

Dynamics of (In)Visibility: Immanent Potential of Young Feminism Across and Beneath the Square

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Abstract

The invisibilization of feminist activism driven by postfeminist trends and the strategic use of invisibility to build safe communities free from oppression represent two sides of the same coin. Both treat invisibility as a passively determined stage preceding visible activism. Moving beyond this understanding, the current study explores the immanent potential of invisibility within contemporary feminist activism by conceptualizing (in)visibility through Deleuze’s conceptual pair of the virtual and the actual. In Deleuze’s philosophy, the virtual is the immaterial potential that constitutes reality, whereas the actual is the materialization of virtuality into a specific form through the process of actualization. Accordingly, we conceptualize invisibility as a persistent potential that exerts power across and beneath the surface and enables visibilization of activism upon encountering a specific event. Drawing on interviews with 20 women aged 22–35 who participated in the 2024–2025 anti-martial law protests in South Korea, this study examines how the potential of invisibility is actualized as activism. We analyze three interrelated dimensions: the temporality through which women cultivated their inherent potential while being politically and socially invisibilized; the virtual spatiality that mediates invisibility and visibility, enabling the actualization of that potential; and the physical spatiality in which activism is materialized as an inclusive and distinctive protest culture. Through this approach, we seek to uncover the dynamic potential immanent in invisible forms and fundamentally rethink the relationship between invisibility and visibility in activism.

Keywords

feminist activism; immanence; invisibility; protest; South Korea; virtuality; young women

1. Introduction

The invisibilization of feminist activism driven by postfeminist trends (McRobbie, 2008) and the strategic use of invisibility to build safe communities free from oppression (Jackson, 2018) represent two sides of the same coin regarding the visibility of activism. Both perspectives closely associate the goal and value of activism with visibility, and existing discussions of assemblies and demonstrations primarily focus on their visible manifestations in physical spaces or online public spheres. For instance, Butler's (2015) discussion of bodies in the street foregrounds the politics of visibility in assemblies. Within this paradigm, invisibility is inevitably regarded as a temporary retreat from activism or a stage that precedes the visible phase (G. Jung & Moon, 2024).

Moving beyond this understanding of invisibility, the current study explores the immanent potential of invisibility within contemporary feminist activism, arguing that the continuation of activism necessarily involves and affirms the invisible realm. This study combines a theoretical conceptualization of (in)visibility based on Deleuze's (1997) concepts of virtuality and actualization, with an empirical analysis of young women who emerged as a central force in the 2024–2025 anti-martial law protests in South Korea (hereafter Korea). In Deleuze's philosophy, the virtual is the immaterial potential that constitutes reality, whereas the actual is the materialization of virtuality into a specific form through the process of actualization (Deleuze, 1997). Unlike the possible, which awaits the realization of a predetermined ideal prior to reality, the virtual is reality itself and possesses the capacity to create something new (Lévy, 1998). Therefore, the virtual and the actual are neither separate nor opposed; rather, they exist in a corresponding relationship on a single immanent plane. Our theorization of the relationship between invisibility and visibility is grounded in this conceptual pair. We argue that the invisible dimension of activism functions as a continuous potential that sustains its persistence and transformation while enabling its actualization (or visibilization) through specific events.

The anti-martial law protests in Korea were widely perceived as a moment in which young women, long marginalized by dominant political forces, suddenly gained visibility through a major national political event. However, through interviews with 20 young women who participated in these protests, this study reveals the potential of (in)visibility that had been continuously flowing as a virtual undercurrent before this visibility emerged. Because the actualization of virtuality in a specific event necessarily unfolds across space and time (Beck & Gleyzon, 2016; Lundborg, 2009), we conduct an empirical analysis based on research questions concerning the spatiotemporal axes through which the potential of invisibility is actualized. Specifically, we explore the temporality through which this potential is cultivated, the virtual spatiality through which it emerges into visibility, and the physical spatiality in which it is actualized. Through this approach, we seek to uncover the potential immanent in invisible forms and fundamentally rethink the relationship between invisibility and visibility.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Contemporary Feminism and the "Crisis of Visibility"

Dominant social systems and power structures have long suppressed and distorted discourse emerging from marginalized public spheres. Contemporary feminist movements, in particular, cannot be separated from the

threat posed by postfeminist trends that seek to replace socially resistant movements with individualistic discourses (McRobbie, 2008). The neoliberal rationality of the entrepreneurial self, which emphasizes autonomous, calculative, and proactive subjects, has given rise to neoliberal feminism. This perspective prioritizes the well-being of individual women over the transformation of structural social inequalities (Gill, 2007; Rottenberg, 2014). Compounding this challenge is the explicit backlash that has emerged in recent years. The rapid expansion of the misogynistic online manosphere, which promotes essentialist views of gender and antifeminist ideologies while advocating for men's "rights," has amplified voices that position themselves as victims of feminism (Botto & Gottzén, 2024; Ging, 2019).

