

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG WOMEN SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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Abstract. Addressing sexual violence against women is an urgent global concern that demands action at all societal levels. Unlike other forms of violence against women, sexual violence is particularly challenging to expose and address due to its association with societal norms of morality. The emergence of social media as a pivotal platform has enabled survivors to share their experiences, fostering potential preventive measures for others. Through digital platforms, survivors can promote awareness, solidarity, and collective strength, driving societal and structural changes. This research focuses on two primary objectives: How to optimize social media to establish a protective environment for women survivors of sexual violence? and What role does the interplay of social media communication play in facilitating the empowerment of these women survivors? A qualitative descriptive approach with a case study methodology will be employed, utilizing snowball sampling for informant selection to address these aims effectively. The study aims to offer insights into how social media serves as a tool for survivors seeking support, validation, and advocacy. It will provide recommendations for using social media in prevention and education campaigns against sexual violence, aiming to enhance support for women survivors and advocate for more inclusive societal changes. Through this research, we seek to contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersection between social media and sexual violence survivorship, highlighting the platform's role in fostering empowerment and societal transformation.

Keywords: Social Media, Women, Sexual Violence Survivors, Safe Safe Space, Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence constitutes a coercive act targeting an individual's sexuality, affecting all genders, though predominantly impacting women. This form of violence against women stands as a grave concern that demands immediate and widespread attention across societal strata. Despite advancements in societal awareness and the implementation of legal frameworks aimed at mitigating such incidents, the incidence of sexual violence continues to be alarmingly prevalent. A significant number of these cases remain undisclosed, largely due to the associated stigma and the victims' apprehension of societal backlash. The National Commission for Women's data for 2022 underscores the prevalence of sexual violence as the foremost type of aggression against women, accounting for 2,228 instances or approximately 38.21%, with psychological violence trailing closely at 2,083 cases or 35.72%. The challenge in addressing and unveiling sexual violence lies in its complex entanglement with societal norms concerning morality.

Within societal constructs, women are often idolized as paragons of purity and honor, rendering them subject to severe dishonour in instances of sexual violence, such as rape. Consequently, victims frequently face unjust blame, compelling them to suffer in silence. Despite legislative strides towards eradicating violence against women, the surge in reported incidents is disconcerting. An in-depth examination of the complaint records reveals sexual violence as the predominant form of aggression against women in public domains, with 1,127 cases reported. Conversely, the private sphere records the highest instances of psychological violence, with 1,494 cases. Nonetheless, the actual number of incidents is speculated to be significantly higher than reported, suggesting that the disclosed cases

merely represent a fraction of the reality. Domestic violence, encompassing sexual violence, is often dismissed as a private affair within numerous cultural contexts, leading victims to endure in silence and perpetuate patriarchal family dynamics (Saras K, 2020).

In the contemporary landscape of digital media evolution, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (formerly known as X), and Instagram afford nearly universal opportunities for individuals to voice their opinions on various topics (Achmad, 2022). It is within this context that the significant impact of new media technologies emerges, particularly in empowering women survivors of sexual violence to stand up and articulate their experiences. Social media serves as a pivotal platform for these survivors to vocalize their stories, thereby potentially safeguarding other women from similar fates. Leveraging these digital forums, survivors can disseminate information, raise awareness, foster a sense of solidarity, and cultivate a collective resilience that contributes to societal and structural reforms.

