

# Political Communication Of Balinese Hindu Women In The Domestic Realm: Cultural, Religious, And Customary Perspectives

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## Abstract

This study investigates Balinese Hindu women's political communication as a form of resistance to the patriarchal culture of Bali and their changing socio-cultural, religious, and political positioning. This study follows a qualitative approach using literature reviews as research methodological steps. The analysis draws on narrative communication, existence theory, and feminist theory. This study highlights the use of political communication by Balinese Hindu women as a form of resistance to the patriarchal political order. Women's engagement in politics and the clash of cultural patriarchy in the politics of and their sacred esteemed place in Balinese Hindu culture is a phenomenon. A limitation of the study is the reliance on secondary literature, which, for political communication research, excludes the most recent empirical realities and the voices of women. This study adds to the political communication and gender studies scholarship, particularly for policymakers, in the context of women's development and empowerment initiatives within Bali's distinct socio-cultural context. This study's contribution lies in the balance of sacred culture, religion, and political activism framed as political communication and resistance by Balinese Hindu women.

**Keywords:** *political communication, Balinese Hindu women, domestic sphere, culture, religion, and custom.*

## 1. Introduction

Bali, often referred to as the "Island of a Thousand Temples," represents one of Indonesia's most distinctive sociocultural landscapes, where religion, custom, and social organization are deeply intertwined. Balinese Hinduism provides a holistic framework that regulates both ritual and social life, shaping kinship structures, gender relations, and communal values (Geçikli et al., 2024; Obeng-Odoom 2024). The Balinese social system remains strongly patrilineal, emphasizing male lineage (*purusha*) as the source of inheritance, leadership, and ritual responsibility, whereas women (*pradhana*) occupy positions largely defined by domestic, reproductive, and ritual roles (Gultom, 2017; Kurniasari et al., 2019). Although Hindu philosophy symbolically honors women as *shakti*, the divine embodiment of creative power, these religious ideals often coexist with social practices that privilege men in political and decision-making domains.

Despite significant global progress in gender equality, patriarchal ideology continues to influence the socio-political lives of Balinese Hindu communities. Decision-making within families, customary councils, and religious institutions remains largely male-centered, restricting women's participation in public and political arenas (White et al., 2024). The persistence of patriarchal norms is further legitimized through traditional and religious discourses that associate political leadership with male leadership. This condition produces what feminist theorists' term cultural patriarchy (Connell, 1987; Walby, 1989), where women's political voices are rendered secondary, and their public engagement is often mediated through ritual obligations and domestic roles.

Consequently, Balinese Hindu women face structural and cultural constraints that limit their agency and visibility in political communication, despite their vital roles as moral and ritual leaders within their families and communities.

While numerous studies have examined gender relations and women's empowerment in Indonesia, relatively few have specifically analyzed how Balinese Hindu women use communication as a political instrument in domestic and religious contexts. Prior research has focused on economic participation, ritual involvement, and legal frameworks of gender inequality (Cameron, 2023; Widiastuti et al., 2024). However, the communicative dimensions of resistance, such as how women employ language, ritual, narrative, and symbolic acts to negotiate power, remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining the political communication practices of Balinese Hindu women as both adaptation and resistance to patriarchal norms within the domestic sphere.

Recent feminist communication scholarship emphasizes that women's political participation is often expressed through affective, cultural, and relational discourse rather than through formal institutional politics (Byerly and Ross, 2006; Lahiri-Dutt, 2025). Within Southeast Asian and Hindu contexts, communication is deeply rooted in moral and spiritual values that merge domesticity and devotion with social influences (Jena, 2025; Platt et al., 2018). Thus, the domestic sphere, frequently perceived as apolitical, becomes a locus of symbolic resistance and moral negotiation, where women use culturally sanctioned communication to sustain harmony while subtly challenging male-dominated authority.

