly led by women from diverse educational backgrounds, but knowledgeable in traditional Islamic sciences. Its shared goals are to deconstruct patriarchal discourses, seek gender justice and equality, and reformulate the position of women in Islamic law and societies. As a gender reform project, Islamic feminism is characterized by its commitment to the production of Islamic interpretive knowledge, serving as the grounds to claim gender equality.[7]

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5 Amal Grami, "Islamic Feminism: a new feminist movement or a strategy by women for acquiring rights?", *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 6, No. 1 (January 2013): 102-13.

6 Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. (One World Publications, 2009), 242.

7 Mulki Al-Sharmani, *Islamic Feminism: Hermeneutics and Activism*. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2024); see also Annita Kynsilehto, ed., *Islamic Feminism: Current* Perspectives. (University of Tampere, 2008).

Muslim women participating in leadership roles are abundant across Islamic histories and the rise of women's rights consciousness and movements in Muslim-majority countries can be traced back to the late nineteenth century.[8] However, Islamic feminism as a discourse is a recent phenomenon, initially observable between the 1980s and 1990s amongst Islamic feminist activists and scholars in different parts of the world, including Indonesia. It emerged at a moment of increasing gender-conservative, Islamist narratives and deep disaffection with secular authoritarianism,[9] along with the rise of political Islam and gender in both global and local contexts.[10] While Islamic feminism is a global occurrence, its articulations in different Muslim geographies vary from place to place. This difference is due to the variety of focal issues faced by women's Islamic movements across the globe, relative to their domestic political challenges and culturally inflected expressions of Islam. Therefore, an understanding of an Islamic feminist project must pay attention to the diversity of Muslim societies and avoid making any unsupported generalizations.[11]

In Indonesia, Islamic feminism has emerged from specific historical and political moments. Anwar examines the evolution of Indonesian Islamic feminism, from its birth in the 1900s to its established forms in the 1990s.[12] While initially seeking to establish an ethic of women's agency grounded in Islamic teachings, Indonesian Islamic feminism has, instead, been shaped by a combination of global forces, like colonialism, developmentalism, and transnational feminism, and local factors, including indigenous cultures, nationalism, and Islamic reformism. A significant development occurred in the 1980s when several Muslim NGOs focused on civil society and women issues began appearing across the country, pioneered by P3M[13] and, later,

8 Eva F. Nisa, "Women and Islamic Movements," in *Handbook of Islamic Sects and Movements*, ed. Muhammad Afzal Upal, Carole M. Cusack. (Brill, 2021),151-175.

9 Margot Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (2005): 6-28.

10 Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "The Challenges of Islamic Feminism," *Gender a výzkum / Gender and Research* 20, No. 2 (2019): 108-22.

11 Nisa, "Women and Islamic Movements," 151-75.

12 Etin Anwar, *A Genealogy of Islamic Feminism: Pattern and Change in Indonesia*. (Routledge, 2018).

13 P3M is the abbreviation for *Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat* ('Association for the Development of *Pesantren* and Society').

by the likes of Kalyanamitra and Rifka Annisa. These NGOs cultivated women's equality programs and awareness, especially in Muslim-dominated environments like *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). Notably, those involved in emancipatory movements are mostly affiliated with various Muslim groups, each representing different interpretations of Islam in the country. These include Aisyiyah from the "modernist" Muhammadiyah, Muslimat and Fatayat from the "traditionalist" Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muslim women within the PKS (the Prosperous Justice Party) and other Salafism-friendly groups that produce gendered Islamist narratives.[14]

Indonesian Islamic feminist movements are heterogenous. While similarly focusing on empowering their members to become progressive actors within their communities, especially on issues like education, marriage, and polygamy, women's Islamic movements have developed their own approach to these issues. For instance, while activists linked to Aisyiyah and Muslimat advocate for a complementary relationship between men and women, those affiliated with Fatayat promote gender discourses based on the principles of equality, including in matters of sexual relationships between married couples.[15] In contrast, women activists supporting Islamist discourses believe that women's primary responsibilities lie within the domestic spheres, pushing them to protect women's rights within polygamous marriages rather than seeking to outlaw polygamy.[16] Still, Muslim women from both Muhammadiyah and NU backgrounds do not necessarily support their peers' gender discourses, nor do they completely agree with the Islamist groups' views.[17] The above is evidence that Indonesian Islamic feminism consists of various heterogeneous approaches, sometimes contentious even amongst the internal Islamic organizations themselves. I will now turn to a discussion on the intersection between the media and Islamic feminism in Indonesia.

As mentioned previously, the expansion of Islamic feminism found its foothold in media roles. While print technology was instrumental to secular

14 Nisa, "Women and Islamic Movements," 151-175.
15 Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Indonesian Women Reading the Qur'an.* (University of Illinois Press, 2006), 31-38.
16 Rachel Rinaldo, *Mobilizing Piety: Islam and Feminism in Indonesia*. (Oxford University Press, 2013), 97-100.
17 Nisa, "Women and Islamic Movements," 151-75.

feminist campaigns, it was the advance of Internet technologies that hastened the spread of Islamic feminism across the world.[18] Scholars have theorized that the proliferation of new media technologies in Muslim societies enabled the birth of new Muslim actors. These are (primarily young) Muslim figures educated at non-conventional Islamic learning institutions, but comprehend Islamic knowledge and promote their Islamic understanding as a result of the democratic nature of the Internet and digital environments.[19] Islamic feminist leaders are part of these new figures. Previously discouraged from expressing their voices in male-dominated public spaces due to their marginalized identities as both (Muslim) women and feminist activists, they are now taking advantage of the democratic spaces provided by the print and digital culture to expand and accelerate their feminist projects.

