

The Role of Online Platforms in Addressing Gender Based Violence in Wagige Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a critical global issue, disproportionately affecting women, men, and marginalised communities. As digital technologies evolve, online platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, forums, and specialised support websites have emerged as key tools in addressing GBV. This study examines the role of these platforms in raising awareness, providing resources, facilitating reporting, and mobilising communities to combat GBV in Wagige, Kiambu County, Kenya. The research explores three main questions: (i) How effective are online platforms in raising awareness and providing resources compared to traditional support systems? (ii) What mechanisms do online platforms use to facilitate reporting and support for victims, and how do these impact victims' willingness to seek help? (iii) How do online platforms contribute to the mobilisation of communities and

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advocacy groups, and what role does user engagement play? Data were collected through a questionnaire from 20 respondents, to capture their experiences with online platforms addressing GBV. Findings suggest that 85% of respondents were aware of online platforms dedicated to GBV, with 60% having accessed resources. While 90% of respondents found these platforms somewhat or very effective compared to traditional systems, challenges such as difficulty navigating reporting mechanisms and limited trust were also noted. Additionally, 50% of the respondents participated in online discussions on GBV, demonstrating the potential for community mobilisation on these platforms. However, user engagement was seen as key, with respondents stating that advocacy efforts are more successful when users actively participate in campaigns and discussions. The study observes that even as online platforms enhance awareness and support for GBV manifold, barriers persist in access, usability, and community mobilisation. The report also includes recommendations on how the mechanisms of reporting, preserving anonymity, and encouraging users to more actively use the platforms can be improved to increase their impact on GBV.

Keywords: Online Platforms, Gender Based Violence, GBV, Wagige, Kiambu County, Kenya

Introduction

The problem of gender-based violence is pervasive, cutting across all demographics and cultural contexts. It includes a range of violence- physical, emotional, sexual, and economic- that is mostly committed against men and women. Over the past years, digital communication technologies have transformed the activist, support, and awareness frames of activism on GBV. Multiple online platforms, like Facebook, X (then Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, and bespoke advocacy apps, have established themselves as strong means through which discussions, education, and community about the issue are facilitated. The study investigates the effectiveness of these online

platforms in combating gender-based violence through an examination of their effectiveness, challenges, and innovative strategies that enhance their impact.

Background of the study

GBV is an age-old, internationally acclaimed issue that spans all forms of age, classes of ethnic backgrounds, and is geographically widespread. It encompasses several forms of violence, including physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological, because of one's gender. It is estimated that, globally, one in three women face either physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, usually perpetrated by an intimate partner. The impacts of GBV range far, including survivors who face lasting physical, mental, and emotional trauma. It is to be noted, however, that women face greater societal impacts in the perpetuation of gender inequality and barriers to economic development.

Traditionally, support mechanisms for victims of GBV include shelters, crisis hotlines, law enforcement agencies, and medical facilities. These are among the many support systems that have played a relevant role in ensuring that victims receive protection, resources, and legal support against their abusers. Traditional systems face geographical barriers, underfunding, and social stigma regarding violence. Moreover, many victims would not wish to seek help out of fear of reprisal, lack of anonymity, and cultural taboo, especially in conservative or rural areas where such issues are not publicly welcomed. Peterman et al. (2020) comment that this occurs particularly in conservative or rural areas where it is discredited to speak publicly about such issues. In response to such challenges, the development of online platforms brings a new frontier for tackling GBV. Online platforms like Facebook, X (then Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, specialist forums, and support websites offer victims the opportunity to receive information, share their experiences, and seek help on a more private and anonymous basis. These mechanisms are increasingly recognised for awareness- raising of GBV, reporting processes, and mobilisation of communities and advocacy groups in combating violence. Global social media movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp have changed the way in which GBV is communicated and understood within the public sphere. Survivors now, en masse, can break their silence and tell their stories. Such movements bring gender-based

violence into the global limelight, showing how online platforms amplify voices and begin conversations. A 2019 study conducted by Garcia et al. illustrated that social media is influential in changing public attitudes and perceptions towards the case of GBV, aside from building solidarity with survivors.

Thus, online platforms make it easier for victims who may be isolated due to geographic location, disability, or social stigma to access resources and support. Such initiatives apply particularly to remote or rural areas where traditional services are limited or completely nonexistent. Online forums can establish a sense of community and empowerment that offsets much of the isolation inherent in the victim's experience, and can do much to increase willingness to seek help.