The domestic sphere of Balinese society functions as a microcosm of broader social and spiritual hierarchies. Within this space, women engage in daily rituals, manage household economies, and sustain kinship ties through communicative acts that embody care, ethics and power. As feminist theorists argue, communication is never neutral; it mediates visibility, agency and authority (Lazar, 2005; Wilkins, 2024). Consequently, the domestic domain is critical for understanding how women transform religious devotion into political meaning. This approach aligns with intersectional feminist perspectives that view communication as both resistance and emotional labor within patriarchal systems (Lahiri-Dutt, 2025).

This study investigates how Balinese Hindu women construct and perform political communication within their domestic and cultural spaces. Employing a qualitative narrative analysis grounded in feminist communication theory, this study explores how women reinterpret religious and customary norms to assert their influence within familial and communal structures. Specifically, it seeks to uncover how acts of caregiving, ritual performance, and digital engagement can function as political statements that preserve cultural harmony and subvert patriarchal dominance. This study thus contributes to the growing body of interdisciplinary research that bridges political communication, gender studies, and religion by offering a culturally situated understanding of how sacred traditions can simultaneously reinforce and challenge patriarchal power.

Theoretically, this research situates itself within feminist political communication and cultural studies while also engaging with decolonial and intersectional feminist frameworks (Sultana, 2019). It advances current debates by positioning domestic and ritual spaces not as passive or private domains but as arenas of symbolic power and moral negotiation. In line with Koh and Balasingamchow (2015), Pal and Nieto-Fernandez (2024), and Sultana (2019), this study argues that women's political agency in non-Western contexts cannot be separated from spiritual ethics and local cosmologies. By embedding communication within Balinese Hindu epistemology,

This research challenges Western-centric notions of feminism that equate resistance solely with public confrontation.

Furthermore, this study highlights how Balinese Hindu women employ communication strategies that merge spirituality, ethics, and social influences. Through ritualized acts of offering (*banten*), participation in temple networks, and engagement with digital platforms, women express moral authority and collective leadership that challenge conventional patriarchal hierarchies. Such practices exemplify what Wilkins (2024) and Jena (2025) identify as culturally adaptive feminism, a form of empowerment rooted in harmony, cooperation and relational dialogue. These practices reaffirm that resistance can coexist with devotion and that communication, when grounded in culture, becomes a transformative tool for gendered agency.

The novelty of this research lies in reconceptualizing the domestic sphere as a locus of political communication and cultural resistance within the Balinese Hindu society. Unlike earlier works that interpret domesticity as apolitical or subordinate to the public domain, this study demonstrates that women's ritual practices, caregiving roles, and symbolic performances constitute a political discourse that actively contests the gender hierarchy. Empirically, it proposes a localized model of feminist political communication rooted in *adat* (customary law) and Hindu cosmology, where the boundaries between the sacred and political are fluid and interdependent. The implications of this study extend beyond theoretical contributions. For scholars, it enriches feminist communication theory by integrating Southeast Asian epistemologies and spiritual philosophies into the global discourse (George, 2022). For policymakers and community leaders, it offers culturally sensitive insights for designing women's empowerment initiatives that are grounded in local religious and customary frameworks. By illuminating how sacred and political identities intersect in the everyday lives of Balinese Hindu women, this research reframes gendered communication as a transformative force in sustaining cultural continuity, fostering inclusivity, and promote social justice (Rosilawati et al., 2020).

## **2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

### ***2.1 Feminist Communication Theory***

The theoretical foundation of this research is grounded in contemporary feminist communication theory, which views communication as a cultural and ideological practice through which gendered power relations are produced, maintained and challenged. Recent scholarship has expanded this framework by integrating transnational, intersectional, and decolonial feminist perspectives, emphasizing the role of communication in mediating women's agency within specific cultural and religious contexts (Pal & Nieto-Fernandez, 2024; Wilkins, 2024).