When feminist ideas first arrived in colonial Indonesia in the early twentieth century, it was through access to Dutch books and magazines that inspired a small segment of elite young Muslim women in Java and West Sumatra to embark upon women's emancipation projects.[20] Since then, print media has played a significant role in raising gender equality awareness and propagating women's emancipation projects among these groups. A notable example is the 1926 launch of *Suara Aisyiyah* (Aisyiyah's Voice) by the modernist Muhammadiyah group. A century later, the role of print culture in disseminating Islamic feminist ideas remains just as instrumental, if not more so. Large publishing companies targeting secular female readers, like the Kartini Group, launched Amanah in 1986, the first-ever commercial magazine for Indonesian Muslim audiences.[21] NGO women's Muslim movements including Rahima and Kalyanamitra, also established their own magazines, Swara Rahima and Mitra Media, respectively. Indeed, the early 2000s witnessed the emerging popularity of women's Islamic magazines, including NooR, Ummi, Paras, and, a decade later, Auleea, all with their own

18 Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 7.

19 Dale F. Eickelman & Jon W. Anderson eds., *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Indiana University Press, 1999).

20 Anwar, *A Genealogy of Islamic Feminism,* 36.

21 Nor Ismah, "Women Issuing Fatwas. Female Islamic Scholars and Community-Based Authority in Java, Indonesia" (PhD Diss., Leiden University, 2023), 212.

ideas on Islamic womanhood and targeted market audiences.[22] This is complemented by numerous books by Indonesian and international feminist thinkers that circulate the country's intellectual public spheres, further showcasing print culture's continued instrumental role in advancing Indonesian Islamic feminism.

The growth of Internet connectivity and social media users[23] over the last two decades in Indonesia has led many Indonesian Islamic feminist activists to utilize the Internet as a significant platform to voice their concerns about gender equality.[24] While the fascination many Indonesians have with social media may stem from their collectivist culture,[25] Internet-supported technologies provide various communication and knowledge-sharing opportunities that previous technologies did not afford. For example, they now offer immediate and delayed communications, one-on-one and one-to-many interactions, and convivial spaces for people of various ages and backgrounds,[26] fostering innovative ways to share ideas and connect with people. Even within a consumer regime influenced by television ads and media oligarchs, social media offers numerous chances to imagine new forms of self-identity, social connectivity, and participatory politics[27] among

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22 See Virgnia Hooker, "Shaping Modern Muslim Women," *Inside Indonesia* 10, (January 2011).; Nisa K. Illahiati, "Diskursus Identitas Perempuan dalam Majalah Perempuan Muslim Indonesia," *Bahasa dan Seni* 45, No. 1 (2017): 86-96; Carla Jones, "Dress for Sukses: Fashioning Feminity and Nationality in Urban Indonesia," in *Re-Orienting Fashion: the Globalization of Asian Dress*, ed. Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkowich, and Carla Jones (Berg, 2003), 185-212.

23 As of early 2024, Indonesia recorded about 183,5 million Internet users, 139,0 million of whom were active on social media, equivalent to 49.9% of the total population, of which 46.5% identified as female and 53.5 % male. This number, however, does not represent the unique individuals as many users engage with multiple social media platforms. See https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-indonesia, last accessed December 25, 2024.

24 Zulfa Sakhiyya, et al, "From protest march to digital campaign: women's movement and critical literacies in Indonesia," *Gender and Education* 35, No. 4 (2023): 384-400.

25 Hamidah Molaei, "Social Media Usage, Social Relations, and a Sense of Community in Indonesia," *International Journal of Interactive Communication Systems and Technologies* 4, No. 2 (2014): 50-63.

26 Merlyna Lim, "@rchipelago Online: The Internet and Political Activism in Indonesia" (PhD Diss., University of Twente, 2005), 19-27.

27 Edwin Jurriëns and Ross Tapsell, "Challenges and Opportunities of digital 'revolution' in Indonesia," in *Digital Indonesia: Connectivity and Divergence*, ed. Edwin Jurriëns & Ross Tapsell (ISEAS Yusof-Ishak Institute, 2017), 1-20.

minority and marginalized groups, including women. This way, while social movements significantly depend on media for their growth and sustainability,[28] the Internet's communicative and connective capacities create a fertile ground for social activism as they improve one's experience with idea dissemination, member recruitment, network expansion, action mobilization, and internal/external communication.[29]

As noted by Nurmila,[30] Internet technology has significantly increased access to Islamic feminist materials previously inaccessible to Indonesian audiences due to geographical and political barriers. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, training sessions and real-time discussions on platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, and WhatsApp improved the visibility of Islamic feminist agendas in the country. Reminiscent of Bunt's "cyber-Islamic environments",[31] the digitalization of Islamic feminist sources and activities through online platforms has the potential to enable various elements in Muslim society to participate in the production of Islamic knowledge traditionally dominated by established religious authorities. This asks whether online activities of Islamic feminism could function to democratize religious discourses or, in contrast, reinforce the existing hierarchies in new forms?

Working in the context of North America, Faiza Hijri shows how Arab-American Muslim women activists and political leaders have utilized online spaces to reclaim their narratives around the body, space, and empowerment in both virtual and physical worlds. These women were feminist activists before the Internet age and online spaces have historically been fertile ground for the harassment and oppression of women's bodies and voices. However, leveraging the affordances of Internet technology,

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28 Meredith Weiss, "New Media, New Activism: Trends and Trajectories in Malaysia and Indonesia," *International Development Planning* 36, No. 1 (2014): 91-109.

29 Bart Cammaerts, "Social Media Activism," in *The International Encyclopedia of Digital Communication and Society*, ed. R. Mansell and P. Hwa (Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 1027-34. The current version is published by LSE Research Online, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/62090/, June 2015.

30 Nina Nurmila, "The Spread of Muslim Feminist Ideas in Indonesia: Before and After the Digital Era," *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 59, No. 1 (2021): 97-126.