However, the role of social media is inherently complex. Intended as arenas for open sharing and healing, these spaces can paradoxically transform into venues of conflict, where survivors face stigma, online harassment, and breaches of privacy (Mendes, Keller, & Ringrose, 2019). Amidst the significant empowerment potential these platforms offer, there is a pressing necessity to explore how they can be more effectively tailored to support the needs of sexual violence survivors. Incorporating the "Uses and Gratifications Theory" and Pierre Levy's New Media Theory into the exploration of social media's role for women survivors of sexual violence offers a nuanced framework for understanding the complexities of digital spaces as tools for empowerment and safety. The "Uses and Gratifications Theory" suggests that individuals actively choose media sources that meet their specific needs,

including information seeking, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment (Selly Ananda Pratiwi, 2020). When applied to the context of women survivors of sexual violence, this theory can elucidate how these individuals use social media platforms to fulfill their needs for support, community, and advocacy, thus transforming these digital spaces into sanctuaries of empowerment and healing. Moreover, this theory also emphasizes on the active role of individuals in seeking media to satisfy their needs and the transformative potential of collective engagement in digital environments. Women survivors of sexual violence, through their interactions on social media, exemplify the uses and gratifications theory by seeking out these platforms for emotional support, information, and community building.

This study aims to delineate and analyse the ways in which women survivors engage with social media for advocacy and support, pinpointing strategies to navigate the challenges of maintaining safety and privacy within these digital environments. In the contemporary landscape of digital media, platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and TikTok offer nearly universal access to public discourse, enabling individuals to express their perspectives on various topics. Within this context, the advent of new media technologies plays a pivotal role by empowering women survivors of sexual violence to raise their voices and share their stories (Nurfudiniyah, 2022). Social media has emerged as a crucial venue for these women to vocalize their experiences, fostering a preventative narrative against further victimization. Through digital engagement, survivors can disseminate awareness, foster a sense of unity, and catalyse societal and structural reforms.

However, the utility of social media as a haven for expression and healing is accompanied by its challenges. It can

inadvertently serve as a new arena for stigma, cyber harassment, and privacy breaches (Musyaffa & Effendi, 2022). Given these complexities, there is a pressing need to delve into the adaptability of these platforms to better serve survivors of sexual violence. This study aims to chart the ways in which women survivors utilize social media for advocacy and support, identifying methods to navigate the digital landscape safely and privately. This investigation will delve into the utilization of social media as an innovative communicative tool that empowers women survivors to affirm their societal standing. It will examine their use of digital spaces for mutual support, advocacy for systemic change, and the dissemination of their stories as educational tools to avert further violence. Additionally, this research will spotlight the obstacles survivors encounter in safeguarding their virtual presence and privacy, and the requisite measures to establish genuinely supportive and inclusive online safe havens.

Drawing from the aforementioned background, the research question posed in this study includes: 1) How to optimize social media to establish a protective environment for women survivors of sexual violence? 2) What role does the interplay of social media communication play in facilitating the empowerment of these women survivors? In light of the background and research question delineated above, the primary aims of this investigation are twofold: 1) To explore the potential of social media as a space for women who have survived sexual violence, and 2) To examine the influence of social media communication dynamics on the empowerment of women survivors of sexual violence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women Survivors of Sexual Violence. In this context, cases of gender-based violence

experienced by women remain a significant source of distress and fear within society, particularly among women themselves, due to the prevailing patriarchal cultural norms (N Hayati, 2021). Regrettably, instances of violence are not only becoming more common but are also spreading across various domains. This includes public areas, digital environments (Online Based Gender Violence or KGBO), and instances of sexual violence in private and educational settings. Alarming, the perpetrators often include family members, partners, or other close associates of the victims. According to a survey conducted by Lentera Sintas Indonesia and Magdalene.co via Change.org, 93% of those who have suffered sexual violence did not report the incidents to law enforcement (Adiyanto, 2020).

Sexual violence encompasses a range of non-consensual and coercive actions linked to sexuality, such as sexual harassment, rape, sexual assault, and other forms of sexual exploitation. There exists a gender bias stereotype which suggests women are less likely to commit acts of violence compared to men, with data indicating that reports of such incidents often feature men as the aggressors and women as the victims (Asmarany, 2020). From an academic perspective, women survivors are acknowledged not just as victims, but also as resilient individuals who cope with the trauma they have endured. Survivors frequently grapple with complex long-term effects, both psychological and physical, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and other related disorders (Sartika Sari Wardanhi DH Pasha, Indrayanti, Jeanny Maria Fatimah, 2023). Additionally, survivors endure social repercussions such as stigma, isolation, and challenges in establishing trust in relationships. In socio-cultural settings like Indonesia, women survivors often confront extra hurdles due to societal norms that might

blame them or pressure them to remain silent to preserve the 'honor' of their family or community.

