From Awareness to Action:
How Social Media Users Respond to Femicide Cases

Gjorgjina Sherovska[1] (iD)

Abstract: *Femicide is a grave violation of fundamental human rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and personal security, as well as a formidable hindrance to social and economic progress. By definition, femicide is the premeditated killing of a female person due to their gender. This phenomenon is the result of a multitude of risk factors at the individual, interpersonal, community, and societal levels. The magnitude of what has been dubbed the "shadow pandemic" is evidenced by the mounting violence inflicted on women. This research seeks to analyze the role of social media marketing in bringing awareness to the issue of femicide, namely, its effect on public opinion, the degree to which it increases awareness of the rising femicide rate, and the reactions of social media users when confronted with individual cases. To achieve this, a phenomenological study with a Likert scale was conducted, involving 100 participants in North Macedonia aged between 18 and 60. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents do not believe that social media provides an impetus for people to take action against femicide and their concerning note is witnessing online harassment or bullying related to femicide or violence against women on social media. Empowering the potential of creating a safe and supportive environment for discussing and addressing issues of femicide and violence against women in the social media space.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the study by Ott (2018), feminist activism has cast renewed light on an extreme form of gender-based violence which has spiked in many countries even in places where there are laws against femicide. The role of social media in addressing femicide reveals the positive impacts of social media platforms as well as their negative effects in the war to combat femicide. Ott (2018), explains that the fight against femicide through social media has been achieved through the reinstatement of different factors that lead to the persistence of femicide. However, social media itself still harbors other unaddressed factors making it a contributing factor to the persistence of femicide. In this case, assessing social media with regard to femicide explores how different communities formed and interact in the social media spaces while gauging whether values expressed in the event align or misalign with the femicide ethical standards. Verkuyl (2020) explain that digital social media has invited participation based on values of collaboration, networking, and openness as an ethical way to align society with femicide values like inclusion, cooperation, and access. However, with advancements in technology, hence social media platforms, these platforms are not only shaped by the algorithms and business models behind them but as well as the material biases that users bring with them to the particular platforms. Moreover, the femicide internet behind different social media platforms majorly works towards empowering women and queering people from all diversities to have them enjoy their rights, and pleasure as well as dismantling the patriarchy. Through this, social media facilitates the integration of different contexts, specificity, and realities regardless of age, disabilities, gender, racial markers, ethical origin, sexuality, religious beliefs as well and socioeconomic location, Verkuyl (2020).

---

1   SMX Academy, North Macedonia

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The aspect of raising awareness in social media to address femicide portrays the positive side of social media which has been elaborated through fighting gender-based violence, social movement, intersection and empowerment of technology, and change of the users' conversation across different social media spaces, Ott (2018). Based on the study by Nagarajan (2016), different social media platforms have deployed mechanisms aimed at harnessing the power of the internet to convey the realities of women's lives across the world to empower freedom of gender and sexual expression in the communities. Additionally, initiatives like "Take Back The Tech" called for everyone particularly women and girls to rise and take control of technology to end violence against women. Such global campaigns and initiatives through social media aimed to highlight different tech-related violence against women as well as gathering research and solutions across the world, Verkuyl (2020). Nagarajan (2016), adds that with the advancement of technology, different social media platforms have incorporated tools oriented to support femicide ideas i.e. checking which gender dominates the conversation, checking on job advert biasing, and revealing the nature of languages used by the users across the platforms. This artifact enables social media to manage and change the users' conversations as one of the ways to control femicide. According to Weiner (2015), through social movements, social media has given women, activists as well and everyone the opportunity to connect as a virtual soapbox to ground up, make points, and spread out their message across different regions even when magazines and newspapers ignore their message. This is all achieved through the use of smartphones as one of the leading social movements towards rebuking femicide. Based on Wallace (2014), the intersection of technology and empowerment has been evident from the involvement and amendment of Cyber security policies across different social media platforms. In this case, monitoring the users' activities, connections, and comments across particular platforms has helped in revealing serious cases that could not be accessed- thanks to social media. Moreover, social media demonstrated a massive impact on galvanizing international outrage over horrific scenarios. This has all been achieved through the inclusion of Cyber security policies in promoting technological intersection in empowering the fight against femicide. Such policies protecting the community standards have put Cyber security at the forefront in fighting femicide by governing the nature of content and activities across particular sites, as well as monitoring, blocking, and filtering suspicious content/users from the platforms. Additionally, Cyber security has also helped play a part in investigations on matters associated with femicide (Wallace, 2014). Moreover, outlined policies governing the operation of particular social media platforms have been a key guidance in the process of empowering initiatives that are meant to change how femicide cases are reported as one of the ways to achieve extensive and effective societal change. This implies that concerned authorities that control the different social media spaces can either reinvent existing femicide control mechanisms or even leverage and apply existing frameworks in a manner that matches the femicide context as well as responding to the grievances from the anti-violence groups and movements as an approach to address right-based and gender-sensitive concerns in different regions, (Wallace, 2014).