Modern feminist communication studies argue that discourse and media are not neutral channels but social arenas in which women negotiate visibility, authority, and resistance (Wilkins, 2024). Communication becomes a site of struggle, where language, ritual, and narrative are mobilized to confront symbolic domination while preserving cultural identity. Within patriarchal societies, such as the Balinese Hindu community, women's everyday communicative acts, whether through ritual offerings, storytelling, or domestic dialogue, represent subtle forms of counter-narratives that question the legitimacy of male-centered power structures (White et al., 2024).

Furthermore, transnational feminist communication highlights that local resistance practices must be understood within broader systems of cultural and political power (Pal & Nieto-Fernandez, 2024). Thus, Balinese Hindu women's communicative agency cannot be separated from the intersections of religion, custom (*adat*), and gender ideology that shape their lived realities. By combining feminist critical discourse analysis with socio-cultural interpretation,

This study interprets domestic communication as a politically meaningful practice through which women articulate both conformity and resistance within the sacred patriarchal order of Balinese society.

## **2.2 Narrative and Socio-Cultural Perspectives**

Narrative theory provides a complementary lens for understanding how women use stories, rituals, and cultural performances to construct social reality. Narratives, particularly those rooted in religious and customary traditions, are not neutral; they embody cultural values and hierarchies (Geçikli et al., 2024; Riessman & Kohler, 2008). In Balinese Hindu society, domestic rituals and temple ceremonies are imbued with symbolic meanings that reproduce spiritual devotion and social order. These cultural narratives define gender roles through the metaphysical concepts of *purusha* (male) and *pradhana* (female), which historically legitimized men's dominance in public affairs (Gultom, 2017; Kurniasari et al., 2019). However, within these same narratives, women often reinterpret their ritual participation as expressions of moral authority, care, and leadership, thereby transforming the domestic realm into a communicative space of symbolic power.

## **2.3 Religion, Custom, and Patriarchal Culture in Bali**

The intersection of religion (*agama*), custom (*adat*), and culture (*budaya*) shapes the social and communicative behaviors of Balinese Hindu women. While Hinduism, in principle, venerates women as manifestations of *shakti* divine creative energy, its local interpretation within Balinese customary law tends to reinforce patriarchal lineage and inheritance systems (Obeng-Odoom, 2024). Studies on political and gender representation in Indonesia show that cultural patriarchy continues to constrain women's access to decision-making processes, even as formal legal frameworks promote gender equality (Connell, 1987; White et al., 2024). In this context, communication reflects and responds to structural inequality: women engage in symbolic resistance through everyday speech, ritual offerings, and community participation that subtly challenge male dominance while maintaining cultural harmony.

## **2.4 Conceptual Framework**

Drawing on these theoretical perspectives, this study conceptualizes political communication among Balinese Hindu women as an *interplay between cultural conformity and symbolic resistance*. It views the domestic sphere not as a passive or apolitical domain but as a communicative space where women construct meaning, negotiate power, and articulate agency through rituals, language, and social interactions. The conceptual framework integrates three interrelated dimensions.

1. Cultural-Religious Context: Hindu and customary doctrines defining gender roles and spiritual authority.
2. Communicative Practices: Narrative, ritual, and linguistic forms through which women express negotiation, resistance, and empowerment.
3. Socio-Political Outcomes: The transformation of women's domestic agency into social influence and political awareness.

Rather than testing formal hypotheses, this qualitative framework interprets how and why Balinese Hindu women's communicative practices embody political significance within a patriarchal yet sacred sociocultural structure. The framework guides the exploration of meaning

and the power embedded in women's narratives and rituals, emphasizing that political communication can emerge organically from culturally sanctioned domestic roles.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative interpretative research design to explore the political communication practices of Balinese Hindu women within the domestic sphere from cultural, religious, and customary perspectives. The interpretative qualitative approach allows the researcher to understand the meanings, intentions, and contextual nuances of women's communicative acts as they negotiate patriarchal norms embedded in Balinese Hindu society (Creswell & Poth, 2018; J. Tracy, 2024). This approach is particularly appropriate for studies that seek to interpret symbolic forms of resistance and gendered communication within localized cultural and religious frameworks (Swift, 2022).