Moreover, online platforms have emerged as important spaces not only for support but also for reporting incidents of GBV. Many of them have created mechanisms for anonymous reporting, which allows the victim to report without showing their identity for fear of exposure or reprisal. Such reporting tools, supported by online counselling services and helplines, provide access to immediate intervention and support for victims, thereby increasing the chances of assisting them.

As previously indicated, while there is increasing acknowledgement of the use of online platforms to support those experiencing GBV, little understanding exists of their efficacy, compared to traditional systems of support. While online platforms have specific benefits related to access and anonymity, a number of challenges remain, including digital literacy, technology access, and potential online harassment or misinformation. The potential of such platforms to actually mobilise the long-term communities and policy changes in the struggle against GBV has so far not been explored.

This study aims to ascertain the role of online platforms in promoting actions against Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in the effectiveness of creating awareness of the problem, providing resources and facilitating reporting, as well as galvanising advocacy efforts. The paper will probe the operating mechanisms of the online platforms and compare these with the conventional support systems. It thus contributes to the knowledge base related to digital interventions for GBV and provides, through best practices, recommendations which help improve victim support.

Statement of the Problem

GBV is one of the most widespread global phenomena affecting all genders. While there has been a mighty stride to fight this societal problem, traditional mechanisms using legal options, law enforcement, and community-based interventions are barely enough in battling the complications arising from GBV, especially in areas with cultural, economic, or political barriers. In the past two years, online platforms have emerged as strong tools for communication, advocacy, and education on new avenues for approaching social issues. However, their role in combating GBV is not well understood or systematically analysed.

This study aims to address the lack of understanding regarding how online platforms can contribute to the prevention, reporting, and resolution of gender-based violence. Although some online platforms have been used to raise awareness and support victims, their potential influence on policy changes and ensuring protection and accountability is not well outlined, not only in Wagige, Kiambu County, but also across Kenya and the world. The core of this study is, therefore, the dual nature that online platforms have played in dealing with GBV, in respect of their potential to create safe spaces, give support, and foster long-term behaviour and policy changes.

The proposed study represents a critical gap in the literature on how online platforms are grappling with opportunities and limitations around GBV and will provide recommendations on how to best utilise online platforms to combat gender-based violence.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate the role that online platforms play in educating and promoting gender-based violence awareness among the people of Wagige, Kiambu County, Kenya. Furthermore, the study contributes to understanding how online platforms have been or could be employed in the future to promote awareness of GBV.

Research Questions

- i. To what extent do online platforms prove to be an effective way of creating awareness and finding resources for victims of gender-based violence in Wagige, Kiambu County, Kenya?

- ii. Are there mechanisms through which online platforms facilitate reporting and support for victims of gender-based violence in Wagige, Kiambu County, Kenya?
- iii. How do online platforms contribute to the prevention and addressing of gender-based violence in Wagige, Kiambu County, Kenya?

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the role of online platforms in addressing gender-based violence in Wagige, Kiambu County, Kenya. The findings will benefit the residents of Wagige, Kiambu County, Kenya. However, the greater significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to understanding, and the practical application of, how online platforms can be instrumental in addressing gender-based violence (GBV). This study holds significant potential to inform, empower, and inspire action against gender-based violence through the lens of online platforms, thereby contributing to a more equitable and just society.

Scope of the Study

The research study area focuses on Wagige, Kiambu County. The study focuses on youths, government administrators and reliable community members. Specifically, it addresses the issue of GBV and the instrumentality of online platforms in addressing this menace.

Limitations of the Study

The study relies on a limited sample size, which may not adequately represent the diverse experiences of all gender-based violence (GBV) victims. Factors such as age, socioeconomic status, cultural background, and geographic location can significantly influence how individuals perceive and use online platforms for support. This research involves sensitive topics like GBV, presents ethical concerns, including the potential for re-traumatisation of participants and the need for confidentiality and informed consent, which can limit the scope and depth of the research.

Literature Review

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a problem in the whole world and affects people of all ages, regardless of race or socio-economic status. This violence

is perpetrated through physical, sexual, and psychological forms of harm, with gender inequality exacerbating the problem. Traditional support systems for victims of GBV have been historically limited in their reach and effectiveness, sometimes leaving survivors feeling isolated and unsupported. In recent years, online platforms-support websites, social media, and forums, have emerged as important tools in addressing GBV. How effectively do online platforms raise awareness and provide resources to victims of gender-based violence compared to traditional support systems?