This situation has exacerbated the crisis of visibility faced by young women engaged in activism rooted in both online and offline environments and centered on informal, everyday practices. Early concerns about the visibility of feminist activism stemmed from the relative invisibility of online feminist practices (see Briggs, 2008; Harris, 2008), which had been led primarily by young women since the turn of the millennium. For instance, Schuster (2013) argued that older generations of activists' relatively limited access to online spaces creates an inevitable generational divide, leaving young women's online feminist activism "hidden" from potential allies and reinforcing the image of politically indifferent young women. In addition, popular discourse has portrayed online activism as providing individuals with a sense of participation through minimal effort while failing to generate meaningful political change. This discourse has been used to criticize younger activists through pejorative labels such as "slacktivism" and "clicktivism" (Christensen, 2011; Morozov, 2009).

However, online activism is no longer separate from mainstream discourse and institutional politics; indeed, it can serve as an effective strategy for amplifying visibility (Milan, 2015). Consequently, the current crisis of visibility is discussed less in terms of the effectiveness of activism itself than in terms of the invisibilization of young feminism under postfeminist trends. Jackson's (2018) study provides clear evidence of this shift, showing that girls often hesitate to express their views in online public spaces, where they are vulnerable to antifeminist attacks, and instead prefer more homogeneous online communities. G. Jung and Moon (2024) identified a consistent pattern in female college students' feminist practices in Korea, which they termed "quiet feminism": forming safe offline communities while concealing feminist identities from unfamiliar others. This practice reflects efforts to protect themselves from everyday backlash and antifeminist sentiment across both online and offline spaces. According to Jung and Moon, this period allows women to construct feminist identities among like-minded peers and cultivate political agency for the future. At the same time, it constitutes a "state of abeyance in the feminist movement" (G. Jung & Moon, 2024, p. 218) while awaiting a rebound.

When invisibility arises from oppression, the (re)achievement of visibility often becomes the "goal" of marginalized groups. However, this framework poses two risks. First, treating invisibility as a condition to be overcome—whether as a prior stage, a hiatus, or a temporary retreat—makes it difficult to affirm the discourses and forms of activism that persist within the invisible domains of marginalized public spheres. Second, prioritizing visibility can obscure the broader aims of activism, such as structural change. This concern echoes Banet-Weiser's (2018) analysis of how Western popular feminism has become entangled with the "economy of visibility" fostered by digital platforms organized around quantified metrics such as clicks and "likes." These risks suggest that invisibility should not be understood merely as concealment, avoidance, or disappearance. Rather, it should be understood through its generative capacity and examined in relation to visibility within the social world.

2.2. Invisibility as a Strategy: Protecting and Distancing

According to Brighenti (2007), although the pursuit of visibility is linked to the politics of social recognition, existing power relations create the possibility that visibility may instead produce vulnerability. The objectification of women through the male gaze is one example. Thus, visibility is associated not only with recognition but also with mechanisms of control. This duality suggests that invisibility may be crucial for securing power in certain contexts.

The strategic function of invisibility in minority activism must also be understood within this context. Building on Fraser's (1992) concept of multiple public spheres among marginalized groups, Squires (2002) illustrates this point using examples from Black public spheres. She identifies three types of marginalized public spheres that vary according to the social context, available resources, and political goals: (a) the enclave public sphere, where resistance is discussed and prepared within safe spaces rather than through direct engagement with the dominant public sphere under oppressive situations; (b) the counterpublic sphere, which actively engages with or challenges the dominant public sphere through visible acts of resistance; and (c) the satellite public sphere, which voluntarily separates itself from other public spheres while selectively participating in public discourse depending on the context. Squires emphasizes that these models are neither mutually exclusive nor developmental stages. Rather, they are flexible and often coexist. Furthermore, she rejects the assumption that the counterpublic sphere, which visibly confronts the dominant public sphere, is always the optimal choice for marginalized groups. This is because confrontation is not necessarily the most advantageous strategy for navigating real threats and constraints.

Interest in invisible activism as a contemporary feminist strategy remains relatively limited, though it does exist. For example, while Clark-Parsons (2022) acknowledges the capacity of digital, networked feminist movements to encourage visible forms of activism, she cautions against overemphasizing "highly visible forms of feminist media activism" (p. 101). The cases she examines, including a secret feminist Facebook group, feminist zinesters, and a grassroots feminist art collective, illustrate forms of strategic invisibility that foster connections among feminists through media while building safe communities protected from networked misogyny.

