

# From the Streets to the Internet: Politics, Gender and Social Media in Fiji



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## Digital feminism in Fiji



This research project explores how feminists and women's rights activists in Fiji are using digital technologies. It is a collaborative project with researchers at the University of the South Pacific.



During Fiji's 2014 elections, **social media – especially Facebook** – was widely used as a campaigning tool by candidates. A recent study (Finau et al. 2015) has shown how social media in Fiji is also evolving as the 'new and safe' space for political discourse: young, technologically savvy citizens are using social media to engage with information that is restricted in the traditional media by political constraints and reporting restrictions. Young people in Fiji increasingly turn to social media for information

# Digital Revolution in the Pacific

- Deregulation of telecommunications – the Pacific in the midst of digital revolution
- Increase in mobile phone penetration, leading to rise in social media consumption
  - implications for democratic governance – DT providing Pacific Islanders with opportunities to harness, influence and promote political change “Digital generation” – emerging; playing an increasingly influential role in society.

(Cave, 2012)

**MAR  
2015**

# DIGITAL IN FIJI

A SNAPSHOT OF THE COUNTRY'S KEY DIGITAL STATISTICAL INDICATORS



**TOTAL  
POPULATION**



we  
are  
social

**859  
THOUSAND**

**URBANISATION: 52%**

FIGURE REPRESENTS TOTAL NATIONAL POPULATION, INCLUDING CHILDREN

**ACTIVE  
INTERNET USERS**



we  
are  
social

**335  
THOUSAND**

**PENETRATION: 39%**

FIGURE INCLUDES ACCESS VIA FIXED AND MOBILE CONNECTIONS

**ACTIVE SOCIAL  
MEDIA USERS**



we  
are  
social

**340  
THOUSAND**

**PENETRATION: 40%**

FIGURE REPRESENTS ACTIVE USER ACCOUNTS ON THE MOST ACTIVE SOCIAL PLATFORM IN THE COUNTRY, NOT UNIQUE USERS

**MOBILE  
CONNECTIONS**



we  
are  
social

**1.00  
MILLION**

**vs. POPULATION: 116%**

FIGURE REPRESENTS MOBILE SUBSCRIPTIONS, NOT UNIQUE USERS

**ACTIVE MOBILE  
SOCIAL USERS**



**300  
THOUSAND**

**PENETRATION: 35%**

FIGURE REPRESENTS ACTIVE USER ACCOUNTS ON THE MOST ACTIVE SOCIAL PLATFORM IN THE COUNTRY, NOT UNIQUE USERS

# Feminists Use & Scope of Digital Technologies

- Organising demonstrations, networking, advocating
- Networking & solidarity
- Accessing information, questioning & reframing feminist identities
- Accountability



# Pathways & Links to Mainstream Media

- Collectively – planned campaigns, highlighting issues online (debates) and creating relationships (feminist allies)
- Individually – contributing to discussion/debate, sharing information
- Citizen journalism; mobilising media attention.
  - #GiveBackHisScholarship



## Some illustrative examples...

- *Take Back the Streets Campaign* – against street harassment of young women, especially in public transportation.
- *Anti - Boko Haram* demonstrations – informed by international campaign.



# Communities of education and empowerment

## Tapping into global movements & moments

*“...transcends the physical space into the cyberspace”*

*“one of the coolest aspects of digital advocacy is how you’re not restricted to the time zones and distances”*

## Educating, questioning & reframing

*“...you keep on rediscovering your own self”*

## Alternative feminist discourses

*“...moving away from white feminism to black feminism”*

*“there aren't many queer activists in Fiji so my activism is informed by digital technologies and, through that, exposure to queer feminism.”*



# Communities of validation, solidarity & support

## Finding a 'home' in online spaces

*“I found my niche on social media. Social media allowed me to find people who may have gone through things that I have gone through as well”*

## Sharing anger & frustration – documenting harassment

*“a lot of women who shared their stories actually said in those posts that they just don't think about women's rights so that's the violation they felt and immediately they just wanted to talk to somebody who understood and they thought of other women activists which is how a lot of women come to us like who have never thought of feminism”*

# Communities of accountability

## Ability to hold other feminists to account for their feminisms

*“I do assess peoples feminism, I think if you're a feminist you should be constantly questioning ideas, thoughts and people and I unlearn a lot of behaviours..”*

*“...there are certain rules I have for example if you don't believe in trans-rights, then to me you're not a feminist...to me your approach to feminism is exclusionary and feminism is not exclusionary, so I do hold people to account.”*

## Ability to hold oneself accountable

*“And you also question your own analysis, and then other articles come, you have an in-depth knowledge for that particular issue, and you keep learning and analyzing and you start reacting to situations differently, you even start analyzing things differently and in the digital world that has worked and it's amazing coz you keep on rediscovering your own self.”*

# Risks & Concerns

- Political climate & online censorship
- Self-Censorship
- Workplace restrictions/concerns
- Harassment & Cyberbullying



# Recommendations

1. Digital technology programs must address gender- and class-based barriers to women's access.
2. Capacity building of young feminists
3. Protecting women from ICT enabled gendered violence
4. New NGO culture for online possibilities



Thank you for listening!

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