31 Gary R. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-jihad, Online Fatwas, and Cyber-Islamic Environments*. (Pulto Press, 2003), 201.

they have harnessed social media to amplify their hitherto unheard voices,[32] underscoring the significance of online spaces in Muslim women's initiatives to fight for gender equality in contemporary times. Online platforms enable women activists to enhance their visibility and challenge dominant patriarchal narratives about women in society. The following section will examine the KUPI and its media strategy to demonstrate new media deployment for gender-equality campaigns in an Indonesian context.

KUPI and its Digital Campaigns

Initiated in 2015, the KUPI is a congress-based movement aimed at creating a safe(r) space in which to articulate gender discourses among female Islamic scholars in Indonesia and beyond. The KUPI was established by networks of feminist ulama and activists linked to Rahima, Fahmina, and Alimat. These are Muslim women's NGOs with strong ties to P3M and decades-long commitment to civil Islam and gender equality, highlighting the KUPI's uninterrupted link to the country's sustained progress in Islamic feminist discourses. The movement also involves female Islamic scholars from broader global organizations, including AMAN Indonesia and Musawah, further illustrating its resonance and engagement with Islamic feminist efforts on the international stage.

KUPI's gender campaigns are primarily developed through its congresses. The first congress took place on 25-27 April 2017 in Cirebon, West Java, followed by a second five years later in Bangsri, Jepara, Central Java. It includes various activities, but its main agenda is *musyawarah keagamaan* (religious deliberation), a session where the KUPI scholars work to produce community-based Islamic legal opinions (*fatwas*) on contemporary issues affecting women in Indonesia. During its first congress, the KUPI developed three fatwas addressing issues of sexual violence against women, child marriage, and environmental destruction. The second congress produced five fatwas covering issued on waste management for a sustainable environment, women-involving leadership to defend the nation from violent-supporting ideologies, and protection of women from forced marriage, rape-related pregnancy, and female-genitalia-cutting practices.[33]

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32 Faiza Hijri, "Claiming our Space: Muslim Women, Activism, and Social Media," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 6, No. 1 (Spring 2021): 78-92.

33 Hasil Musyawarah Keagamaan Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia Ke-2 - Kupipedia, last accessed October 01, 2024.

The congress featured renowned Islamic feminist scholars and activists from across Indonesia and abroad and attracted hundreds of Muslim women participants, mostly Muslim women from NU and *pesantren* backgrounds. Despite being held shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic, the second congress drew around 1,600 attendants,[34] showcasing the people's enthusiasm about feminist inquiries and topics. While most of the KUPI supporters come from the NU and Muhammadiyah, not all women affiliated with these organizations share the vision of the KUPI's Islamic feminist campaigns, let alone the organizations' male majority, dominant members.[35] Still, the KUPI enjoys sufficient backing from several Islamic organizations, Muslim intellectuals, political figures, and stakeholders, especially those committed to fostering the ideals of a moderate Islam.[36]

Cognizant of the persistent challenges of disseminating Islamic feminist ideas within conventionally male-dominated spaces**,** the KUPI leaders turned to print technology and digital platforms to broaden their audience beyond the congress sites. Since 2017, the KUPI has published numerous books written by its Islamic feminist scholars and activists. Numerous copies are distributed for free to relevant individuals and institutions thanks to the generosity of the KUPI donors, as well as being available for purchase at online and offline stores. One notable example of a KUPI-linked book is *Qirā'ah Mubādalah* ("Reciprocal Reading"), authored by one of the KUPI founders, Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir. The book has sold over eight thousand copies,[37] indicating significant acceptance of the KUPI ideals among educated audiences. Furthermore, a few of the KUPI books follow the language and format of *kitab kuning* (literally meaning yellow book),[38] classical Arabic-scripted texts of Islam commonly used as curriculum in

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34 Susi Ivvaty, Meneguhkan Peran Elite dan Komunitas di KUPI-2 Jepara (kompas.com), last accessed October 01, 2024.

35 Nisa, "Muslim Women in Contemporary Indonesia", 434-54.

36 "Moderate Islam" can be defined as an effort to adjust the implementation of sharia law with local peculiarities. Hisanori Kato, "The Nusantara Movement in Indonesia," in *Handbook of Islamic Sects and Movements*, edited by Muhammad Afzal Upal and Carole M. Cusack (Brill, 2021), 110-128.

37 Pers. Comm., Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, December 15, 2024.

38 An example includes *al-sittīn al-'adliyyah fi al-aḥādīth al-nabawiyyah al-syarīfah' an taqwiyah huqūq al-mar'ah al-muslimah*, a compilation of sixty Hadiths about Muslim women empowerment, authored by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir.

pesantrens, which are Islamic boarding schools established primarily to produce religious leaders or ulama. This implies the KUPI's serious effort to reclaim the authority of female Islamic scholars, particularly against their male ulama counterparts, who may feel unsettled or infuriated by the growing prominence of these female ulama.[39]

The use of the Internet and online platforms that provide the KUPI activists with inclusive spaces in which to expand their campaigns is also extensive. One example is *kupi.or.id*. Established in August 2022 and designed as the KUPI's official website, it features a variety of content related to the KUPI's history, missions, and programs, as well as updated events and photos from the last two congresses. Notably, this content is connected to another KUPI-linked page, namely *kupipedia.id*. Developed in 2021 and run like Wikipedia, it serves as an open and free web-based source listing the KUPI's fatwas, feminist figures involved, and other relevant audio-visual materials. This content is contributed by trusted members and is available for download to all. As of October 2024, *kupipedia.id* has uploaded 1,788 articles, with 905 content entries across a total of 4494 pages. In February 2025, the site recorded an estimated 3,200 monthly visitors, a relatively encouraging number for an Islamic feminist webpage.[40]

Aware that most Indonesians are active social media users, the KUPI uses platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as instruments to promote its feminist ideas and projects. Its official social media, which is linked on its website, is dedicated to sharing the KUPI's fatwas and views on current women's issues and providing updates on activities led by KUPI-associated scholars. During the recent congress the KUPI significantly increased its online presence by utilizing its social media to publish testimonies from public figures, share its feminist agendas and gatherings, and disseminate its fatwas. This strategy encouraged many participants to share their personal experiences of the congress on their personal online accounts, thereby mobilizing digital spaces for KUPI-related posts and extending the engagement of the congress beyond its physical and temporal boundaries. Nevertheless, the KUPI's online platforms have generally gained little

[39] David Kloos & Noor Ismah, "Siting Islamic Feminism: The Indonesian Congress of Women Islamic Scholars and the Challenge of Challenging Patriarchal Authority," *History and Anthropology* 34, No. 5 (2023): 818-43.