Social Media as a Digital Safe Space.

Various factors, including societal pressure and intimidation, contribute to the apprehension and fear experienced by survivors when contemplating the disclosure of their traumatic experiences resulting from sexual violence. Consequently, alternative digital platforms are perceived as more open and accessible venues for voicing these experiences. However, caution must be exercised in this process, as statements and disclosures made in the digital realm can sometimes backfire, leading to accusations against the survivors themselves (Nur Hayati, 2020). The rise of online gender-based violence has prompted the establishment of several social media accounts that serve as confidantes or platforms for sharing narratives from survivors or eyewitnesses. These accounts facilitate social campaigns aimed at fostering understanding and elucidating various forms of sexual harassment, their impact on survivors, and necessary interventions (Nurfudiniyah, 2022).

Online media is regarded as a vital resource for survivors seeking social support and emotional validation, which they might not receive in their offline lives. The ability to share their experiences anonymously or within a supportive community can significantly empower survivors, helping them to navigate and potentially overcome associated stigma. Moreover, social media enables survivors to form connections with others who have undergone similar ordeals, fostering peer-to-peer support networks that offer collective solidarity and contribute to healing. Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that social media can also expose survivors to further harassment through negative comments or responses

from other users. Therefore, it is essential to investigate and implement effective strategies for maintaining safety and privacy in these digital spaces, to ensure they remain safe and inclusive for all survivors.

Dynamics of Social Media Communication and Empowerment of Women Who Survive Sexual Violence. The rapid advancement of the internet has catalyzed significant transformations in communication technology, notably in the ways individuals interact and communicate with others. This evolution has led to the emergence of virtual spaces that mirror the social environments found in the real world, with social media being one of the most accessed platforms today (Musyaffa & Effendi, 2022). Social media serves not only as a venue for sharing and listening to stories but also as a tool for empowering women survivors by providing them with a space to reconstruct their identities and advocate for social change. The communication dynamics on social media enable survivors to articulate their own narratives and manage the self-representation they wish to project to society. The platform's ability to facilitate the sharing of personal stories, which in offline contexts might be hindered by social stigma, opens the door to broader recognition and solidarity (Feryna Nur Rosyidah, 2019).

Conversely, in the journey towards self-empowerment, survivors often encounter challenges such as judgmental narratives and derogatory gender stereotypes. Social media's rapidity and anonymity can expedite the dissemination of supportive information but can also propagate misinformation and discrimination. Therefore, it is crucial to scrutinize the dynamics of social media communication within the context of advocating for change. Identifying and addressing the challenges in self-empowerment and in fostering supportive communities are essential. This

involves strategizing to counter negative narratives, bolster support networks, and harness social media as an effective, sustainable tool for advocacy.

METHOD

The research methodology adopted for this study is a descriptive qualitative design, utilizing a case study approach grounded in the Uses and Gratification Theory articulated by Herbert Blumer and Elihu Katz in their 1974 publication, "The Uses of Mass Communication: Current Perspectives on Gratification Research." This theory posits that media consumers actively choose and engage with media to fulfill their needs. By employing this theoretical framework and approach, it is anticipated that the study will offer a nuanced understanding of the experiences of sexual violence survivors in terms of their perceptions, behavioral interpretations, overall motivations, and verbal descriptions within a specific and natural setting, using inherently natural methods (Moleong, 2021). The investigation involves detailed data gathering from various relevant sources, exploring multiple cases (Alwasilah, 2022). This study focuses on individual victims of sexual violence, enabling a comprehensive and cohesive comprehension of the data and case dimensions. The research is slated to last one year and will be conducted in Makassar City, South Sulawesi. It involves three student informants from Hasanuddin University, who are survivors of sexual violence and have received direct intervention from the university's task force dedicated to preventing and managing sexual violence. Data collection will be executed through Snowball Sampling and in-depth interviews to procure pertinent information. All interviews will utilize a semi-structured format, which is selected for its ability to uncover critical and often concealed aspects