Nevertheless, studies highlighting the strategic use of invisibility in activism do not fully diverge from those examining the invisibilizing power of dominant public spheres. In both perspectives, invisibility is treated as a passive condition shaped by external circumstances, and the relationship between invisibility and visibility is framed as mutually exclusive. In other words, the visible remains visible, and the invisible remains invisible. However, explaining the continuity of activism requires attention to the interplay between visibility and invisibility, as well as to the enduring potential of the invisible domain that enables this fluidity. In the following section, we conceptualize the potential of invisibility flowing beneath the visible surface by drawing on Deleuze's concepts of virtuality, actualization, and immanence.

2.3. Theorizing Invisibility as a Virtual Potentiality

Rather than treating invisibility and visibility as hierarchical, we theorize them as an inseparable relationship through Deleuze's conceptual pair of the virtual and the actual, along with the dynamic of potentiality and actualization that connects them. Within this framework, the two are neither separate nor opposed; rather, they correspond dynamically to one another on a single plane of immanence.

In Deleuze's philosophy, the virtual is the potential that constitutes reality (Deleuze, 1997). It is distinct from the possible, which assumes an ideal model prior to reality and awaits its realization (Smith et al., 2023). By contrast, the virtual is reality itself as well as an immaterial force inherent in life that has not yet been actualized in a specific form (Deleuze, 1997). The actual corresponds to the unfolding of the virtual into a particular form of reality through the process of actualization. Therefore, actualization is not the realization of a predetermined blueprint but a process of becoming and creation (Lévy, 1998). The plane of immanence is the site where virtuality is actualized; it "does not depend on an object or belong to a subject" (Deleuze, 1997, p. 4), but is instead immanent to itself. This dynamic, through which virtual potential is actualized in diverse ways on a single plane, clearly illustrates Deleuze's opposition to philosophical traditions grounded in transcendent ideals (such as God or Platonic Ideas) that are presumed to exist prior to reality.

The relationship between invisibility and visibility can likewise be understood through the dynamic between the virtual and the actual. In this framework, invisibility is not an incomplete or preliminary state that exists merely to become visible. Rather, it persists as the potential for activism, a force that enables activism to actualize (or become visible) in specific forms through specific events. Just as Deleuze (1997) describes immanence as "a life" itself, the invisibility that exists across and beneath visible activism is composed of lived experience. Because the invisible plane of immanence is where individuals experience "life" (whether as singular subjects, members of marginalized groups, or social components), they can visibly manifest as protesters or activists through particular events. Therefore, in our conceptual framework, invisibility denotes an immanent and enduring potentiality that exerts force beneath the threshold of perception, whereas visibility signifies the material actualization of this accumulated latent force.

The concept of invisibility discussed in this study certainly does not exclude minority discourses rendered invisible through the oppression of the dominant public sphere, nor does it exclude activism practiced invisibly as a paradoxical strategy for resisting such oppression. However, it is also a broader concept that encompasses immanent life itself: life that is not always observable, verbalizable, or explicitly discussed, yet nevertheless sustains and enables the actual (i.e., the visible). In this regard, we propose the term "(in)visibility" to capture the dynamic between invisibility as the potentiality of the virtual and visibility as its actualized manifestation within the public sphere. This term emphasizes the relationship between invisibility and visibility as a process rather than as a static, unchanging state.

Our empirical analysis explores how the fluidity of (in)visibility unfolds through actualization in a specific real-world event. From a Deleuzian perspective, attention to the spatiotemporal axis is essential for understanding the actualization of an event. A present event exists only in relation to the past and the future, connecting the two; this connection itself implies the process of actualization (Lundborg, 2009). Furthermore, because events emerge through the transformation of immaterial potential into material form, they are necessarily actualized in space (Beck & Gleyzon, 2016). Applied to our research context, the anti-martial law protests in Korea, discussed in detail in the following section, were perceived as a moment in which young women, long marginalized by existing political power, suddenly gained visibility through a major national political issue. However, a close examination of their spatiotemporal actualization reveals that this visibility was not a sudden emergence. Rather, it was the actualization of an immanent potential that had long been present, operating beneath the surface to create difference.

As Deleuze and Guattari (1994) note, any attempt to discuss the plane of immanence involves a form of “groping experimentation” (p. 41). Accordingly, event-based analysis provides a crucial foundation for exploring how invisibility is actualized and for affirming its potential within activism. This study therefore examines the fluidity and potential of invisibility from the following research questions:

RQ1: What forms of (in)visible temporality drive the actualization of activism?

RQ2: How does the (in)visibility of activism manifest in (a) virtual and (b) physical spaces?