[40] This number was sourced from similarweb.com on March 31, 2025.

attention from Internet audiences, as indicated by low engagement levels on its Facebook and Twitter. Over time, the KUPI's Instagram has emerged as the most vibrant platform despite its overall inferior engagement rate of 1.77% across a total of 486 media uploads and 6,732 followers.[41]

However, this shortage does not imply the insignificance of online spaces for KUPI campaigns. The KUPI's digital movement is organized in such a way that it can happen beyond its official websites and online platforms. As mentioned earlier, the KUPI is a network of various Islamic feminist groups and individuals, all with their own established organizations and communities. The KUPI encourages its associated scholars, activists, and supporters to address KUPI issues and agendas using their own identities and affiliations rather than representing the KUPI in their activities. Additionally, KUPI-linked activists and supporters often shared KUPI media postings through their personal accounts, allowing KUPI ideals to spread across non-KUPI platforms. A movement with robust Islamic feminist agendas, the KUPI faces unpopularity and resistance from many conservative Muslim majorities who are wary of feminist discourses. By spreading its agendas through non-KUPI affiliations, the movement can reduce the sensitivity surrounding KUPI projects and make them more acceptable to members and networks of these affiliations. The decision is, therefore, a deliberate strategy to enhance the dissemination of the KUPI agendas, navigate political sensitivities, and avoid potential backlash while ensuring the sustainability of its influence within diverse Islamic communities.

The KUPI media activists have organized "KUPI media" into three categories: core media, network media, and supporter media. The core media includes media accounts directly established by the KUPI and its primary networks and consist of two components: first, all websites and online accounts affiliated with the KUPI and *Mubadalah* (*mubadalah.id*, discussed later); and second, media accounts created by the KUPI's main organizing bodies, including Rahima, Fahmina, Alimat, and AMAN Indonesia. The second category encompasses media platforms associated with the KUPI's larger networks, including *islami.co*, *gusdurian.net*, *neswa.id*, and other networks promoting a moderate interpretation of Islam.

[41] This statistic was scratched from socialblade.com on July 21, 2024.

The final category refers to media platforms from the KUPI's secular media contemporaries, such as Kompas and Magdalene,[42] that support the KUPI campaigns by featuring and disseminating its gender perspectives.[43] Supposedly, the categorization of the KUPI's media reflects the organization's strategy to expand its campaigns across various digital formats and platforms. That said, an analysis of the KUPI's online campaign should consider media types beyond its official websites and platforms, such as *Mubadalah.*

Mubadalah Activism

Mubadalah is an Internet-based gender campaign, enacted through *mubadalah.id* and its affiliated social media platforms, that actively creates KUPI spaces in digital arenas. The term "mubādalah" (*kesalingan,* or reciprocity, subsequently called *mubadalah*) was first introduced by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir to describe the KUPI's approach for interpreting Islamic texts that emphasizes the reciprocal nature of all forms of gender relations.[44] While the term signifies its affiliation with the KUPI, it also bears witness to the initiative's unique historical and ideological background.

The term originated on Kodir's personal blog, created in 2016 to share his writings on *mubadalah*-related topics, primarily in academic styles. As the blog gained positive feedback from his fellow Islamic feminists, he was encouraged to transform it into a data bank on Muslim women leaders, issues of gender justice, and *mubadalah* principles, among other subjects. After the first KUPI congress, Kodir expanded his blog into a digital movement, fully supportive of KUPI campaigns in the online realm, with funding provided mainly by the Fahmina Foundation.[45] Today, organized by a small team, who I refer to here as *Mubadalah* activists, *mubadalah.id* has grown to be a major reference platform that disseminates the KUPI fatwas and feminist ideas. It does so by "promoting relations of reciprocity,

42 Kompas is a national daily newspaper established in 1965 (see Berita Terkini Hari Ini, Kabar Akurat Terpercaya - Kompas.com). Magdalene is a digital media dedicated to women empowerment and gender justice (see Redaksi Magdalene).

43 Pers. com., Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, October 13, 2024

44 Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Qirā'ah Mubādalah. Tafsir Progresif untuk Keadilan Gender dalam Islam.* (IRCiSoD, 2019).

45 Pers. Com., Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, October 13, 2024.

cooperation, and true justice in Islam in order to build a civilization that is dignified, sustainable, and inclusive for all humanities living under the mercy of God".[46]

The spirit of activism is at the heart of *Mubadalah*'s online activities. Initially, *Mubadalah* media was run by a few individuals with backgrounds in gender activism and Islamic studies, but they lacked training in information and communication technology (ICT). This pushed them to acquire ICT skills by all means possible, including self-learning from the Internet and benchmarking against more established gender-related online media. In its early years, *Mubadalah* media faced severe criticism as its posts were perceived as overly "serious" and "theological".[47] The website also underwent multiple address changes due to various challenges, moving through several domains before finally settling on *mubadalah.id*. Despite these difficulties, the team remained motivated to improve their knowledge and skills in website optimization, content creation strategies, and online media management.[48]