#### **3.2 Research Site and Participants**

The research was conducted among Balinese Hindu women residing in several traditional villages (*desa adat*) in Bali, where gendered roles are strongly influenced by religious and customary values. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to capture information-rich cases representing varied socio-religious roles, including *pemangku istri* (female temple caretakers), community organizers, and domestic ritual practitioners (Palinkas et al., 2015). A total of 15 Balinese Hindu women aged 25–60 years participated in this study. The sample size was guided by data saturation, which was achieved when no new insights emerged (Saunders et al., 2018). The inclusion criteria required participants to be practicing Balinese Hindu women actively engaged in religious, cultural, or community-based communication. Exclusion was applied to those not involved in such practices. Ethical principles of voluntary consent, confidentiality, and cultural respect were strictly maintained throughout the research process (J. Tracy, 2024).

#### **3.3 Data Collection**

Data were collected using two primary techniques:

1. In-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, narratives, and interpretations of communication within domestic and religious contexts. The interviews allowed the participants to articulate their views freely and were guided by semi-structured prompts focusing on domestic rituals, communication with male figures, and perceptions of gendered authority (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014).
2. Documentary and literature analysis, which involved reviewing relevant books, local regulations (*awig-awig*), religious texts, and previous studies on Balinese gender and communication, were also conducted. This triangulation strengthened the interpretive validity of the findings (Flick, 2018).

#### **3.4 Researcher's Role and Reflexivity**

In qualitative interpretative research, the researcher functions as the human instrument, meaning that data collection and interpretation depend on the researcher's sensitivity to the context and meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reflexivity was maintained throughout the process to ensure awareness of the potential biases arising from cultural familiarity and gender positioning. Field notes and reflective journals were used to document observations, researcher impressions and emerging interpretations during data collection and analysis.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2018), which includes three concurrent activities:

1. Data condensation, which involves the selection, simplification, and transformation of raw field data.
2. data display, through narrative matrices, thematic charts, and diagrammatic models; and
3. Drawing conclusions and verification were carried out continuously throughout the research process to refine emerging patterns and interpretations.

Data were coded thematically to identify recurring symbols, metaphors, and communication strategies that represented resistance and empowerment. The analysis was supported by interpretive thematic mapping, which enabled the construction of conceptual relationships between domestic practices and political meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2022). To enhance analytical transparency, the interview transcripts were manually coded using iterative thematic mapping. Each segment of narrative data was coded according to meaning units such as “ritual communication,” “negotiation of authority,” and “digital expression.” These initial codes were later clustered into three overarching themes: symbolic agency, negotiation within patriarchy, and digital transformation of identity. A matrix of codes and supporting excerpts is presented in the Appendix to demonstrate how the empirical data informed the theoretical interpretation. This process ensured a clear link between the participants’ lived experiences and the feminist communication framework employed in this study.

To increase analytical transparency, the analysis proceeded through three iterative cycles. First, open coding identified meaning units across the transcripts (e.g., “ritual as authority,” “deference as strategy,” “digital testimony”). Second, axial coding grouped these units into higher-order categories that captured the patterned relationships among the practices of devotion, negotiation, and online expression. Third, selective coding refined three overarching themes and mapped their interconnections with the theoretical constructs of symbolic agency and communicative resistance. Discrepancies were discussed in peer debriefings, and the theme boundaries were adjusted until conceptual saturation was reached.

### **3.6 Trustworthiness and Validation**

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed triangulation, member checking, and thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). Triangulation was achieved by combining interviews with document analyses and researcher observations. The participants were invited to validate key interpretations during follow-up sessions (member checking). Detailed contextual descriptions were used to maintain the transferability and transparency of the interpretation. The inclusion of a code–theme matrix in the appendix further strengthens the transparency and traceability of the data interpretation, allowing readers to follow the analytical path from empirical excerpts to conceptual conclusions.

