

Feminist Activism and Power Dynamics in the Digital Sphere: A Case study of #VisibleWikiWomen campaign

Abstract

Women's knowledge, achievements, and contributions to the world are invisible in so many ways. Power structures and system's privilege determine whose knowledge is represented online and whose voice' are heard. Digital Inequality is among the top five global risks in the world today, and the current COVID-19 pandemic has exposed these gaps. In the current age the momentum of change of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is enormous and this emerges as a great challenge to achieve gender equality for women (Technology and Social Justice Community, 2021). Although three-fourths of the women online today are from the Global South, yet the internet and Wikipedia, the encyclopedia of the world, don't reflect this reality in either content or contribution (Redi et al., 2020). The present study aims at building insights on how enduring feminist concerns are discussed through hashtag activist campaign #VisibleWikiWomen on Twitter.

Keywords: Digital Gender Divide, Biased AI, Feminist Activism, Feminist Digital Social Advocacy, Gender Equality

Introduction

Completing two decades in 2021, Wikipedia is the fifth most visited website in the world, and the platform is one of the largest multi-lingual, global online communities that collects and curates the many textures and layers of human knowledge (Routley, 2019). In the Wikiverse, the gender gap is the most salient. Representation of varied gender identities in content, readers, and contributors, found, less than 20% of the biographies in Wikipedia are about women, roughly 75% of readers in Wikipedia are men, and this disparity is alarmingly high when analyzing editors' gender distribution. Though studies have shown that inconsistent application of cultural norms and tension between central and peripheral contributors who adhere to community culture to differing degrees has impacted its image (Niederer & van Dijck, 2010), yet it has become the experimental educational equalizer and the solution to knowledge equity (Katherine, 2018).

Gender bias in technology

Research on AI bias is gaining momentum, studies shed light on how algorithms bias is absorbing and replicating the gender biases of their programmers and users across the web (Noble, 2018; Tarpley, 2020). According to Fuchs (2014), a critical analysis of social media can expose the economic power relations that operate in digital communications environments, helping us to understand who benefits and who is disadvantaged. Fuchs (2014), however, pays limited attention to feminism, as does other critical internet research. Digital spaces are not free from traditional resistance that women of opinion face; online spaces are not a utopia for feminist campaigning and are marked with gender-based violence, trolling, and misrepresentation.

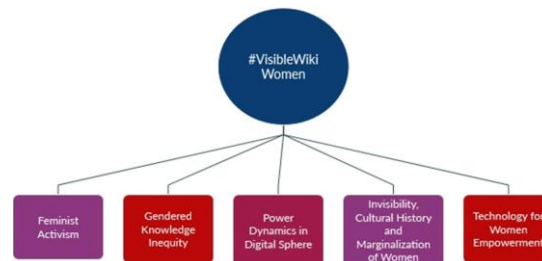
Research question

RQ1: How are the themes and predominant discourse emerging from the tweets on #VisibleWikiWomen campaign responding to the absence of women in Wikipedia?

Methodology

Following exploratory design, we studied the 1,067 English language tweets that contained hashtag #VisibleWikiWomen out of the 1500 tweets of #VisibleWikiWomen campaign collected from the first two years of the campaign (March 1, 2018–March 1, 2020). It is qualitative research building its insights on how #VisibleWikiWomen is being discussed at the intersection of enduring feminist concerns. Mixed methods were adopted for the purpose of the study. Computer mediated sentiment analysis of the tweets was done to understand the tonal responses (positive/negative/neutral) of the participants in the campaign using NVIVO.

Results and Discussions



In all, five out of seventeen categories led to the generation of Feminist Activism as a theme. Categories that had tweets on solidarity, collaboration, organization, mobilization, awareness, call for action, fighting for cause related to justice for women in the context of the campaign issue were labelled as one theme—Feminist Activism. Similarly tweets in the categories reflecting less images/missing images of women, bias and inequality in the data source led to the generation of Gendered Knowledge Equity as the discursive theme. Tweets on digital literacy, skill acquisition, e-learning, expertise and research inclusion in science and technology falling under the three categories from campaign: Digital skills, ICT for women and Women in STEM generated another salient theme: The elements of these five themes helped us to analyze the nature and characteristics of the discourse on #VisibleWikiWomen. Twitter response conveys that digital is future of cultural history hence, it is imperative to redress the gender imbalance in collaborative data banks and repositories. Absence of women in the digital world can be challenged by action, advocacy and activism where women collate, collaborate and create organized and sustained programs (virtual and integrated) to bridge the gender divide. There is a need to break the silence against role of organizations in missing images of women in information production by coming out with personal stories and data.

References

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