2.4. Research Context: 2024–2025 Korean Anti-Martial Law Protests

To empirically address these questions, this study examined young feminists who participated in the 2024–2025 anti-martial law protests in Korea. On December 3, 2024, former President Yoon Suk Yeol declared martial law, accusing the National Assembly, which was largely controlled by the main opposition Democratic Party, of engaging in anti-national activities and supporting North Korea. This declaration, which was later found to be unlawful, stemmed from legislative conflicts arising from: a political landscape in which the opposition party held a majority in the National Assembly; the expansion of these conflicts into an investigation into the First Lady’s alleged involvement in corruption; and the resulting decline in the President’s approval rating among the public. Citizens immediately rushed to the National Assembly to protest, and less than three hours after martial law was declared, the Assembly passed a motion demanding its repeal (see Regan et al., 2026). Although the immediate crisis ended with the cabinet’s decision to lift martial law, its political consequences continued. Large-scale protests condemning the illegal declaration of martial law and demanding Yoon Suk Yeol’s impeachment took place from December 2024 to April 2025.

Although the protests centered on a broad societal agenda rather than gender-specific issues, young women stood out as a particularly visible driving force. Women in their 20s and 30s comprised approximately 30% of those protesting in front of the National Assembly at the height of the demonstrations (S. Lee & Hwang, 2024). These women primarily mobilized through online networks on Twitter that were not originally organized for political participation. Instead, they were largely formed around activities such as fan culture, which are often regarded as nonpolitical, private, and trivial hobbies associated with women (Hills, 2003). This characteristic produced a scene rarely found in large-scale political protests: peaceful, festival-like gatherings marked by K-pop music and light sticks. The protests subsequently attracted attention from both domestic and international media outlets (Rashid, 2024).

The Korean women who are the focus of this study have long experienced oppression within a patriarchal, male-centered social system. Young women in particular have been targeted by misogynistic conservative forces, including the Yoon administration, as well as by groups of young men who have internalized far-right ideologies rooted in militaristic masculinity (Y. Kim et al., 2025). Consequently, beyond structural inequalities such as the gender wage gap, young women have also faced stigma toward feminism and hostility from online manosphere communities (Hines & Song, 2021), leading many to seek safe and homogeneous communities (G. Jung & Moon, 2024). To understand how these women became a significant presence in the public square despite their sociopolitical invisibilization, it is crucial to examine the capacities they cultivated within the invisible realm. For this reason, the anti-martial law protests provide an especially appropriate case for exploring invisibility as an immanent potential that materializes through specific events.

3. Methods

This study focused on Korean women in their 20s and 30s who had participated in the anti-martial law protests at least once and used social media (primarily Twitter) during the protest period. We retained the name Twitter rather than X out of respect for the language used by these women, who engaged in micro-resistance on the platform due to their resentment toward the changes introduced following the new owner's takeover.

Given the urgency of the event and the specificity of the target population, participants were recruited through snowball sampling, beginning with the researchers' networks and online communities. Twenty participants were recruited, ranging in age from 22 to 35 years ($M = 27.2$); 14 were in their 20s and six were in their 30s. Because the focus of this study was defined by age and gender, information such as place of residence or sexuality was not collected to avoid raising safety concerns for participants. To provide context for their protest participation, minimal occupational information was collected. Participants included three undergraduate students, three job seekers, three postgraduate students, and three office workers. The remaining participants worked as a designer, music industry professional, marketer, multidisciplinary artist, IT professional, freelance publisher, civil servant, and researcher. All interviews were conducted in Korean between January and February 2025, with each interview lasting approximately 100 minutes. All participants provided informed consent for participation, recording, and publication, and received an incentive of 50,000 KRW. The researchers transcribed the audio recordings and translated the direct quotations used in this article.

The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of four main parts. First, participants were asked about their attitudes toward and experiences with politics, particularly gender politics. The second section focused on their experiences participating in anti-martial law protests, including their motivations and any changes resulting from participating. Participants were then encouraged to discuss their perceptions of their generation and the communities surrounding the protests, as well as how they identified themselves as young women participating in the protests. Finally, the interviews explored the relationship between their social media use and participation in the protests.

This study employed thematic analysis following the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006). The researchers repeatedly reviewed the transcripts and conducted initial coding by identifying recurring patterns relevant to the research questions. Initial themes included young women's experiences participating in social movements before the anti-martial law protests, their experiences as women and feminists in Korean society, their Twitter use before the protests, the role of Twitter and online networks in facilitating protest participation, and the distinctive culture they experienced at protest sites. The initial codes generated by each researcher were refined through repeated discussion, revision, and consolidation. The final themes were then organized according to the temporal (RQ1), virtual-spatial (RQ2a), and physical-spatial (RQ2b) dimensions of the analysis.

4. Findings

4.1. *Historical Temporality Constituting the Potential of Invisibility*

Our first research question explored the (in)visible temporality that drives the actualization of activism. The potential of invisibility that enabled the anti-martial law protests in "the present" can be understood

only in relation to the historical temporality that had developed prior to that moment. In other words, although the anti-martial law protests brought visibility to young feminist women, they were not a single, sudden event. Rather, they represented the actualization of a potential formed through a series of internal, social, and political changes experienced over time. Based on the interviews, we identify three characteristics of this historical temporality: accumulative, strategic, and conflictual.