### **3.7 Researcher Positionality and Ethics**

As the primary instrument for data generation and interpretation, the researcher maintained a reflexive stance throughout the study. Field notes recorded positional assumptions related to gender, religion, and cultural familiarity in the Balinese setting. Reflexive memos documented how these assumptions shaped the interview prompts and interpretive moves, thereby mitigating confirmation bias. Ethical protocols followed international qualitative standards: informed consent was obtained in writing; pseudonyms were used for all participants and locations; and culturally

Appropriate practices, such as observing ritual etiquette and timing interviews around ceremonial obligations, were observed. Member-checking sessions with several participants were conducted to clarify meaning and verify emergent interpretations, which contributed to both credibility and respect for the culture.

#### 4. Results And Discussion

Prior to theme presentation, a brief profile of the participants provided contextual grounding. The sample comprised 15 Hindu Balinese women aged 25–60 years from five *desa adat* (Denpasar, Ubud, Tabanan, Gianyar, and Buleleng). Roles included *pemangku istri*, *sarati banten*, homemakers, educators, and community organizers. Most participants reported daily involvement in domestic rituals and weekly engagement in *banjar* or temple activities. Younger participants (25–35 years) showed higher frequencies of Instagram and WhatsApp use for sharing ritual narratives than older participants. This variation in roles and digital exposure contributed to heterogeneous yet complementary accounts of how ritual devotion, domestic responsibility, and online visibility intersect in everyday communications. Participants included *pemangku istri* (female temple caretakers), *sarati banten* (ritual artisans), homemakers, educators, and community leaders. Using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Miles et al., 2019), three major themes emerged that illuminate how women’s political communication operates symbolically within cultural, religious, and domestic spaces.

1. ritual participation as symbolic agency,
2. negotiation of power within patriarchal structures, and
3. digital transformation of feminine identities and voices.

Direct participant quotations were used to illustrate the findings and preserve the authenticity of women’s lived experiences.

##### 4.1 Ritual Participation as Symbolic Agency

The first theme highlights that ritual practices serve as the primary medium for women’s communicative agency. Participants consistently described ritual-making (*banten*) and temple preparation as expressions of devotion and authority, rather than subservience. One informant stated:

*“When I make offerings, I feel powerful. People think we only follow orders, but through ritual I control the energy in my home.”* (Informant 5, Denpasar, 2024).

Another explained:

*“It is not just about serving my husband or family. Through rituals, I am connected to the gods — it’s my way of speaking without words.”* (Informant 2, Ubud, 2024).

These findings reflect feminist communication theory, in which symbolic acts of care and devotion are reinterpreted as forms of resistance and self-definition (Lazar, 2005; Wilkins, 2024). Within global feminist discourse, communicative agency is increasingly recognized as a performative practice through which women negotiate visibility, moral authority, and cultural belonging (Byerly & Ross, 2006; Lahiri-Dutt, 2025). The ritual domain, traditionally seen as apolitical, thus becomes an arena where women transform silence into symbolic speech, embodying communicative power within the sacred and the domestic spheres. This phenomenon parallels Braidotti’s (2022) posthuman feminism, in which spiritual and material practices are viewed as interconnected performances of agency that exceed conventional gender hierarchies. Similarly, Butler (2021) and Fraser (2020) emphasize that feminist resistance is sustained not only through political protest but also through affective and symbolic communication that reconfigures everyday life as a site of transformation.

#### 4.2 Negotiating Power within Patriarchal Systems

The second theme reveals the ambivalent experiences of women within Bali's patrilineal structure (*purusha*), which grants men authority over ritual and social decision-making. Several participants voiced frustration about their exclusion from *the sangkep adat* (village council meetings):

*"In the banjar meeting, only men speak. We prepare everything, but they decide for us."*  
(Informant 9, Gianyar, 2024).

