



How Social Media Affects People's Ideas on Sexist Behaviours and Gender-Based Violence



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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how social media may influence people's perspectives on sexism and gender-based violence. Methods: A selective review of the literature on the relationship between social media and people's perceptions of sexism and gender-based violence that was published between 2003 and 2022. Results: It is explained how social media might mentally alter people's behaviour and ideas on sexism. It also offers light on the psychological effects of social media on women who advocate for feminism and the many forms of activism women utilize to combat sexism on social media. In addition, the challenges women encounter while utilizing the Internet to advocate for their opinions are emphasized. We conclude that Celebrities and powerful persons criticizing sexism influence people to change their behaviour. When people are surrounded by feminism in the media and on social media, they are likely to stop sexist behaviour to conform to the new ideal and majority based on conformity and doing what others do.

Keywords: Social media; Sexism; Gender-based violence; Feminism

Definition of Attitudes

Attitudes are how people perceive and value elements in their environment, including other people, different ideas, behaviours, and objects [1]. The response of living organisms to all their living conditions and any type of external stimuli is considered behaviour. Behaviour can also be defined as "the activity of an organism interacting with its environment" as stated in the psychology dictionary, thus it is the actions taken by a living organism to interact and react to its environment. For humans, behaviour can also be described as the actions taken to express opinions, thoughts, and ideas [2].

The attitudes humans have towards certain ideas affect their behaviours, but the intensity of the effect they have on one another differs according to the situation. However, humans generally aim to find balance between their attitudes and behaviours [1].

Definition of Sexism, Gender-Based Violence, and Feminism

Sexism is a form of prejudice and discrimination that consists of a set of behaviours and attitudes that create harmful

stereotypes and social expectations based on sex. In most cases, it is a mixture of gender-based attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that cause unequal treatment of men and women. Sexism and sexist behaviours can include, but are not limited to, beliefs that women are inferior to men, unequal salaries, sexual harassment, denying access to education, and physical violence [3].

Gender-based Violence is physical violence committed against women solely based on gender, and it is a result of sexist ideas and beliefs. The term Feminism includes any movement and anyone that fights for the equality of women and acts against sexism and discrimination. Movements that fight for equality are called feminist movements, while people who support these movements are called feminists [4].

Definition of social media and its effect on Sexism

Social Media platforms are virtual online spaces like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook where people socialize. They enable people to share ideas in the form of text, likes, tweets and Facebook posts, or images and videos, like Instagram and Pinterest. Social

Media is a very efficient way of sharing ideas and opinions with people and finding people of similar interests to oneself. Social media has positively affected people's ideas on sexism and helped them let go of harmful, sexist ideas, and increased the spread of feminist movements that call for equality between everyone and every gender since 2010 [5]. Social media made everyone's voice important and heard while giving everyone a platform to share their experiences; thus, exposed people to all different types of opinions. This has increased advocacy for feminism in mass media platforms and social media [4]. People feel empowered to talk about their experiences with injustice on social media because it creates a sense of collectiveness which positively affects people's ideas on the topic [6] (Foster, 2015). Furthermore, Conformity is when people desire to do what others do to become social accepted, which can both cause and diminish social phenomena [1].

Methods

Study design

This article is a selected literature evaluation of works published between 2003 and 2022 on the social media may influence people's perspectives on sexism and gender-based violence. PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) criteria were followed.

Search strategy

A complete search of the databases PubMed/MEDLINE, Cochrane Library, Cumulative, and PsycINFO was done. We utilized a search strategy based on the combination of the following terms: (social media) and (sexism and gender-based violence). The search was last updated in June 2022.

Selection criteria

The included research explored social media and people's perspectives on sexism and gender-based violence. Therefore, only studies examining the social media, sexism, and gender-based violence were considered. Nonrelevant articles, such as conference proceedings, editorials, and letters, were eliminated from this review. There were no language or research design constraints in place.

Results

Using Hashtags to spread awareness about sexism and feminism is frequently done by women today to speak publicly about the injustices they experience daily. This phenomenon is commonly called "Hashtag Activism" [7]. Using Hashtags can help spread awareness by reaching more people, as it is more likely to show up on people's feeds on social media. Also, using social media can give people confidence and decrease the fear of replying to a sexist individual because it can be less intimidating than facing them face-to-face or offline [8]. Moreover, Hashtags group all related posts together, thus people are more likely to see multiple

people's opinions on the topic and have a better chance at forming their own, individual opinion on it [5]. Abbott discussed the most famous Hashtag discussing sexism and sexual harassment which is #MeToo. The hashtag was started by feminist and activist Tarana Burke more than 10 years ago and was viewed more than 1.7 million times as of 2018 after American actress Alyssa Milano suggested using it for sexual harassment stories in 2017.

The Hashtag helped women share their experiences with sexism and sexual harassment, which exposed people to the reality of women's everyday lives and facilitated normalizing topics like sexism and sexual harassment that were otherwise considered offensive and taboo [9]. More hashtags like #HeforShe, which was started by Emma Watson, a famous English actress and activist, to advocate for equality and call men to stand by women and support feminism, started to include men in the conversation about feminism on social media [4]. Also, the Hashtags #YesAllWomen and #EverydaySexism where women shared everyday experiences of sexism, sexual harassment, and gender-based violence that they experienced in workspaces, on the street, and even from their intimate partners.