First, the occurrence and accumulation of external political events shape the dynamics of (in)visibility, which we term *accumulative temporality*. These events are not isolated incidents. Although unpredictable, they recur in ways that affect marginalized groups. Consequently, the accumulation of past events generates a series of experiences that influence later visible phases of action by providing motivational, experiential, and network resources. In the case of the martial law crisis, young Korean feminist women already had “experience in voicing opinions and participating in broader social discourse” (#11), which played a critical role in prompting their immediate reaction to the crisis. Most interviewees reported participating in multiple protests condemning misogynistic crimes and biased investigations into them, including the 2016 Gangnam Station femicide, the 2018–2020 Nth Room digital sex crime case, and the 2024 Telegram deepfake pornography distribution crime (see Y. Kim, 2025, for detailed descriptions of each case). These experiences extended beyond feminist issues to include broader social causes, such as “LGBTQ+ issues, labor, and disability rights” (#8).

Along with these experiences, accumulated dissatisfaction toward the president and government, who “explicitly advocated anti-feminism” (#1, #3, #10), contributed to participants’ shift toward visible political action. Specifically, resentment toward the Yoon administration was fueled by Yoon Suk Yeol’s election campaign strategy of appealing to young male voters during his election campaign with the slogan “abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family” (#5, #8, #13, #20); by social disasters linked to government negligence or corruption, such as the Seoul Halloween crowd crush and the death of Lance Corporal Chae (#1); and by the government’s passive or even hostile response to economic inequality (#11) and minority issues (#4, #9). Ultimately, the declaration of martial law served as the decisive trigger.

Secondly, changes in strategy resulting from group transformation or maturation create a form of temporal dynamics in (in)visibility that we term *strategic temporality*. During the “feminist reboot” of the mid-to-late 2010s in Korea (see J. Kim, 2021), the popularization of feminism, fueled by the series of misogynistic crimes discussed above, led many young women (particularly college students) to “naturally and inevitably become feminists” (#7). However, due to the depoliticization of student communities, intensifying backlash, social isolation during the pandemic, and increasing fragmentation and diversification within feminist agendas, this popularization entered a new phase of transition. This fragmentation and diversification are particularly evident in the emergence of *Raetpem* (self-identified “radical feminists”), who adopt an essentialist perspective that excludes transgender people and privileges biological sex (J. Kim, 2021), as well as in conflicts with perspectives that seek to include diverse socioeconomic minorities. Faced with this, some participants began to pursue more strategic and personalized forms of activism:

In the past, I was quite aggressive, saying things like, “Anti-feminists, get out!” But [as I went through that period], I started taking a more personal approach and using language and rhetoric that could persuade even people with absolutely no interest in the issues. I didn’t participate in large-scale political activities as much as I used to. However, I think there was a shift where I ended up talking a lot more about these issues with the people around me, on a personal level. (#7)

This participant argued that internalizing such a strategy helped young women proactively frame the anti-martial law protests as “mainstream public opinion,” conveying messages such as “It’s not strange for you to be here. Everyone is on board with this now,” which in turn contributed to the movement’s ability to appeal to a broad public. This finding has two implications. First, the adoption of quiet feminism by young women (G. Jung & Moon, 2024) following the feminist reboot may have been shaped not only by backlash but also by broader temporal contexts. Second, invisible practices carried out within personal networks can be viewed as more than a preliminary stage preceding visibility. They can also function as strategies of conversion and versatility that facilitate everyday micro-practices. The changes and development that occurred during this period were crucial to the actualization of (in)visibility in the anti-martial law protests as an event.

Lastly, although there have been periods in which activism sought visibility before the martial law crisis, the selective endorsement and recognition of activism by the dominant public sphere further complicate the dynamics of (in)visibility; we term this *conflictual temporality*. Participants recognized that their heightened visibility during the anti-martial law protests was largely attributable to the fact that it was a “general issue that affected the entire citizenry” (#1). One reason these young women were treated as if they had been newly discovered during the anti-martial law protests was the perception that “the countless protests held since the 2016 Gangnam Station femicide are not political movements, but rather the noisy complaints of tired and oversensitive women” (#13). Although participants viewed the opportunity to actualize their activism through the anti-martial law protests positively, they also harbored ambivalent resentment toward the exclusionary mechanisms of established groups with the power to grant such selective recognition, feeling that they were being “politically exploited/objectified” (#1, #7, #20):

When people from the mainstream media or politics started saying things like “Young women are the future,” I thought, “They never paid us any attention when we were doing this before.” Though, it didn’t feel so bad to be in the spotlight and finally have people acknowledge us. (#3)

Furthermore, the asymmetrical power relationship between dominant and marginalized public spheres encompasses not only whether activism is recognized or ignored but also which aspects are highlighted and how they are framed. During the anti-martial law protests, the complexity of representation was reflected in participants’ differing responses to popular narratives portraying young women as “good, harmless fangirls” holding light sticks. While some participants welcomed media portrayals that highlighted their commitment to K-pop culture, others expressed frustration that their visibility was confined to a nonpolitical, consumerist fandom, reducing them to the stereotype of the “good girl.” Such portrayals hindered a nuanced understanding of the reality that “those women came out with a sense of pride, meaning they’re just as earnest and genuinely concerned about this national issue as they are when they’re fangirling over what they love” (#7).