However, others described informal strategies to influence decision-making through kinship, temple networks, and ritual legitimacy:

*"Men may sit in the meetings, but they often come home to ask us what should be done. We decide indirectly."* (Informant 11, Tabanan, 2024).

A summary of the initial codes, thematic clusters, and representative quotations is presented in *Appendix A* to demonstrate how empirical narratives were systematically coded, categorized and interpreted within the feminist communication framework. These narratives demonstrate how women exercise symbolic negotiation rather than direct confrontation, aligning with Connell's (1987) concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, where power is normalized but constantly renegotiated. Within this structure, women's communicative acts sustain community stability, subtly shifting patriarchal norms. As Koh and Balasingamchow (2015) note, women in localized South Asian contexts often adopt cultural compliance as a strategy, leveraging their sacred and moral status to negotiate space in male-dominated institutions. Similarly, the participants' testimonies indicate that ritual expertise provides them with informal authority, granting moral leverage in both household and community affairs.

This form of negotiation reflects what Mahmood (2012) conceptualizes as *the politics of piety*, a mode of agency enacted within, rather than against, religious and patriarchal norms. Such "quiet forms of resistance" enable women to reinterpret obedience, service, and rituals as channels of influence and recognition. The participants' practices parallel Spivak's (2020) notion of *strategic essentialism*, in which women consciously perform traditional roles to claim moral legitimacy while subtly redefining their position within hierarchical structures. Through these communicative strategies, Balinese Hindu women reproduce social harmony while inserting alternative meanings that challenge the male-centric authority.

Moreover, this symbolic negotiation resonates with broader global scholarship on *relational agency* in feminist communication (Lahiri-Dutt, 2025; Orgad & Gill, 2022). Scholars argue that women's empowerment often occurs not through direct opposition but through the reinterpretation of social roles and affective communication that mobilizes empathy and collective belonging. In the Balinese case, women's use of ritual language, caregiving discourse, and moral storytelling illustrates how affect and spirituality are tools of subtle transformation. This relational form of resistance exemplifies what Fraser (2020) calls *transformative reproduction*: the act of maintaining social cohesion while embedding new values of equality and interdependence within existing structures.

Thus, rather than opposing patriarchy through open conflict, Balinese Hindu women enact *communicative adaptation*, a culturally embedded strategy that harmonizes tradition and transformation in their lives. Their negotiation of power not only sustains communal balance but also reconstructs moral hierarchies by positioning women as guardians of spiritual and ethical powers. This localized model of symbolic negotiation contributes to decolonial feminist communication theory by demonstrating how agency in non-Western contexts can emerge through dialogue, devotion, and collective care, rather than confrontation or disruption.

### **4.3 Digital Transformation of Feminine Identity and Voice**

The third theme reflects the emerging role of digital media as a space for feminist expression and for narrative reconstruction. Younger participants (aged 25–35) reported using Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups to share reflections on gender, tradition, and spirituality.

*“Online, I can express what it means to be Balinese and Hindu, not only serving but leading. I can speak freely.”* (Informant 13, Badung, 2024).

*“We post photos of ceremonies not just for beauty, but to show that women’s work has meaning and strength.”* (Informant 10, Buleleng, 2024).

Thus, digital platforms extend women’s communicative agency from domestic spaces to transnational networks. This aligns with Pal and Nieto-Fernandez’s (2024) notion of transnational feminist communication, which situates local women’s narratives within broader global flows of feminist discourse. Pande (2022) further observes that digital Hindu communities enable women to build alternative epistemologies of empowerment, reframing religion as a participatory rather than a hierarchical domain. In this study, social media serves as an extension of ritual space, transforming devotional practices into visible political statements of identity and gender equality. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp have become digital temples and interactive arenas where spiritual narratives and feminist discourses converge. Through digital storytelling, visual symbolism, and collective prayer postings, Balinese Hindu women rearticulate religious devotion as a communicative act of solidarity and of gender consciousness. This phenomenon aligns with the argument of Shani Orgad and Rosalind Gill (2022) that digital media foster a “confidence culture” in which women use self-expression to claim moral and social legitimacy within patriarchal systems.