By 2020, during the pandemic, they began restructuring the editorial board of *mubadalah.id* and established its standard operational procedures while inviting more people to help develop the website. The pandemic pushed people to rely on digital devices for social interaction and influenced the development of their website positively. They organized training sessions to teach young people about the KUPI's interpretive methodology[49] and how it could be applied to relevant gender issues, thereby fostering the emergence of future content creators supporting the KUPI's ideals. Their efforts were rewarded. *Mubadalah.id* had long struggled to maintain a steady flow of daily content, with contributors primarily limited to its editor and KUPI-affiliated feminist scholars and activists. Since 2022, however, the website has consistently posted eight articles every day, with most contributions coming from graduates, predominantly young writers, of the *Mubadalah* training program. Currently, the average daily visitors for the website ranges from

46 Redaksi Mubadalah: Keadilan dan Kesetaraan Gender - Mubadalah
47 Nisa, "Muslim Women in Contemporary Indonesia," 434-54.
48 Interview, Zahra Amin, October 9, 2024.
49 This includes Kodir's *mubadalah* perspective, Rofiah's substantive justice concept, and Fayumi's idea of goodness. See Nina Nurmila's paper of this edition.

2,500 to 5,000,[50] representing a significant audience for an Islamic feminist platform, a notion not widely accepted by the country's Muslim majorities.

Mubadalah's website organizes its articles into several distinct categories, including *Aktual* (current), *Kolom* (feature), and *Rujukan* (reference). Each category addresses women's issues from the *Mubadalah*/KUPI perspectives, while featuring different types of content. *Aktual,* for instance, includes update articles on the KUPI's gender programs. *Rujukan* are articles discussing specific Islamic feminist principles and approaches. While distinct in content, all articles across these categories maintain a similar, popular writing style and include vibrant illustrations, reflecting the website's goal of appealing to a broader audience.

Alongside the website, *Mubadalah* created accounts on Facebook, Twitter (X), YouTube, and Instagram to enhance its digital campaigns. While the website features various articles on gender issues, its social media platforms serve as additional channels from which to reach wider audiences by reposting articles on Facebook and Twitter pages, live-streaming offline gender campaigns on its YouTube channel, and appropriating selected articles into visual content for Instagram posts. Its engagement on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube is relatively low, evidenced by its limited number of followers and posts lacking comments. However, *Mubadalah* has gained significant popularity on Instagram, with approximately 45,000 followers, more than the number of follower of any other online platforms associated with the KUPI's networks.

Created on 9 October 2017, six months after the first KUPI congress, *Mubadalah'*s Instagram has uploaded over 2,000 posts, with an average of 668 likes and 7.6 comments per post, making up for its low engagement rate of 1.5%.[51] This statistic, however, does not fully illustrate the growth of *Mubadalah'*s popularity. The account struggled to gain traction in the first two years after its creation. Most posts during this period received less than 100 likes, many with zero comments. This sluggish growth can be attributed to the posts' design quality. Visually bland and filled with excessive text written in Arabic, the posts failed to attract the general Instagram audience.

[50] Interview, Zahra Amin, October 9, 2024.
[51] This statistic is based on my inquiry using socialblad.com, conducted on June 21, 2024.

Mubadalah's media team admitted that they started the platform without sufficient knowledge of how to create engaging social media content.[52]

The tide began to shift in mid-2019, when a post on 9 May of the same year, entitled "Is Shaking Hand with a Person of Different Sex Permissible?", hit more than 1,000 likes and 110 comments. Since then, *Mubadalah*'s Instagram has seen increased engagement, with more than 304 of its posts gaining at least 1,000 likes by September 2024, along with approximately 18,800 comments. Posts about polygamy have attracted significant attention, both for good and ill reasons. The most popular post, "Aisyah's Protest against Muhammad's Polygamous Marriage", garnered 14,300 likes and 746 comments, along with three other posts on polygamy receiving more than 4,000 likes each. Other topics that receive high engagement include ones about a childfree lifestyle, head-coverings (*jilbab*), female genitalia circumcision, fasting for women during a menstrual period, education and financial independence for women, and women's participation in advocating for regulations supporting women's and family welfare, including the bill on sexual violence (RUU-TPKS) and the bill on family resilience (RUU-HALU).

The increased popularity of *Mubadalah*'s Instagram can be attributed to a range of social media management skills and strategies**.** Since early 2019, the account has consistently uploaded at least one post a day, and from late 2020 onward, the designs of its posts have become more creative, playing with color, compositions, graphic presentations, and diverse audio-visual formats. The reduced use of text is also notable across their recent posts. Nurajizah, the administrator of *Mubadalah*'s Instagram, explained that the platform developed specific strategies to maintain and expand its audience, which included greater attention to the visual design, strategic use of hashtags, attention to optimal timings for posts, and collaborations with other relevant media accounts. Its recent posts also refrain from using theological justifications written in Arabic, enhancing their clarity and accessibility. According to Nurajizah, this change reflects a significant shift in its targeted followers from countering gender discourse produced by Islamist groups to spreading Islamic-feminist messages to a universal audience, hence, the use of accessible language for the general public.[53]

[52] Interview, Abdullah, October 9, 2024.
[53] Interview, Fitri Nurajizah, October 9, 2024.

Mubadalah's Instagram content focuses on relevant issues rather than on specific individuals. Each post is derived from articles published on its website, where key issues are specifically selected by the editorial board based on its political relevance in current public debates. This approach ensures that not every article is converted into an Instagram post. Instead, a single post on *Mubadalah*'s Instagram can cover the scope of multiple articles covering the same topic and can be shared repeatedly based on its urgency to influence public opinion. This strategy proves to be effective, as it limits the individual popularity of the post and allows it to reach diverse audiences by sharing common interests in issues affecting women's well-being. The combination of social media management skills and strategies has successfully increased the number of *Mubadalah*'s Instagram followers, averaging 120 new accounts per month.