What mechanisms do online platforms give rise to in reporting and supporting victims of gender-based violence, and how do these mechanisms influence the victim's tendency to seek assistance? How do online platforms mobilise communities and advocacy groups in GBV prevention and management, and what is the role of user engagement therein?

The above questions are addressed in this study to ascertain the level at which online platforms possess transformative potential in the fight against GBV, hence informing future intervention and policy decisions.

Effectiveness of Online Platforms in Creating Awareness

The advent of the Internet changed how information is disseminated and accessed. Various studies denote that online platforms have a very significant bearing on creating awareness about GBV, especially to a young generation. Goh and Lee (2019) indicate that social media campaigns, as evidenced by the #MeToo movement, have managed to mobilise people throughout the world and create solidarity among survivors; this has increased the public discourse around the issue of GBV. Moreover, these platforms enable the dissemination of informative materials on how to educate victims about their entitled rights and available resources. In contrast, hotlines and community centres are traditional means that usually have lots of problems with visibility or access in some rural settings. While these conventional means are meritorious, they cannot work as well as online platforms to reach diverse audiences. Barter et al. (2021) also present research evidence showing that younger people like to use online communication, which proves that online platforms can be effective in reaching the targeted group, more than conventional means.

Support and Reporting Mechanisms

In this regard, online systems have introduced ways through which victims can report and be supported with anonymity, easy accessibility, and instant linking of resources. Mardorossian's studies (2020) highlight how anonymity can embolden victims to report their experiences without stigma or retribution. For instance, forums and chat rooms are secure environments where people can tell their stories, even asking for advice from others who have been in similar situations.

In addition, most online facilities also provide support through the use of facilities such as chat-bots and automated responses that are available at any time of the day (Aguirre & Chou, 2020). These facilities can go a long way in ensuring a victim's readiness to seek support. For example, Sele et al. (2024) posit that victims who report incidents using online facilities are more satisfied compared to those who access other support services. This may suggest that online features can allow victims to take action and overcome the hurdles usually imposed by getting help.

Mobilisation of Communities and Advocacy Groups

Social Media platforms, therefore, act as powerful tools of mobilisation in communities and for all forms of advocacy, improving responses to GBV that are currently in use. Social media has served well in organising activities and events, such as those of "Take Back the Night" and "White Ribbon Day" campaigns that Vogel et al. (2022) describe. These platforms create avenues for the advocacy groups to reach wider audiences, mobilise support, and foster community engagement in ways traditional methods often cannot.

User participation makes it all possible. This increases awareness that creates a sense of community and support for the individuals suffering from GBV. The ability to allow the users to share their stories and resources creates a collective impact that amplifies the voices of victims and survivors to the voices of significant advocacy.

In a nutshell, online systems form an important avenue in the fight against gender-based violence through awareness-raising and mobilisation of the community, offering support and reporting (Sele & Mukundi, 2022). However, online or computerised systems do not solve the issue of being more effective compared to other traditional systems. This study provides an overview of

how online mechanisms are complementing conventional resources with the potential to revolutionise the arena of support for GBV victims.

Research Methodology

This study tries to understand the contribution online spaces have made in reducing cases of gender-based violence in Wagige, Kiambu County, Kenya. This section describes the methodology employed during the study- research design, population, sample, and the research instrument. The section also provides procedures for the collection and analysis of data.

Research Design

This study is a survey research; it employs a quantitative research design, utilising surveys to gather data from individuals who have interacted with online platforms concerning GBV. This design is appropriate as it allows for the collection of measurable data that can be statistically analysed to identify trends and correlations. The research will focus on collecting data to address the three primary research questions, aiming to quantify perceptions of effectiveness, support mechanisms, and community mobilisation associated with online platforms.

Entry Procedure

Entry Procedure refers to gaining permission, selecting key informants and familiarising oneself with the setting or culture (Kawulich, 2005). Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher obtained an official introduction letter from the Head of Department, Development Studies, Africa International University, Kenya. This was presented to the Area Chief of Wagige, Kiambu County, to seek the local administration's permission to carry out the study.

Research Population

The focus of this study is Wagige, Kiambu County. The location has a population of over 8,097 people and 4,189 households. (Source: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics-2023). The study targeted all 4,189 households.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who had relevant experience and knowledge regarding GBV and online platforms.

The sample size is 20 respondents to ensure adequate statistical analysis. Participants were recruited through social media channels, advocacy groups, and online support forums related to GBV. This sampling Technique helped to ensure fair representation and generalisation of findings to the entire population of Wagige, Kiambu County.