of personal or organizational experiences, facilitated by its flexible nature and a more personal approach. An interview protocol will be developed to ensure the research stays focused on addressing the study's questions without diverging into extraneous topics. In addition to interviews, a variety of secondary documents, including journal articles, government records, newspapers, magazines, and online content, will be leveraged to enrich the contextual backdrop of the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of this study, the differences level of violence that happened to those woman survivor determined their decision in choosing action that conducted in their social media, whether theirs main account or second account. This was happening duet o their psychological condition after the incident. Yet, all of the informants agree that social media could be a safe space for them to share story, pursue information and support from others.

The Optimize of Social Media As A Safe Space for Women Survivors of Sexual Violence. Drawing upon the insights provided by the literature and the narratives of the informants, this discussion explores the multifaceted role of social media as a space for women who have survived sexual violence. Social media platforms offer unique spaces for survivors to navigate their healing journey, seek information, and connect with others sharing similar experiences. The first informant's experience underscores social media's role as a safe but private space for self-education and indirect support. This approach is indicative of a broader trend where survivors, not yet ready to share their stories publicly due to recent trauma and societal victim-blaming attitudes, turn to online platforms for discreet support and information. This behaviour aligns with

findings from "Silent Voices, Hidden Stories: A Review of Sexual Assault (Non)Disclosure Literature, Emerging Issues, and Call to Action," which discusses the complexities surrounding the decision to disclose sexual violence experiences. The informant's use of social media for understanding societal misconceptions about sexual violence, such as the wrongful correlation between a victim's attire and the likelihood of assault, reflects a proactive yet cautious engagement with digital spaces for personal empowerment and healing (Anna Gjika, 2020).

Conversely, the second informant's strategy of sharing her story through an anonymous second account on Instagram exemplifies a different but equally valid use of social media as a shelter. This method of engagement provides a sense of control over her narrative and identity while still allowing for the benefits of community support and advocacy. Her active participation in discussions, along with reposting content related to sexual violence awareness, indicates a higher level of comfort with public engagement, albeit anonymously. This practice is supported by the literature, such as in "Konten Kisah Akun Instagram @perempuanberkisah Sebagai Ruang Bersuara Perempuan Korban Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online," which explores how Instagram accounts serve as platforms for survivors to voice their experiences and foster a supportive online community (Sekar Diva Parasdy, Nuryanti Nuryanti, 2023).

Both informants' experiences highlight social media's dual role as both a private refuge for silent healing and a public platform for advocacy and support. This duality is crucial for understanding social media's potential to accommodate diverse survivor needs and preferences. As survivors navigate their healing journeys, their engagement with social media evolves, reflecting a spectrum of strategies from

private information-seeking to public advocacy and support networking.

The third informant's story further enriches our understanding of the varied ways in which survivors of sexual violence engage with digital platforms for healing and advocacy. Unlike the first two informants, this individual quickly leveraged digital platforms not only to share her experience and seek solidarity but also to actively pursue psychological support and advocacy. Her decision to utilize the HopeHelps platform for storytelling and obtaining professional assistance underscores the increasing significance of digital environments in offering immediate resources and support networks for survivors. This action, coupled with her strategic use of Instagram for both personal branding and exploring personal interests related to gender and sexual violence issues, illustrates the nuanced ways survivors navigate their public and private selves online. By sharing her story in a manner that conceals her identity, she maintains control over her narrative while contributing to the broader discourse on sexual violence, embodying the potential of social media as a space for both individual healing and communal support.