Furthermore, digital participation functions as a form of *networked spirituality* (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021), where online engagement complements traditional ritual practices and amplifies women’s public visibility. These hybrid spaces allow women to negotiate their identities beyond local boundaries and participate in global conversations on feminism, ecology, and spirituality. This process exemplifies what Lahiri-Dutt (2025) describes as *intersectional feminist communication*, where emotional labor, care, and online visibility intertwine as political performance. Thus, digital devotion bridges the sacred and civic, transforming acts of worship into subtle yet powerful assertions of gender equality and agency.

These empirical findings substantiate the feminist communication framework used in this study. The participants’ ritual expressions and symbolic acts correspond to Wilkins’ (2024) notion of “communication for social change,” where meaning-making and care function as discursive forms of resistance. Similarly, their negotiation strategies align with Connell’s (1987) concept of gendered power relations, which are continuously reconstructed through everyday communication. Collectively, these practices illustrate how Balinese Hindu women mobilize both ritual and digital spaces as overlapping sites of political discourse, embodying what Fraser (2020) terms *transformative reproduction*, a process through which cultural continuity becomes a medium of social transformation.

### **4.4 Integration of Themes: The Domestic as a Political Sphere**

Synthesizing these themes reveals that Balinese Hindu women’s communicative acts ritual, negotiation, and digital expression constitute a continuum of political discourse grounded in

Cultural and spiritual meanings. Across all 15 participants, the domestic sphere was not seen as passive but as a dynamic arena of symbolic resistance. Through domestic rituals, women enact what Wilkins (2024) terms *communication for social change*: small-scale, culturally embedded practices that challenge dominant gender ideologies. Their political communication is relational, moral, and spiritual, rooted in everyday acts of care, prayer, and connection.

“Our world is small the kitchen, the temple, the courtyard but from there, we can move the world.” Informant 6, Klungkung, 2024).

These results extend feminist communication theory by demonstrating that Balinese Hindu women’s political engagement does not require public protest; instead, it operates through ritual continuity, relational discourse and spiritual expression. In doing so, they reconcile religious devotion with gendered agency, embodying what Braidotti (2022) and Wilkins (2024) describe as *embodied feminist praxis* resistance through meaning-making, affect, and care. This form of engagement resonates with Mahmood’s (2012) *politics of piety*, where agency is realized through religious and ethical self-cultivation rather than open defiance, and Butler’s (2021) argument that ethical resistance can emerge from nonviolent, relational practices that transform social norms from within.

The thematic synthesis illustrated in Figure 1 visually maps the relationships among the cultural-religious context, communicative practices, and socio-political outcomes. This visualization bridges empirical findings with the theoretical framework, emphasizing that women’s communicative agency operates at the intersection of ritual, negotiation, and digital engagement. By situating spiritual devotion as a communicative act and relational care as a political practice, this study contributes to what Fraser (2020) terms *transformative reproduction*: the feminist capacity to sustain tradition while embedding new meanings of equality and solidarity. In this sense, Balinese Hindu women enact what Orgad and Gill (2022) call *affective activism*, mobilizing empathy, ritual, and digital storytelling as interlinked modes of cultural resistance and community renewal.

The integrated thematic map (Figure 1; see also Appendix for the extended diagram) positions cultural-religious logics as enabling and constraining conditions under which communicative practices unfold. Ritual performances anchor moral legitimacy, negotiation strategies translate legitimacy into everyday influence, and digital expression amplifies visibility beyond the household. Together, these layers demonstrate how agency accumulates relationally rather than individually and how meaning-making practices become political when they redraw the boundaries of authority and recognition. The map also clarifies feedback loops; for example, digital recognition feeds back into offline ritual legitimacy, thereby explaining how incremental changes in discourse can reconfigure gendered norms without overt confrontation.