Nevertheless, *Mubadalah* activists also recognize the importance of offline strategies to support their online campaigns. One notable initiative is the *Mubadalah* Goes to the Community (MGC) program, whereby *Mubadalah* activists visit universities, Islamic boarding schools, and local community centers to promote the KUPI gender campaigns. *Mubadalah* activists acknowledge the significance of the MGC's offline activities in generating stronger emotional connections, as they involve facial expressions, physical interactions, and vocal tone variations that enhance emotional engagement.[54] The importance of offline campaigns is furthered by the fact that online campaigns are internet dependent, a challenge in remote areas especially in the eastern provinces of Indonesia.[55] The fact that their potential audiences reside in educational institutions with regulated Internet access, including *pesantren*, exacerbates the challenge. By engaging in offline activities, they can build an emotionally charged connection with their online audiences while still reaching potential followers who are not easily accessible through online channels. The offline encounters are expected to transition into online interaction once the audiences are wired to the Internet.

54 Interview, Zahra Amin, October 9, 2024.

55 Onno W. Purbo, "Narrowing the Digital Divide". In *Digital Indonesia: Connectivity and Divergence,* edited by E. Jurriëns and R. Tapsell (ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017), 75-92.

This situation supports other research suggesting the significance of offline activities and their connectedness to the success of an online project.[56]

A Counterpublic in the Making

> "The goal of our media activities is to seize keywords of "*Mubadalah*", of "KUPI", and of "*ulama perempuan*" in Google." (Mubadalah Media Activists, October 9, 2024)

Scholars argue that mass media can trigger the rise of alternative arenas for debates that are not fully controlled by the state or other dominant institutions and can foster shared ideas and sentiments among people from diverse cultural backgrounds.[57] Close to the Habermasian public sphere, which has been criticized for its Eurocentric, universalistic, and patriarchal character,[58] this arena should be approached from one that emphasizes non-European trajectories and the contribution of members of subordinate and marginalized groups in society.

Warner's idea of the multiplicity of publics is crucial here. He writes, "A public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse",[59] suggesting that various publics exist within the social totality, all with their own senses of audience and discourse. In her 1992 article, Nancy Fraser observes the presence of arenas created by marginalized groups to deliberate their own needs and objectives, opposing the public that works for the dominant groups.[60] She calls these arenas "subaltern counterpublics", as they allow subordinated social groups to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities and interests against those created by the dominant discourses. Warner, however, defines counterpublics not simply by their oppositional nature, but by their attempt

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56 See, for example, Danah Boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (Yale University Press, 2014), 24.

57 Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors (eds.), *Religion, Media and the Public* Sphere. (Indiana University Press, 2006), 3-4.

58 Luke Goode, *Jurgen Habermas: Democracy and the Public Sphere*. (Pluto Press, 2005): 1-2.

59 Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics", 62.

60 Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, No. 25/26 (1990): 67.

to "supply different ways of imagining stranger-sociability and its reflexivity", or their ability to recognize their subordinate status.[61] For him, counterpublics remain oriented to "a relation of strangers" that is not merely strategic but also foundational to its memberships and effects. A counterpublic, in short, is a public characterized by its endeavor to counter dominant discourses while simultaneously being reflexive of its subordinate status.

Social media and the Internet produce arenas where marginalized women's groups can freely articulate their concerns and initiate collective actions to generate discourses, promote social changes and establish an alternative public sphere.[62] They provide these women with new opportunities to create safer spaces for self-expression and participatory politics in ways that are both different from and opposing of the dominant groups. The KUPI's digital movement, as reflected in the quotation above, expresses a similar spirit of creating an alternative public space that runs in favor of its feminist interests and against dominant discourses on women that exist across many patriarchal cultures in Indonesia. To further examine this idea, I will focus on *Mubadalah*'s Instagram posts on female circumcision practices.

Issues of female circumcision, also known as female genitalia cutting and hurting, or P2GP, have gained significant attention among *Mubadalah* digital activists. There are over 53 articles on P2GP published by *mubadalah.id*. While the first article on P2GP appeared in September 2016, the majority were released after July 2019, with most being published between 2021-2024, shortly before and after the topic was deliberated at the second KUPI congress. All these P2GP articles share the same rejection of any form of female circumcision practices performed without medical reasons because the practices lack a solid Islamic-legal foundation and have no medical advantages.

Mubadalah's Instagram actively posts content on P2GP. Among its 300 posts hitting more than 1,000 likes/views, six focus specifically on P2GP and female circumcision practices. The first post on P2GP, made on April 1, 2020, features a graphic silent video, a "warning" to its audiences that no part of a female genitalia organ should be circumcised. The video garnered

61 Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics", 87.

62 Manuel Castells, *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age*. (Willey, 2012); Wiesslitz (ed.), *Women Activism Online*, 2023.

7,516 views and received 125 comments. The lastest two posts, uploaded on May 24 and June 5, 2024, showcase short videos of KUPI-affiliated scholars, including Nur Rofiah and Ulil Abshar Abdalla, discussing the danger and irrelevance of female circumcision. As of October 2024, these six posts have collectively earned 21,300 likes and views, along with 960 comments. This engagement indicates the significance of P2GP issues to *Mubadalah*'s Instagram followers and broader audience.