Considering that one of the major goals of social media platforms is to connect people from different regions, spreading femicide cases has become easier due to the extensive outrage coverage from an international perspective. Wallace (2014) expounds that, apart from the possible virtual connection and interactions made possible by the social media space; social media has been key in extending such virtual connections to in-person meetups that empower femicide control based on proving wrong some of the existing beliefs that are seen to be promoting femicide. In addition, Wallace (2014) explains that since the basic objective of the existence of technology is to connect

people; hosting events like hackathons, webinars, and other events aimed at connecting people will largely help in accomplishing motives that empower femicide control in different regions. Despite the positive impacts of social media on femicide, social media still stands as a contributing factor to femicide through factors like gender-based violence, race, filtered data, and "openness". Adapting from Wallace (2014), although technological innovations are paramount as well as significant from a technological advancement perspective, different technological innovations spike up a different social media shape. Based on the report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the combination of mobile phones and online ads-related platforms has made it easier and faster for one to order a woman/girl than a pizza. Such social media platforms can be grouped under the inappropriate usage of social media which can promote femicide from the sale of women or the exchange of femicide-stimulating artifacts across particular sites. Generally, inappropriate usage of social media is a femicide-stimulating factor since it involves the spread of inappropriate content, inappropriate operations, and well as clouding individuals with inappropriate beliefs that tend to affect their behavior in their regions, Nagarajan (2016). Moreover, different social media platforms operate under different frameworks under the control of different personnel. This implies that having diversity from the operational nature of certain sites determines the likelihood of having certain content shared across as well as how reporting of femicide incidences is done. In this case, it is believed that within the social media space, not all social media platforms use the right channels and modes in reporting or addressing femicide cases. This challenge, therefore, affects how common users perceive the fight against femicide thus making it a challenge to combat femicide from a social media perspective, Ott (2018). Generally, Jacobson (2016) explains that the ratio at which social media is helping in fighting femicide is indirectly proportional to it serving in favor of stimulating femicide. This can be adapted from the fact that today peers observe the impossible standards set much closer to their homes not even by celebrities but by fellow friends or classmates. Such instance exerts some psychological pressure on the users, including vulnerability, the need for validation, and the desire to compare themselves with their friends or peers. In addition, different attitudes, behavior, and beliefs are ingrained in individual users regardless of age, gender, or race based on the type of social media platform, the associate users, and the trending conversation from the particular platforms, Marsh (2016). According to the study by Jacobson (2016), today the age bracket of users interacting with social media platforms includes a higher percentage of kids. This implies that kids are exposed to content that is beyond their age class. In this case, if the content is inclined towards encouraging femicide of any form in society, the kids are therefore likely to suffer from social media pressure that affects their belief on what is right and what is wrong in society, found Jacobson (2016). Social media may or may not be a stimulating factor in femicide based on the available social media platforms, the type of users available as well as the type of content trending from the social media platform, states Marsh (2016). Besides, with applicable laws and policies enforcement on the type and nature of content allowed in the social media spaces concerning the set community standards expectations, different social media platforms have been in a position to filter out toxic content, users as well as influential sites that are believed to be empowering femicide. Generally, social media plays both parts in either fighting femicide or promoting femicide regardless of the available enforced laws and regulations for the same, explains Powell (2018).

