

Credocast

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The Global Crisis


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Social Media for Social Impact

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About Credo Advisory

Credo Advisory is a strategic communications firm that specializes in designing and implementing strategic, operational and tactical communication initiatives. We provide a full suite of communications support to our clients, which include public communications and advocacy, government relations, community engagement, media relations, crisis communications, digital communications and capacity building.

Our mission is to develop bespoke communications products, activities and campaigns based on knowledge, research and industry insights. With our ability to communicate effectively with diverse audiences and stakeholder groups, Credo's mission is to provide impactful strategic communications advisory from inception to implementation. At Credo, we are committed to improving the way societies communicate.

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“In essence, sexual violence is when a person exerts undue power over another person in order to obtain sexual gratification without consent.”

Introduction

Sexual violence is one of the most common human rights violations. Worsened by the culture of silence, there is a lot of stigma around sexual violence and rape in particular. The impact it has on the society is significant while women remain the main victims across racial, cultural, political, religious and geographic lines.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexual violence as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments, advances or acts to traffic or otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting.”¹ In essence, sexual violence is when a person exerts undue power over another person to obtain sexual gratification without consent.

This thought piece aims to highlight the importance of communication in mitigating sexual violence. It further addresses ways to craft messaging and maximize the use of social media in increasing awareness about sexual violence.



The Global Crisis

Approximately 35% of women have experienced some form of sexual violence globally.² However, it is a widely known fact that rape and other forms of sexual violence cases are mostly under-reported. This is due to the stigma associated with being labeled a rape survivor or victim of sexual harassment. Also, perpetrators of sexual violence are rarely prosecuted due to insufficient evidence and legal and social systems that enable an anti-victim environment.

Culture, religion, patriarchy, amongst other cultural norms, play a huge role in the high rate of sexual violence globally. For example, many countries don’t recognize spousal rape as a crime. In South Africa, which has the highest incidents of rape in the world, approximately 1 in 4 men admitted to committing rape.³ To address this global crisis, it is important to go beyond making new policies and instead, address the deeply rooted cultural beliefs and norms that foster sexual violence.

¹ WHO (2012) Understanding and addressing violence against women. Available at: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77434/WHO_RHR_12.37_eng.pdf;jsessionid=2B4CE3CC20B149D-761F815BDD5626AD8?sequence=1

² UNWOMEN (2019) Facts and figures: Ending violence against women. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

³ NBC News (2013) Survey: 1 in 4 South African men admit to rape. Available at: http://www.nbcnews.com/id/31456652/ns/world_news-africa/t/survey-south-african-men-admit-rape/

“ During the COVID-19 lockdown, the #WeAreTired hashtag trended on social media as Nigerian women spoke up concerning the disturbing increase in gender-based violence. ”

Sexual Violence in Nigeria

In Nigeria, sexual violence is recognized as a crime. There are running conversations around sexual violence, but the recent spike in gender-based violence, in the current COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, is forcing a national dialogue to be revisited.

The growing cases of this “hidden social pandemic” has triggered Nigerians to mobilize on social media and take the action to the streets. The Federal Government recently declared a state of emergency; while several civil society organizations are working with survivors to share their stories as a form of awareness creation about the severity of sexual violence in Nigeria.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, the #WeAreTired hashtag trended on social media as Nigerian women spoke up concerning the disturbing increase in gender-based violence. The watershed moment was the widespread public outrage over the rape and murder of a 22-year-old university student in Edo State. This was just one of the many cases of sexual and gender-based violence reported during the lockdown. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) encouraged survivors to reach out for support.⁴ Similarly, it is very common for rape to go unreported in Nigeria due to fear of stigmatization and police extortion. The #WeAreTired movement also campaigned against the culture of “victim-blaming” in Nigeria and emphasized the importance of teaching boys about consent and that “No means No.”



⁴ BBC (2020) #wearetired: Nigerian women speak up over the wave of violence. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52889965>

“In 2017, women globally spoke with one voice as they shared their sexual abuse stories on social media using the hashtag #MeToo.”