Mubadalah's posts on P2GP aim to amplify the KUPI's fatwa on this matter. According to the fatwa, any form of harmful and medically uninformed practices associated with P2GP are prohibited in Islam, and all stakeholders in society must engage in innovative efforts to prevent and eradicate these practices. The fatwa defines P2GP as any procedure that involves cutting a female genitalia organ, be it done partially, entirely, or otherwise, that is harmful to a woman's life, and is executed with no medical reasons. Examples include piercing, slicing, burning, cutting, and scrapping the female genitalia organs. The urgency to issue the fatwa is said to stem from the wide celebration of P2GP practices among many Indonesian families in both rural and urban areas. The involvement of local practitioners (known as *dukun sunat*), alongside medical workers, highlights the societal negligence of this issue.[63] Moreover, the fatwa seems to respond to a previous fatwa by the MUI, the state-supported council of Indonesian ulama, that still considers the practice part of Islamic teachings provided it is limited to the removal of the clitoral hood (*praeputium*) and does not involve any excessive actions such as cutting or injuring any part of the clitoris.[64]

To the best of my knowledge, the most popular post about P2GP was uploaded on August 29, 2021, and is titled "Female Circumcision Has No Advantage, it is Harmful Instead". The post received 661 comments, making it the second most commented post on *Mubadalah*'s Instagram.[65] It is based on an article called "Is Female Circumcision an Urgent Matter?" authored by a *Mubadalah* contributor, Sulma Samkhaty Maghfiroh, and featured in *mubadalah.id* a day earlier. The comment section was extensive and filled with arguments from both sides. Notably, individuals in favor and against the practice referenced Islamic teachings and medical evidence to support their

63 HasilMKkupi2_(5).pdf, last accessed December 25, 2024.
64 M. Asrorun Ni'am Soleh, "Fatwa MUI Tentang Khitan Perempuan," *Al-Hikam* 12, No. 2 (2012): 35-46.
65 Instagram, last accessed December 12, 2024.

points, regardless of their educational and religious backgrounds. Many comments included personal experiences about the issue and highlighted similar practices found in various local cultures throughout the country. Additionally, a significant number of commenters stated that the post offered new perspectives to understanding issues around female circumcision. This demonstrates the ability of *Mubadalah*'s digital activism to create a space where individuals from diverse backgrounds can access information and engage in public debates about previously undiscussed, if not completely overlooked, issues affecting women.

Some people, however, would go an extra mile deeper into the debate. A noteworthy perspective comes from @najxx.axxxxx, a female Instagram enthusiast affiliated with an Islamist "*Tarbiyah*" movement.[66] She advocated for a non-harmful form of female circumcision and emphasized the importance of carefully selecting religious sources and guiding figures when discussing this topic. In her comment, she clarified her argument by distinguishing circumcision from WHO's banned practice of female genitalia mutilation (FGM). She also referenced a fatwa from the MUI that supports non-harmful female circumcision practices. She concluded her comment with a cautionary note: "Beware, everyone. Do not turn what our religion considers noble into something abhorrent or forbidden".[67]

Her assertive comment sparked a lively discussion. It attracted 75 responses, making it the longest thread of comments on the post. Most of the reactions came from *Mubadalah* supporters, including @tia-xxxxxxxx and @julxxs-hexxxx. While the first is a *Mubadalah* contributor, the second is a self-professed agnostic spiritualist with progressive views on gender issues who has been a loyal reader of *mubadalah.id*. They attempted to counter @najxx.axxxxx's argument by highlighting the flaws in the legal texts commonly used to justify female circumcision and debunking the myth of its medical benefits. Several commenters joined the thread to defend @najxx.axxxxx, particularly @ummxxxxxxx and @aljaxxxxxxxxxxxx. However, their comments only led to an influx of responses from other *Mubadalah* supporters, eventually forcing @najxx.axxxxx and her peers to abandon the battleground.

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66 It refers to an Islamist predication movement mushrooming across mosques of the top Indonesian secular universities in the 1980s, which subsequently became the backbone for the establishment of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS).

67 Instagram, last accessed December 12, 2024.

Despite the intense nature of the debate, both sides approached the discussion with goodwill, avoiding insults and ridicule. The post did receive a few aggressive comments. For example, @randoxxxxxxxx referred to *Mubadalah*'s posts as "devilish". Similarly provocative comments appeared on other posts on Mubadalah's Instagram, and there were some attempts to phish the website. However, while these threats are noticeable, *Mubadalah*'s activists are not deterred from continuing their work. Nurajizah explained that the *Mubadalah* editors decided to focus on comments and responses delivered with positivity, while minimizing their participation in the comment sections.[68] This approach ensured that discussions on *Mubadalah*'s social media platforms remained constructive. As far as I have observed, however, dedicated followers of *Mubadalah* tend to fervently defend *Mubaladah* posts against accounts that express adverse or dissenting reactions. This is demonstrated in another comment thread on a similar post, where @julxxs-hexxxx engaged in a heated debate with an account identified as @xxarabxxx regarding the legal basis for female circumcision practices in Islam.

This observation highlights that *Mubadalah*'s Instagram has enabled members of the KUPI community to create an alternative space for voicing their concerns about women's sensitive and ignored issues, such as the P2GP practices. At the same time, however, the public that emerges from their online activities is rife with oppositional discourses. It is clear that the discourse about P2GP practices raised by @julxxs-hexxxx, @tia-xxxxxxxx, and other KUPI like-minded people goes against the dominant, conservative views on the topic. Despite provocation from opponents of Islamic feminism, they have found the space provided by *Mubadalah*'s Instagram sufficiently safe for them to express their feminist opinions publicly. In fact, their conversations on *Mubadalah*'s Instagram frequently sidelined the opinion of the conservative majority, a challenging feat to accomplish in offline settings.