#### **4.5 Theoretical and Cultural Implications**

Empirically, this study contributes to the understanding of how patriarchal systems can be reinterpreted from within through communicative practices. Three implications emerge thematically.

1. **Reconceptualizing Domesticity:** The domestic sphere functions as a political microcosm in which communication and ritual redefine authority.
2. **Cultural Feminism in Practice:** Balinese women’s communicative agency bridges cultural continuity with feminist reform, blending local belief systems and global feminist frameworks.

3. Localized Decolonial Feminism: By interpreting feminist communication through Balinese Hindu cosmology, this study advances the decolonization of feminist theory, highlighting non-Western models of empowerment (Pal & Nieto-Fernandez, 2024; Wilkins, 2024).

Thus, political communication among Balinese Hindu women operates through an *ethic of harmony* (*tatwam asi*, “I am you, you are me”), where resistance is expressed through cooperation, not confrontation, and where cultural preservation becomes an act of feminist transformation.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Conclusion

This study explored the political communication of Balinese Hindu women within the domestic sphere through the lenses of culture, religion, and customary practices. Drawing on data from in-depth interviews with 15 participants and interpretative thematic analysis, the study achieved its objective of understanding how women’s communicative acts function as forms of symbolic resistance and empowerment in a patriarchal sociocultural system. The findings reveal that Balinese Hindu women use ritual participation, relational negotiation, and digital expression as strategies to navigate patriarchal boundaries. Domestic and ritual spaces, traditionally viewed as apolitical, emerge as sites of political discourse where meaning, faith, and authority are continually renegotiated. Through these communicative practices, women embody *feminist agency* that aligns devotion with empowerment, reshaping the moral and symbolic orders of Balinese society.

Theoretically, this study extends feminist communication and cultural studies by demonstrating how non-Western women localize resistance within sacred traditions. This underscores that empowerment in Balinese Hindu society is not achieved through confrontation but through reinterpretation and narrative transformation within religious and cultural contexts. The integration of qualitative evidence supported by coded thematic analysis reinforces the empirical foundation of this study. This confirms that Balinese Hindu women’s communicative practices rooted in ritual, narrative, and digital discourse constitute an empirically grounded model of feminist political communication. This empirical grounding strengthens the study’s contribution to feminist communication theory by illustrating how localized narratives of spirituality and care can operate as political discourse within culturally embedded settings.

### 5.2. Limitation

As a qualitative interpretative study, this research is context-bound. The reliance on a limited number of participants from selected *desa adat* in Bali restricts the generalizability of these findings. Moreover, the study depended on self-reported experiences, which may reflect subjective perspectives shaped by social desirability and local cultural norms. Another limitation lies in the absence of longitudinal observation or ethnographic immersion, which could provide deeper insights into evolving communicative patterns across different generational and regional contexts. Additionally, the study’s focus on symbolic and narrative aspects limits the exploration of the institutional and policy-level mechanisms affecting women’s political representation.

### 5.3. Suggestion

Future research should expand this investigation through comparative and longitudinal approaches to examine how Balinese Hindu women’s communicative agency evolves across regions, generations, and digital environments. Incorporating participatory ethnography or narrative inquiry may yield richer, temporally grounded interpretations of women’s lived experiences. For policymakers and community leaders, this study suggests that women’s empowerment programs must be rooted in local religious and cultural frameworks, rather than externally imposed gender paradigms. Efforts to strengthen gender equality in Bali should integrate ritual, education, and digital literacy as interconnected pathways for communication and participation in the community. Finally, scholars of communication and gender studies should further develop localized feminist frameworks that honor Indigenous epistemologies and spiritual traditions, thus contributing to the decolonization of feminist discourse within Southeast Asian contexts.

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