Research Instruments

The study used questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire is titled: The role of online platforms in addressing gender-based violence in Wagige, Kiambu County, Kenya. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions, divided into three sections that correspond to the research questions.

Validity of the Instrument

The questionnaire used for the data collection was validated by the researcher's supervisor and experts from Africa International University, Kenya to check the face and content validity of the instrument. Their criticisms and recommendations took effect in the final draft of the instrument.

Data Collection

The researcher administered copies of the questionnaire to the participants online. Participants were given five (5) days to answer the questions. The researcher then retrieved the questionnaire, ensuring that the questions were answered well.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The data collected were checked, verified and processed. The results were presented in various tables to illustrate key findings clearly. A discussion followed, interpreting the results in the context of the research questions and the existing literature on GBV and online support platforms. The findings were contextualised to highlight implications for policy, practice, and future research in the field of gender-based violence.

Response Rate

All distributed copies of the questionnaire, 20 in number, were returned, yielding a 100% response rate; such a high response rate ensures the data is representative of the sample group and can be reliably used in analysing the role of online platforms in addressing gender-based violence.

Socio-Demographic Information

Gender

The sample was divided into two gender groups, with the following distribution:

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	8	40%
Female	12	60%

A larger proportion of the respondents were females, 60% of the sample, while males were 40%. This is a common feature in most studies that relate to gender-based violence, as females would more readily respond to such studies.

Age

Respondents were asked to indicate their age, resulting in the following distribution:

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	10	50%
26-35	7	35%
36+	3	15%

Half of the respondents (50%) are in the 18-25 age group, indicating a younger population. Those aged 26-35 made up 35% of the sample, while 15% were over 36 years old.

Academic Level

Respondents were asked to indicate their highest academic qualification.

Academic Level	Frequency	Percentage
High School	4	20%
Undergraduate	10	50%
Postgraduate	6	30%

The highest number of respondents, 50%, were undergraduate students. Further, 30% had postgraduate qualifications, while 20% had high school certificates.

**Research Question 1: Effectiveness of Online Platforms
Awareness of Online Platforms Addressing Gender-Based Violence**

Question: How would you rate your awareness regarding online platforms that address gender-based violence?

Awareness Level	Frequency	Percentage
Not Aware	3	15%
Somewhat Aware	10	40%
Very Aware	7	35%

The majority of the respondents were aware to a considerable extent of the existence of online platforms addressing GBV, while 35% were very aware, and only 15% were not aware. This shows that most of the respondents are somehow informed about the online facilities for GBV.

Access to Resources on Online Platforms for GBV

Question: Have you accessed resources on online platforms for GBV?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	12	60%
No	8	40%

A total of 60% had accessed the resources set up on online platforms for GBV, which is indicative that the platforms are highly used by the population sample. However, a total of 40% of the respondents reported not accessing such resources. This also shows that a section of the population may be either ignorant or unwilling to use such platforms.

Effectiveness of Online Platforms Compared to Traditional Support Systems

Question: How informative are online platforms about issues of GBV, compared to seeking help from traditional support systems?

Effectiveness Level	Frequency	Percentage
Not Effective	2	10%
Somewhat Effective	12	60%
Very Effective	6	30%

Results showed that a majority of the respondents, at 60%, considered online platforms effective to a moderate degree in sourcing information on GBV. About 30% found it quite effective, while about 10% found it ineffective. That means online platforms are generally useful for sourcing information, but have some drawbacks.

Research Question 2: Mechanisms for Reporting and Support

Reporting GBV Through Online Platforms

Question: Have you ever reported an incident of GBV through an online platform?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	8	40%
No	12	60%

40% of the respondents reported an incident of GBV through an online platform, while 60% had not. This portends that while online platforms are used for reporting, a huge portion of users either don't report incidents or prefer other methods.

Ease of Navigating Online Reporting Mechanisms

Question: On a scale, how would you rate the ease with which the reporting mechanisms on the online platforms were found?

Ease Level	Frequency	Percentage
Very Difficult	2	10%
Difficult	3	15%
Neutral	5	25%
Easy	6	30%
Very Easy	4	20%

30% of the respondents found the reporting mechanisms accessible and easy to use, while 25% held a neutral view. Conversely, 25% found it difficult or very difficult. In interpretation, the results show that while a majority of users may find online reporting mechanisms accessible and easy to navigate, a good number have difficulties doing so

Perception of Anonymity Encouraging Victims to Seek Help

Question: Does anonymity lead you to believe that the promise of anonymity given by online platforms would make victims more likely to seek help?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	1	5%
Disagree	2	10%
Neutral	4	20%
Agree	7	35%
Strongly Agree	6	30%

A majority of 65% strongly agreed/agreed that anonymity through online platforms encourages victims to seek help. This goes to show that privacy is an enabler in helping victims report GBV.