Mubadalah's Instagram followers are primarily young individuals in their 20s and 30s, with most profiles identified as female. Understandably, the discussion on the P2GP post was dominated by female participants, although a few male-identified profiles are noticeable. Based on my observations, the male participants are either loyalists of the conservative

[68] Interview, Fitri Nurajizah, October 9, 2024.

gender discourses or supporters of the KUPI feminist agendas. However, I rarely found male commenters in the P2GP post who used *Mubadalah*'s Instagram as a reference to gain information about Islamic gender discourses. Those males in support of the KUPI's feminist agenda tended to use their participation in the debate to demonstrate their knowledge of and commitment to Islamic gender reform projects. In contrast, women's participation in the debate revealed a different dynamic. In general, female participants who support or oppose the KUPI's feminist discourse do so in militant ways, as evidenced by the opinions they voiced across their lengthy and multiple comments. Indeed, the discussions occurring in the KUPI's digital space reinforced existing dissenting opinions about Islamic gender reform initiatives within intra-Islamic groups and organizations. Nevertheless, some female audiences do use the platform as a source of religious reference. For example, @lina_yxxxxxxxx1 writes, "Before reading this post, I thought female circumcision was obligatory".[69] Given that there were numerous similar comments, the KUPI's digital public presents an opportunity for female participants to access a democratic source of Islamic knowledge centered on women-empowering discourses. If this observation is accurate, the KUPI's public has the potential to challenge dominant, patriarchal structures of religious authority.

Interactions between *Mubadalah* and its audience primarily occur through Instagram posts. However, since most of *Mubadalah*'s Instagram content consists of infographics, those interested in fully engaging with the material might visit *Mubadalah*'s website. Editor-in-Chief for *Mubadalah,* Zahra Amin, noted that most visitors to *mubadalah.id* are students from Islamic universities in Indonesia who find the site through Google searches, with the most common search terms relating to Islamic family law. This indicates that many young visitors view *Mubadalah* as a valuable resource for learning about issues related to Islamic family matters. Amin also mentioned that several Islamic boarding schools within the KUPI's network have partnered with *Mubadalah* to use its website as a media reference for discussions around women's and family issues.[70] This trend demonstrates the KUPI's potential to disrupt traditional structures of Islamic authority through the use of digital platforms.

69 Instagram, last accessed December 12, 2024.
70 Interview, Zahra Amin, October 9, 2024.

Still, this public is cognizant of its subordinate status. This is evidenced by some of *Mubadalah*'s Instagram posts, including those about P2GP, that intentionally avoid using the term "fatwa" when referencing the KUPI's religious views. Ismah's contribution to this special issue extensively discusses the KUPI's religious deliberation procedures, acknowledging their outcomes as fatwas. In various "informal" settings, many KUPI-linked scholars refer to these religious opinions as fatwas, and so do several articles featured in *mubadalah.id*. However, in official documents, KUPI scholars have opted to label the outcomes of their religious deliberations as "a religious view" (*sikap dan pandangan keagamaan*) instead of a "fatwa", an attitude followed by *Mubadalah*'s Instagram administrators.

The hesitation among the KUPI network to use the term "fatwa" arises from its strong association with religious authority, which, in Indonesia, is predominantly associated with established religious institutions like the NU, Muhammadiyah, and the MUI. Many KUPI-ulama believe that using the term fatwa might offend leaders of these institutions who have traditionally been responsible for issuing fatwa to most Muslims in the country.[71] They argue that the phrase "religious view" is a more neutral term that could help garner broader support. By avoiding the term "fatwa", the KUPI feminist activists strategically aim to ensure that their gender campaigns reach a wider range of audiences.

This decision indicates that the KUPI is conscious of its subordinate position. This awareness has, subsequently, shaped how the KUPI engages with its online audiences, as demonstrated by the content of *Mubadalah*'s Instagram that focuses on issues rather than people, a strategic move to reach a diverse range of participants. It also influenced how the KUPI defines its affiliates' membership. As discussed earlier, the KUPI encourages its scholars and activists to carry out their feminist activities without using the KUPI label. This strategy ensures that their feminist messages can be distributed across various Islamic organizations and groups that may be unfamiliar with the KUPI or are sensitive to a movement associated with feminism. Likewise, most KUPI scholars and activists prefer not to identify themselves as "feminists",[72] given that the term carries negative

[71] Pers. comm., Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, October 13, 2024.

[72] I am thankful to Kamala Chandrakirana and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir for making me aware of this information.

connotations for many (religious) individuals and groups in Indonesia. These strategic moves aimed at defining membership, reaching wider audiences, and maintaining sustainability suggest the emergence of a nascent counterpublic within the KUPI's digital activism.

Conclusion

I have discussed the commitment, hard work, and strategic moves around the KUPI's online campaign efforts by focusing on those involved in *Mubadalah* digital activism. As a relatively marginalized group, comprising of female ulama and Islamic feminist activists, the KUPI often found it challenging to discuss its religious views and feminist ideas in offline public settings. However, by utilizing the Internet and social media platforms, as demonstrated by *Mubadalah*'s Instagram, they have created a space where they can expand their Islamic feminist campaigns to wider audiences. This space is not devoid of resistance or online threats. However, it offers a safer and more engaging environment for KUPI activists to amplify their feminist discourses. Through this digital public, they can initiate conversations on gender issues, albeit at times heated discussions, that occasionally overshadow those of the conservative majority, a situation that is more difficult to achieve in an offline sphere. The KUPI's public offers an alternative perspective and source on Islamic interpretations on women's issues, opposing the prevailing male-bias interpretations. Their digital initiatives subvert the patriarchal narratives about women that are dominant across Indonesian communities, as well as destabilize the traditional structures of religious authority that have produced and sustained these narratives. Nevertheless, the KUPI's public is conscious of its subordinate status, especially when compared to other more established publics. This awareness has prompted them to devise strategic ways to organize their affiliates' membership and to effectively circulate their feminist discourses across a wider range of audiences. The public that emerges from the KUPI's digital activism walks the lines of a developing counterpublic.

In July 2024, the government enacted a regulation that eliminates all forms of P2GP practices. This is significant news for the KUPI community. While it may be too early to say whether this regulation is directly linked to the KUPI's digital activism, it is essential to emphasize that digital spaces provide the KUPI people with new avenues to imagine their activism strategies and the broader impacts of their efforts on society differently.

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Fitri Nurajizah, administrator of *Mubadalah*'s Instagram, October 9, 2024.

Zahra Amin, editor in chief for *mubadalah.id*, October 9, 2024.