The Elaborated Social Identity Model, also known as the ESIM, discusses issues regarding "conflict within crowd events"; it argued that individuals feel empowered when they feel their actions are collective. Research shows that, in non-gendered contexts like encouraging people to pay taxes, and raising awareness about HIV, collective action was proven to be effective in increasing awareness [10]. Hashtags and social media platforms are effective in decreasing sexism and gender-based violence because they give people space to spread their collective opinion and share their stories; therefore, they feel empowered to continue. Twitter is also commonly used by celebrities and the public as an open discussion of societal phenomena like sexism and violence. All the Hashtags discussed were trending, most commonly, on Twitter with millions of different stories being shared through them. The #EverydaySexism project by Laura Bates also had a website and Twitter account related to the cause and it spread so widely that it was discussed by mainstream media and news outlets like BBC in the United Kingdom [5].

Another way that people's ideas are commonly influenced is through celebrities and famous YouTube personalities sharing their opinions on YouTube. A lot of full-time female YouTubers support the feminist movement and publicly advocate for it on their YouTube channels. For instance, YouTuber Lilly Singh, famously known on YouTube as "Superwoman", created a movement called #GirlLove to call girls and women to stop hating on one another and to stop promoting sexism amongst themselves; a phenomenon known as "girl-on-girl hate". Lilly Singh flew to Kenya to make #GirlLove bracelets and had a goal of selling sixteen thousand bracelets. However, due to the support of other YouTubers like Laci Green, Juelzzy, and Marina Watanabe, she sold over thirty thousand bracelets [4].

When celebrities and people with a huge following discuss sexism on their platform, people are more likely to conform and change their behaviours due to social influence. That is because when people are surrounded by feminism in the media and on social media, they are likely to stop sexist behaviours to conform to the new ideal and majority according to the idea of conformity and the desire people have for following what other people do [1].

Most social phenomena and social constructs, like sexism, can be discouraged and decreased through constant advocacy in the media, as shown in previous research. Social media specifically has been playing a major role in talking about most social issues because of how prevalent and efficient it has become in people's everyday lives. Advocating for ideas through social media, even in non-gendered contexts, was proven to be effective in changing people's ideas and behaviours. Raising awareness through social media works because of the idea of collective action, which helps victims of sexism share their stories and feel empowered, and the idea of conformity, which makes people desire to be like the collective.

Sexist Humour on the Internet

Nonetheless, some research and researchers say the opposite, where they believe social media, not only does not help the issue, but also increases the prevalence of sexism in society. Sexism is still very embedded in our culture and society, and even more so after the cyber revolution. In a study conducted they investigated how sexism is portrayed on social media in the form of sexist humour and memes. They studied 50 sexist memes regarding language, and people's reaction to them. Their results showed that the memes often included sexist language that was covered up with humour, thus seemed less offensive. The memes had different effects on men and women. Studies showed that, men who enjoy sexist humour were prone to being more physically and sexually aggressive, while women were more likely to have a higher level of acceptance towards gender-based violence and interpersonal violence [11].

Gender based cyber bullying

Several studies conducted to investigate cyber-bullying against feminists on the internet have shown women are more likely to use social media for activism; however, they were also more likely to experience cyber-bullying [12]. Critiques of online feminism have used terms like "Hashtag Feminism" in a derogatory manner to ridicule the movements women do. They tend to compare online activism to activism in the past that was mainly protests and sit-ins. The critiques also claim the movements have no real effect on society and only make women feel good with no material effect on the general public and the collective. Also, psychologically, women tend to be more affected by cyber-bullying and are more likely to restrict their actions on the internet because of it, yet they still participate in feminist movements on the internet [13].

Conclusion

To conclude this research, sexism, and people's attitudes towards sexism are greatly affected by social media. In general, social media is the one of the most efficient ways of sharing ideas and influencing people and it does that in many ways. First, it is positively affected by using Hashtags on social media platforms like Twitter because it gives people a chance to feel empowered to share their stories and truly make a change through the sense of collective action it gives. Hashtags group similar tweets and ideas together; therefore, people that interact with them feel as if a lot of people are facing the same issue, so it eliminates the fear people have of being ineffective and different. Second, YouTubers and influencers with big platforms and a big following can influence people when they speak about their own opinions on sexism and gender-based violence. This happens as a result of people's desire to conform to the majority. Social media activism trends can become very huge and cause offline hustle and can make news headlines. On the other hand, some researchers believe that the internet has increased women's susceptibility to sexism and violence through gender-based cyber bullying. They also criticise women's feminist movements on the internet claiming they are ineffective, have no potential to create social change, and only aim to make them feel better about themselves. Even though women are more likely to get psychologically affected by cyber-bullying, they continue to use social media platforms to advocate for their rights. They are also more likely to use social media for activism even though they get more affected by criticism than men and are more likely to receive criticism on the internet.

To sum up, when celebrities and individuals with a large following discuss sexism on their platform, individuals are more likely to comply and modify their behaviour. Due to the concept of conformity and the desire to do what others do, when individuals are exposed to feminism in the media and on social media, they are more likely to abandon discriminatory behaviours to conform to the new ideal and majority.

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