Those informants showcases the spectrum of sexual harassment experiences and the corresponding digital strategies employed for coping and recovery. Their stories illustrate a gradient of sexual violence severity—from rape, through physical touching and verbal abuse, to instances of light harassment—highlighting the diverse impacts of such experiences on survivors' engagement with social media. A schema to represent this model might categorize the informants based on the severity of their experiences and their digital media strategies:

1. First Informant (EZ,22): Experienced severe sexual harassment (rape). Uses social media primarily to connect with

other survivors and seek information for self-education on sexual violence.

2. Second Informant (SS,22): Endured medium-level harassment, including unwanted touching, kissing, and verbal abuse. Engages with social media to educate herself and indirectly share her experiences, while maintaining a degree of anonymity.

3. Third Informant (HN,21): Faced light sexual harassment, including touching and verbal abuse. Turns to digital platforms for advocacy, psychological support, and to share her experience indirectly, while following accounts that promote awareness on gender and sexual violence issues.

These narratives collectively underscore the role of digital media as a pivotal safe space for survivors, allowing them to choose how openly they wish to engage based on their personal journey and the nature of their experiences. Digital platforms facilitate a range of interactions, from seeking information and anonymous sharing to accessing formal support and engaging in advocacy, reflecting the complex and varied needs of survivors navigating the aftermath of sexual violence.

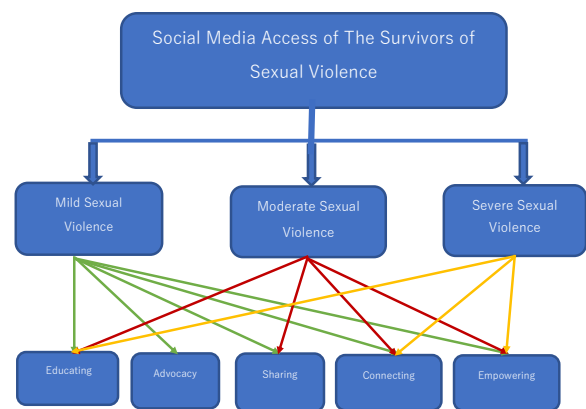


Figure 1: Social Media Communication Dynamics of Women Survivors Of Sexual Violence

To optimize social media for this purpose, it is essential to create moderated spaces that ensure safety and privacy, foster anonymity where necessary, and provide robust digital literacy education. These measures allow survivors to engage with social media safely and beneficially, using it as a platform for discreet information gathering and indirect support without fear of judgment or further trauma. Implementing these strategies effectively requires continuous monitoring and adaptation to the evolving digital landscape, ensuring that the needs and safety of survivors are consistently prioritized. Social media stands out as a versatile tool for survivors of sexual violence, offering both private and public avenues for healing, education, and connection. As illustrated by the experiences of the two informants, these digital platforms provide essential spaces for survivors to validate their feelings, educate themselves and others, and gradually reclaim their narratives. The literature underscores the significance of social media in facilitating these processes, underscoring its potential as a transformative space for survivors navigating the aftermath of sexual violence.

The role of social media communication in facilitating the empowerment of Women Survivors of Sexual Violence. The discussion explores the multifaceted role of social media as a space for women who have survived sexual violence. Social media platforms offer unique spaces for survivors to navigate their healing journey, seek information, and connect with others sharing similar experiences. Social media platforms function as pivotal resources for information and knowledge dissemination (Mendes et al., 2019). For survivors, these platforms offer essential insights into societal attitudes and legal frameworks surrounding sexual violence, enabling a better understanding of both personal experiences and broader

societal responses. This provision of knowledge not only informs survivors but also empowers them by equipping them with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of recovery in a context often laden with victim-blaming and misinformation. The informant's use of social media for understanding societal misconceptions about sexual violence, such as the wrongful correlation between a victim's attire and the likelihood of assault, reflects a proactive yet cautious engagement with digital spaces for personal empowerment and healing.