4.2. Virtual Spatiality as a Medium for the Actualization of (In)Visibility

For the second research question, we examined how the (in)visibility of activism manifests in space. This section focuses on the virtual spaces that mediate the actualization of (in)visibility. Online spaces centered on Twitter facilitated this process by sustaining the potential of invisibility and enabling its actualization during the anti-martial law protests. This role aligns with existing discussions of how online spaces can

complement and expand social movements within alternative political spheres (Jackson, 2018; J. Kim, 2017). We refer to this role as virtual spatiality, where virtuality denotes both Deleuzian potentiality and virtuality in the technological sense.

In Korea, Twitter remains significantly less popular than major social media platforms such as Instagram, Naver Band, KakaoStory, and Facebook (Han et al., 2025). However, it has established itself as an important platform for feminist activism, particularly through the use of hashtags in political campaigns (J. Kim, 2017; S. Lee, 2024). As young women assumed key roles in the anti-martial law protests, Twitter's importance in this context remained evident. Notably, nearly all participants stated that although Twitter played a significant role in their protest participation, their online networks had originally been formed around hobbies and entertainment rather than political engagement. These networks encompassed a wide range of fandom activities, including K-pop, sports, theater and musicals, pets, gaming, films, TV dramas, web novels, and web comics.

Feminism served as a shared political plane of immanence that connected these individuals across their diverse and dispersed interests. It is no coincidence that people with similar political views, shaped by shared identities and life experiences, also find common ground in matters of taste and preference. As Fraser (1992) argued in her critique of Habermas's concept of the public sphere, preferences, interests, and identities are not formed independently of public discourse. A clear example is the role of fandom culture, once regarded as the exclusive domain of apolitical young women, in shaping the political sentiments expressed during the anti-martial law protests and in making women's perspectives, positions, and voices visible. These women shared similar political interests and moral commitments not only because of shared identities and experiences, but also because of the nature of their cultural interests and the political dimensions of fandom itself:

Readers of web novels and web comics, as well as fan communities in general, often seem far removed from real-world politics. But personally, I think these people who've come together on Twitter through their shared interests do have political concerns. When I see flags and slogans at protests inspired by web novels, I've noticed that they're very often based on works where the protagonist acts with goodwill and justice. These women are taking action that resonates with the message of the stories they love. (#16)

It is important to note that participants' preference for loose, network-based forms of participation over organized movements built on strong internal cohesion facilitates connective action through social media (Bennett & Segerberg, 2023). Various features of digital media enable this form of participation, which Milan (2015) conceptualizes as the "politics of visibility." First, online embodiment through social media profiles and forms of protest centered in digital spaces can position individuals as the protagonists of their own stories. Second, technological features such as tags, citations, and mentions make it easier to reach and mobilize others. Third, the asynchronous nature of digital interaction reorganizes time and space, enabling movements to persist and recur.

One example of this mechanism is hashtag activism on Twitter, which has received considerable scholarly attention (e.g., J. Kim, 2017; S. Lee, 2024). However, the declaration of martial law unfolded amid the rapid expansion of personalized recommendation algorithms. At a time when timelines were primarily organized

by nonlinear algorithms rather than chronological order, participants perceived recommendation algorithms as having greater influence than hashtags in mobilizing young women during the anti-martial law protests. These recommendation feeds served not only as immediate channels for accessing information about protest sites, but also reinforced Twitter's role as an active feedback channel that shaped norms and public opinion at those sites (as discussed in the following section). This mediating role between online and offline spaces was grounded in participants' belief that "even if I don't personally know the person who originally posted it, since it's a post retweeted by a friend, they must be someone in a similar situation or with similar thoughts" (#6), as well as in the expectation that "algorithms will show me information about protests tailored to my interests without me having to search for it" (#15).