Research Question 3: Mobilisation and User Engagement

Engagement in Online Discussions About GBV

Question: Have you ever engaged in online discussions about GBV?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	50%
No	10	50%

Half of the respondents had engaged in online discussions about GBV, while the other half had not. This portends that online platforms are increasingly being used as spaces for discourse on issues, but then there is still a considerable section of the population which is not engaging in such discussions.

Role of Online Platforms in Mobilising Community Efforts

Question: How well do you think online platforms have mobilised community efforts against GBV?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	3	15%
Disagree	4	20%
Neutral	3	15%
Agree	10	50%

A majority, 50%, agreed that online platforms have mobilised community efforts in the fight against GBV.

Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study has investigated the use of online platforms as an intervention method in addressing gender-based violence in Wagige, Kiambu County, Kenya. This section summarises the key findings and makes conclusions based on the analysis of responses from 20 participants in a survey about the role that online platforms play in addressing gender-based violence. The aim of this survey was to understand three significant themes: how effectively the online platforms address GBV, mechanisms for reporting and support, and community mobilisation and user engagement.

Awareness and Use of Online Platforms

50% of respondents were somewhat aware of online platforms that address GBV, and 35% were very aware. Additionally, 60% of respondents had accessed resources on these platforms. Most individuals are aware of the existence of online platforms that provide resources on GBV, and many actively use these platforms for information and support.

Effectiveness of Online Platforms Compared to Traditional Systems

60% of respondents found online platforms somewhat effective, and 30% found them very effective compared to traditional support systems. Only 10% found them not effective. Online platforms are generally perceived as effective in providing information about GBV. However, there is room for improvement to enhance their impact, especially in comparison to traditional support mechanisms.

Reporting and Support Mechanisms

40% of respondents had reported incidents of GBV through online platforms. In terms of ease of navigation, 30% found it easy to navigate, while 25% found it difficult or very difficult. While online platforms provide a means for reporting GBV incidents, navigation difficulties can hinder their usability for some users. Further refinement of these systems is needed to ensure accessibility and ease of use for all individuals.

Anonymity and Help-Seeking

65% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the anonymity of online platforms encourages victims to seek help. Anonymity is a key factor in encouraging victims of GBV to report incidents and seek support. Online platforms that prioritise user privacy can play a significant role in empowering victims to come forward.

Engagement and Community Mobilisation

50% of respondents had engaged in online discussions about GBV, and 45% agreed that online platforms had mobilised community efforts to address GBV. Online platforms are effective in fostering discussions and mobilising community efforts to address GBV, though half of the respondents had not participated in such activities, indicating room for increased user engagement.

Conclusions

The study reveals that online platforms are an effective tool in raising awareness, providing information, and supporting victims of gender-based violence. However, challenges such as ease of navigation and user engagement remain areas for improvement. The anonymity offered by these platforms is a crucial feature that encourages victims to seek help, underscoring the importance of privacy in online interventions.

Recommendations

Improve Platform Usability: Online platforms should focus on making their reporting and support mechanisms more user-friendly to ensure accessibility for all users, particularly those who may find navigating these systems difficult.

Increase Awareness and Outreach: Efforts should be made to further increase awareness about online platforms addressing GBV, especially targeting individuals who are not yet aware or engaged with these resources.

Enhance Anonymity Features: Given the positive response to anonymity, platforms should continue to enhance privacy and security features to build trust and encourage more victims to report incidents.

Community Engagement: Online platforms should actively encourage more users to participate in discussions and community efforts to address GBV. Campaigns and initiatives that promote user involvement could strengthen the collective action against GBV.

Partnerships with Traditional Support Systems: Combining the strengths of online platforms with traditional support systems can provide a more comprehensive response to GBV, offering both digital and in-person support options for victims.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future research could expand on this study by:

- i. Investigating the specific challenges users face when navigating online platforms;
- ii. Exploring the role of social media in raising awareness and driving community engagement on GBV issues; and
- iii. Conducting comparative studies between different types of online platforms to identify best practices in addressing GBV.

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