3.   DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This survey of 100 respondents in the Republic of North Macedonia aged between 18 and 60 conducted via a quantitative method of online questionnaire found that there was a relatively even split between male and female respondents. The largest age group was 35-44, and all

respondents had social media accounts. Facebook was the most popular social media site, followed by Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Tiktok, and LinkedIn. Most respondents used social media for communication with friends, with smaller percentages using it for dating, meeting new people, following the latest news, training, or finding resources related to their studies or work. The majority of respondents spent between 2-5 hours on social media activities. All respondents somewhat agreed that they express themselves better on social media and that social media presents a different reality from the real world. Additionally, all respondents somewhat agreed that social media news can shape society's prejudices and discrimination, while 100% agreed that social media plays a role in raising awareness about femicide and impacting women's rights and gender equality. The respondents of the survey strongly agree that social media promotes a culture of violence against women and is a place where women are not treated with respect. They also agree that social media is known to be a place where women are bullied and harassed, and normalizes violent and abusive behavior towards women. However, the respondents neither agree nor disagree with the idea that social media allows for the easy dissemination of harmful and degrading content about women.

Furthermore, the respondents do not believe that social media provides a platform for victims of femicide to share their stories and seek justice. These findings suggest that there is a need for more measures to be taken to address the issue of violence against women on social media and to create safe spaces for women to share their experiences without fear of harassment or abuse. The majority of the respondents do not believe that social media encourages people to take action against femicide. However, all respondents strongly agree that social media can raise awareness about femicide and violence against women. Additionally, all respondents somewhat agree that social media can contribute to the normalization of violence against women or femicide. The respondents were unsure whether social media provides a space for women to organize and advocate for their rights. Moreover, all respondents somewhat agree that social media perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes that contribute to femicide. A majority of the respondents strongly believe that social media provides a platform for perpetrators of femicide to glorify their actions, and only a small percentage somewhat agrees with this. Finally, the vast majority of the respondents strongly disagree that social media has a positive impact on reducing femicide rates, while a small percentage strongly agrees with this statement. Overall, these results suggest that while social media can be a useful tool for raising awareness, it may also contribute to the normalization of harmful behavior and stereotypes, and it may not be an effective means of reducing femicide rates. The survey revealed that the majority of the respondents have come across news or information related to femicide or violence against women on social media. A significant number of respondents believe that social media campaigns and movements against femicide or violence encourage them to take action or raise awareness about the issue. More than half of the respondents think that social media platforms have a responsibility to take action against content that promotes or glorifies femicide or violence against women. It is concerning to note that a large percentage of respondents have witnessed online harassment or bullying related to femicide or violence against women on social media. These findings highlight the need for increased awareness and action against violence against women on social media. 94 out of 100, believe that social media can play a positive role in the fight against violence against women. However, 6 out of 100 respondents disagreed with this statement. When asked whether social media companies should be held accountable for content related to femicide and violence against women, 54% of respondents answered in the affirmative, while 46% answered negatively. This indicates that there is a division among people on whether social media companies should be responsible for their platform's content related to this critical issue.