The role of social media is to fulfilling personal integrative needs such as credibility, stability, and personal identity. For survivors, the ability to control their narratives on social media—whether through anonymous postings or more public accounts—serves to reaffirm their self-worth and reassert control over their stories. This control is crucial not only for personal empowerment but also for restructuring their identity post-trauma. Furthermore, social media also has another uniqueness, it facilitates the creation of communities and support networks, meeting survivors' social integrative needs (Musyaffa & Effendi, 2022). These digital platforms offer spaces where survivors can connect with peers who share similar experiences, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support. Such connections are invaluable as they provide emotional support and collective empowerment, reinforcing survivors' roles not as isolated individuals but as members of a supportive community. The second informant's strategy of sharing her story through an anonymous second account on Instagram exemplifies a different but equally valid use of social media as a shelter. This method of engagement provides a sense of control over her narrative and identity while still allowing for the benefits of community support and advocacy. Her active participation in discussions, along with re

posting content related to sexual violence awareness, indicates a higher level of comfort with public engagement, albeit anonymously.

Social media's role extends beyond providing a platform for narrative control and self-representation; it also significantly impacts visibility and awareness-raising. By sharing their experiences, survivors not only challenge prevailing narratives and stereotypes but also amplify their voices to a broader audience, fostering greater societal empathy and potentially driving cultural and policy changes. This visibility is crucial in building solidarity and community, as the communal aspects of social media help survivors find and join networks of support, where they can connect with others who have endured similar experiences. This solidarity is not only empowering but also aids significantly in the healing process.

Moreover,, social media serves as a critical tool for advocacy and mobilization, allowing survivors and activists to influence public policy and campaign for legal reforms related to gender-based violence. Through these platforms, survivors and advocates can access and disseminate educational materials and information about rights, resources, and recovery strategies, empowering them with knowledge that might not be easily accessible offline. Social media also empowers survivors by satisfying their expressive needs through public advocacy, storytelling, and mobilization for legal reforms. This expressive outlet not only helps survivors process their own experiences but also positions them as advocates for change, influencing public policy and contributing to societal discourse on gender-based violence. As the third informant mention, she use digital platforms for advocacy, psychological support, and personal branding illustrates these points vividly. By engaging in these activities, survivors navigate their public and private selves online, maintaining control over their narratives while contributing to the

broader discourse on sexual violence. This exemplifies the potential of social media as a space for both individual healing and communal support, reflecting the complex and varied needs of survivors navigating the aftermath of sexual violence.

CONCLUSION

The discussion underscores the critical role of social media in establishing a protective environment for women survivors of sexual violence. To optimize social media for this purpose, it is essential to create moderated spaces that ensure safety and privacy, foster anonymity where necessary, and provide robust digital literacy education. These measures allow survivors to engage with social media safely and beneficially, using it as a platform for discreet information gathering and indirect support without fear of judgment or further trauma. Implementing these strategies effectively requires continuous monitoring and adaptation to the evolving digital landscape, ensuring that the needs and safety of survivors are consistently prioritized. Furthermore, social media communication plays a pivotal role in empowering women survivors of sexual violence. By providing a platform for narrative control, social media enables survivors to reclaim their stories and challenge societal stereotypes, thereby facilitating a more profound personal and communal healing process. The ability to connect with supportive communities and access educational resources empowers survivors with the knowledge and support necessary to navigate their recovery. Additionally, social media serves as an essential tool for advocacy, raising awareness, and mobilizing support for changes in public policy and legal frameworks, which are crucial for addressing the broader issues surrounding sexual violence. Therefore, when leveraged

thoughtfully, social media can transform the empowerment landscape for survivors, offering them not just a voice but a powerful channel for change and recovery.

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