Finally, we found that the rejection of collectivity emphasized in network-based connective action and embedded within diversity was also reflected in participants' resistance to homogeneity. Although participants identified themselves as feminists, or were at least conscious of their interest in women's issues, they simultaneously expressed a reluctance to be subsumed under homogeneous group identities. This resistance to collectivism as a monolithic entity is connected to their wariness of the strategies employed by far-right groups in modern Korean history, which have expanded their influence across generations by promoting internal homogeneity, external exclusivity, and hostility toward marginalized groups (see Yang, 2025). Far-right politics in Korea has emerged through the convergence of ideologically connected groups, including anti-North Korean organizations, conservative Protestant forces, online manosphere communities, and far-right YouTubers (Shin et al., 2025). In recent years, groups of young men motivated primarily by misogyny and anti-feminism have gained prominence within far-right circles, deepening the intersection between far-right politics and gender issues. As a result, many interviewees expressed a reluctance to be defined as a homogeneous group, emphasizing that "I'm just interested in practically amplifying the voices of individual women. I've always been wary of nationalist or group-centered ways of thinking" (#19).

4.3. *Physical Spatiality as the Actualization of (In)Visibility*

Finally, we examined physical spatiality as the actualization of (in)visibility, one of the spatial manifestations of (in)visibility addressed in the second research question. Shaped through historical temporality and mediated by virtual spatiality, the potential of invisibility materialized as a distinctive and inclusive protest culture at the protest site. We conceptualize the core characteristics of this physical spatiality as appropriative, intersectional, dispersed, and reciprocal.

First, *appropriative spatiality* is evident in the appropriation of cultural forms that have been socially trivialized or regarded as nonpolitical within the protest space. The protests took on a festival-like atmosphere through the use of K-pop as protest music and the incorporation of light sticks (i.e., symbols of fandom culture) and flags bearing humorous slogans. Notably, Girls' Generation's "Into the New World," described as a "tradition dating back to 2016" (#13) and the "anthem of the feminist movement" (#8), first gained prominence during protests at Ewha Womans University related to the corruption scandal involving former President Park Geun-hye, another impeachment case in modern Korean history. During the anti-martial law protests, it became established as a representative protest song for the broader public. In this context, fandom culture served as the foundation for an inclusive protest culture and a network connecting people with similar social concerns. This culture shaped not only the visual and auditory identity of the protests but also the behaviors expected at protest sites, giving rise to the following self-deprecating joke:

People said that this protest was the culmination of everything these fangirls have been trained to do up until now. Staying orderly, waiting in the cold for a long time, singing along perfectly, bringing plenty of supplies and light sticks, and sharing information with each other. (#13)

Second, *intersectional spatiality* emerged as intersectionality became a central concern of the protest space. Intersectionality refers to the overlap of social identities, such as gender, race, sexuality, and class, and the diverse outcomes that result from these intersections. It has been a key concern of fourth-wave feminism, which is often associated with the rise of the internet (Munro, 2013). The open-mic stage at the front of the protest site, which provided opportunities for diverse citizens to speak publicly, exemplified this commitment. The stage functioned as a venue where people with intersecting identities could share their experiences and explain what had led them to participate in the protest. Interviewees recalled that during the early, less organized stages of the protest, the atmosphere was not entirely open. For example, one participant noted that “when a woman began by saying, ‘I am a feminist,’ some people booed her” (#17). However, this atmosphere quickly improved as BISANG Action for Yoon Out & Social Reform, one of the key organizers of the anti-martial law protests, strengthened its policies against discrimination and hate speech in response to criticism and the views expressed by young women on Twitter and other platforms (B. Jung, 2025). Consequently, the stage transformed the protest site into a space where “vegan women activists could come forward and speak about animal rights and women’s rights” (#1) and where “people could voice their positions and identities in their own words” (#2), extending beyond the issues of martial law and impeachment.

Third, *dispersed spatiality* was evident in the growing participation of young women not only in the large-scale protests held in front of the National Assembly and Gwanghwamun Square, but also in regional and spin-off protests and demonstrations organized by civic groups unrelated to impeachment. One notable example was the Namtaeryeong protest, in which members of the Korean Peasants League drove tractors from various regions to Seoul to demand Yoon’s impeachment. The protest was organized in response to police efforts to block the tractors from entering Seoul at Namtaeryeong Pass, and participants ultimately succeeded in breaking through the blockade. Most interviewees who attended these spin-off protests reported initially feeling “scared” because the gatherings were smaller than the main protests and often involved direct confrontations with the police or opposing groups. However, they explained that these protests became opportunities to reaffirm solidarity with members of other marginalized groups. As one participant stated:

In the protests I’ve participated in so far, I’ve usually gone as a direct stakeholder, but this one was different. For example, even when I went as a feminist, I found myself listening to the stories of people who care deeply about disability issues. Because I looked each person in the face and listened to their remarks, I felt that my solidarity was connecting with real people. (#10)

Y. Lee (2025) argues that this sense of solidarity stems from the shared experiences arising from Korea’s highly oppressive political structure toward marginalized groups.