4.   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this survey highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of social media's impact on women's rights and gender equality. While respondents acknowledged the potential of social media to raise awareness about femicide and promote gender equality, they also highlighted the platform's problematic aspects, such as the normalization of violence and abuse against women, cyberbullying, and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. The finding that respondents expressed themselves better on social media than in real life suggests that social media provides a sense of anonymity and distance that can be both empowering and problematic. On the one hand, this anonymity can be used to speak out against injustices and raise awareness about important issues. On the other hand, it can also contribute to the dissemination of harmful and degrading content about women, and allow for the perpetuation of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors. Given these findings, it is clear that social media companies have a responsibility to actively address the issue of violence against women and gender inequality on their platforms. This can be achieved through the implementation of stricter content moderation policies, the promotion of positive and inclusive messaging, and the development of educational programs to raise awareness about these issues among users. Moreover, individuals need to recognize their role in shaping social media's impact on women's rights and gender equality. By actively engaging in conversations and actions that promote equality and respect for women on social media, users can contribute to creating a more inclusive and safe online environment for all. In conclusion, the survey results highlight the alarming impact of social media on the issue of femicide and violence against women. The majority of respondents believe that social media perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes, provides a platform for perpetrators to glorify their actions, and has no positive impact on reducing femicide rates. However, it is encouraging to note that social media campaigns and movements against femicide or violence are effective in raising awareness and encouraging action against the issue. The fact that a large percentage of respondents have witnessed online harassment or bullying related to femicide or violence against women on social media is particularly troubling. In light of these findings, social media platforms need to prioritize the issue of femicide and violence against women by taking concrete measures to combat harmful content and online harassment. Governments and civil society organizations can also play a critical role in raising awareness and advocating for action to address this pressing issue. It is only through concerted efforts from all stakeholders that we can hope to make progress towards a safer and more equitable society for women.

5.   FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While femicide has been a long-standing problem in many parts of the world, emerging trends suggest that it is on the rise in some countries due to factors such as the proliferation of firearms, domestic violence, and patriarchal attitudes. In terms of social media marketing, several emerging trends are likely to shape the industry's future. One of the most notable trends is the increasing use of artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms to analyze customer data and personalize marketing strategies. Another emerging trend is the growing importance of influencer marketing. As social media platforms continue to gain popularity, influencers with large followings can have a significant impact on consumer behavior. Finally, there is a growing emphasis on social responsibility and ethical marketing practices. Consumers are increasingly concerned about issues such as sustainability, diversity, and inclusivity, and they expect brands to align with their values. As a result, social media marketers are likely to face increasing pressure to adopt more socially responsible practices, such as promoting sustainable products and

avoiding harmful or offensive content. Several potential research directions could be pursued in the intersection of femicide and social media marketing. Future research could examine how social media marketing campaigns address the issue of femicide, and what messages they convey to the public. This could involve analyzing the use of imagery, language, and storytelling techniques, as well as evaluating the impact of these campaigns on attitudes and behaviors related to femicide. Another interesting future research direction would be that researchers can investigate how women are represented in social media marketing and how this representation may contribute to the normalization of violence against women. This can include analyzing the use of gender stereotypes and sexualization in marketing campaigns and how they may impact attitudes toward women.

References

Jacobson, R. (2016). Social Media and Self-Doubt. Child Mind Institute. Retrieved from https://childmind.org/article/social-media-and-self-doubt/

Marsh, S. (2016, September 1). Young women – do you feel the pressure to be perfect? The Guardian. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/01/young-women-pressure-perfect-education-looks-work-relationships-social-media

Nagarajan, C. (2016, September 12). What does a feminist internet look like? The Guardian. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/12/feminist-internet-empowering-online-harassment

Ott, K. (2018). Social Media and Feminist Values: Aligned or Maligned? Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies, 39(1), 93-111. Retrieved from https://muse.jhu.edu/article/690811/pdf

Powell, C. (2018). How Social Media has Reshaped Feminism. Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved from https://www.cfr.org/blog/how-social-media-has-reshaped-feminism

Verkuyl, G. (2020). Impact of Social Media on Feminism. Gender & Sexuality Studies Student Work Collection, 57. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/gender_studies/57

Wallace, K. (2014). Technology is feminism's friend and foe. CNN. Retrieved from https://www.cnn.com/2014/03/18/living/technology-empowering-women-identity/index.html

Weiner, J. (2015). The Pressure to Look Good. The New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/31/opinion/sunday/jennifer-weiner-the-pressure-to-lookgood.html. [Source: https://studycrumb.com/alphabetizer]