Finally, the extensive exchange of resources among protest participants, which has become an established feature of protest culture, can be conceptualized as *reciprocal spatiality*. A culture of donations and prepayments spread widely, taking a unique form that extended beyond financial support for organizations

leading or participating in protests. For example, individuals would prepay part of the cost of meals or drinks at restaurants and cafés near protest sites, allowing participants to receive food and beverages free of charge. This practice was particularly popular among those unable to attend the protests in person and among celebrities. It also helped secure support from nearby business owners who might otherwise have worried about economic losses associated with the demonstrations. In addition, several interviewees described purchasing or shipping supplies, including snacks, hand warmers, and hygiene products, directly to protest sites:

During the Nantaeryeong protest, I only sent supplies. Since I couldn't be there in person, I watched the situation [online] and felt tremendous guilt. At that time, someone in an anonymous group chat compiled a list of items needed on-site, and I noticed some of the items were things I could buy at a convenience store. So, I ordered them for delivery from a convenience store. (#14)

These four characteristics provide concrete examples of how the potential of invisibility among politically marginalized young women created a unique and inclusive protest culture through its process of actualization. The findings demonstrate that this protest culture is distinctive not only because it fostered solidarity across activist groups and generations but also because it created a rupture in the male-centered, dominant political model of visibility “by raising issues in ways the older generation never imagined” (#15). These two dimensions are closely interconnected, as the inclusivity of the protest space reflects a deliberate effort to avoid reproducing earlier exclusionary structures.

5. Conclusion

This study revealed that two dominant perspectives, one focusing on the invisibilization of activism through oppression by dominant powers and the other on invisible activism as a strategic choice, share a common limitation. Both treat visibility as the ultimate goal of activism and invisibility as an inevitable preliminary stage. Drawing on Deleuze's concepts of virtuality, actualization, and immanence, we conceptualized the potential of invisibility that sustains the continuity of activism. Based on this conceptualization, we explored how the invisible potential of young feminism was actualized across space and time within the specific event of the anti-martial law protests in Korea.

Regarding the first research question about the (in)visible temporality that drives the actualization of activism, this study demonstrated that the young women who participated in the anti-martial law protests did not suddenly appear in public spaces. Rather, they navigated shifting dynamics of (in)visibility over time, encountering external events that prompted visible actions as well as internal catalysts that fostered strategic, spontaneous, and vernacular practices within invisible domains. We also showed how the power of the dominant public sphere impedes critical recognition of these forms of actualization by rendering them invisible and reframing them through oversimplified representations. We described these historical temporalities as accumulative, strategic, and conflictual, illustrating how (in)visibility is continuously shaped both within and beyond activist practices.

Regarding the second research question, which concerns how the (in)visibility of activism manifests in space, we examined virtual spatiality as the medium through which the potential of (in)visibility is sustained and physical spatiality as its actualization. First, we analyzed Twitter's role in facilitating loose, personalized

connections grounded in fandom culture and feminist concerns, as well as the role of algorithmically curated recommendation feeds in supporting connective action across online and offline spaces. We then examined how physical spatiality, the potential of invisibility actualized through virtual spatiality, manifested as a distinctive and inclusive protest culture at protest sites. This culture was characterized by appropriation, intersectionality, dispersion, and reciprocity. As evidenced by these findings, young women actualized their potential by creating a rupture in an existing political model marked by exclusion and male-centered visibility.

These findings contribute to a renewed understanding of “invisibility,” a concept that has often been treated either explicitly or implicitly as a condition to be overcome or as a state imposed by external circumstances. Our findings suggest that invisibility flows through space and time as a form of potentiality, enabling visibility through specific events while providing a foundation for the continuity and transformation of activism. Furthermore, by examining the role of young Korean feminist women in the anti-martial law protests, this study extends a theoretical conceptualization into empirical analysis, demonstrating how the potential of (in)visibility among marginalized groups can be actualized as a political capability that challenges and contests dominant political models.

The primary limitation of this study is its reliance on a single case. As a result, it does not address the broader range of conditions that shape activism’s (in)visibility across different contexts. Even within this case, the analysis focused on a relatively small sample drawn from a comparatively homogeneous marginalized group and did not extend to how that group is perceived by external actors. Because the activism of marginalized groups is always situated in relation to dominant public spheres, particularly in terms of (in)visibility, future research should broaden the scope of inquiry to deepen the current understanding of the role of (in)visibility within activism. Building on the conceptual framework and findings presented here, future studies could explore the social and technological conditions under which the potential of (in)visibility is actualized across different movements and contexts. Such work could encompass a wider range of cases, countries, and social identities while also examining the complex dynamics among political actors operating both within and beyond (in)visible forms of activism.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

Data Availability

The interview data are not publicly available due to privacy concerns.

LLMs Disclosure

DeepL Write was used to proofread the grammar of the English manuscript originally written by the authors. No other AI tools were used for any other purpose.

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