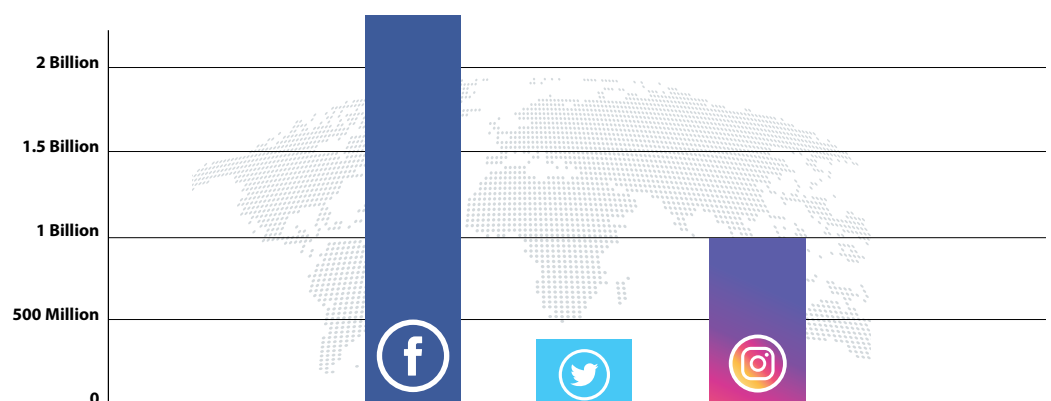
Campaigns against Sexual Violence

Historically, sexual violence campaigns have leveraged mainstream media and advocacy campaigns which have been relatively effective. However, the power of social media can be credited for sparking a cultural shift and global revolution against sexual violence. In 2017, women globally spoke with one voice as they shared their sexual abuse stories on social media using the hashtag “#MeToo.” A single tweet generated over 1.7 million responses across 85 countries⁵ and facilitated a global movement forcing people to have difficult conversations around sexual violence. The “#MeToo” movement revealed what could be achieved when survivors spoke up more leveraging social media.⁶

Social Media for Social Impact

A study on sexual violence and social media carried out in Ontario, Canada suggests that when sexual violence prevention efforts are incorporated into public education within social media spaces, there is a higher potential of it reaching a broader and more diverse audience. It further suggests that campaigns should focus on raising awareness by spreading information, offering resources, or debunking myths to encourage larger conversations about sexual violence which will, in turn, change behaviors over time.

There is a growing increase in the number of social media users. As of April 2020, statistics show that 2.6 billion people use Facebook, 387 million people use Twitter and 1 billion people use Instagram.⁸



⁵ Park (2017) #MeToo reaches 85 countries with 1.7M tweets. Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/metoo-reaches-85-countries-with-1-7-million-tweets/>

⁶ Selepak (2017) Social good from social media. Available at: <https://www.jou.ufl.edu/insights/social-good-from-social-media/>

⁷ Fairbairn (2013) Sexual Violence and Social Media: Building a Framework for Prevention. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280076573_Sexual_Violence_and_Social_Media_Building_a_Frame-

⁸ Most popular social networks worldwide as of April 2020, ranked by number of active users. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

These social media platforms are excellent tools for behavior change, and have played a key role in increasing awareness around social issues in ways traditional media has not.

To better leverage social media, messages need to be designed to achieve maximum results. Here are some key factors for crafting social media messaging:

“ The importance of correct information cannot be over emphasized. A single wrong information can jeopardize the integrity of the campaign. ”

1. Positive reinforcements

Campaign messages about sensitive issues tend to communicate negative scenarios rather than positive examples. To design a campaign that easily resonates with the masses, it is best to use examples of positive scenarios where sexual violence cases were reported and perpetrators, convicted.⁹

2. Simple and concise

Messages should be easy to understand and should resonate with the audience. The fewest words possible should be used to convey the idea. The average attention span is now about five minutes. To captivate the audience, messages should be straight to the point and highlight the keywords.¹⁰

3. Audience specific

Audience segmentation needs to be done and messages should be designed for the intended audience. To achieve this, it's important to first define the target audience, understand their needs and tailor messages that will connect.

4. Call-to-Action

A call-to-action is a statement crafted to encourage the desired response.¹¹ A campaign without a clear call-to-action can have people talking about the issues without the desired action. Sexual violence awareness campaigns can use call-to-actions that encourage rape survivors to share their stories and, in turn, inspire other survivors to speak up.

5. Modern, trendy and interactive

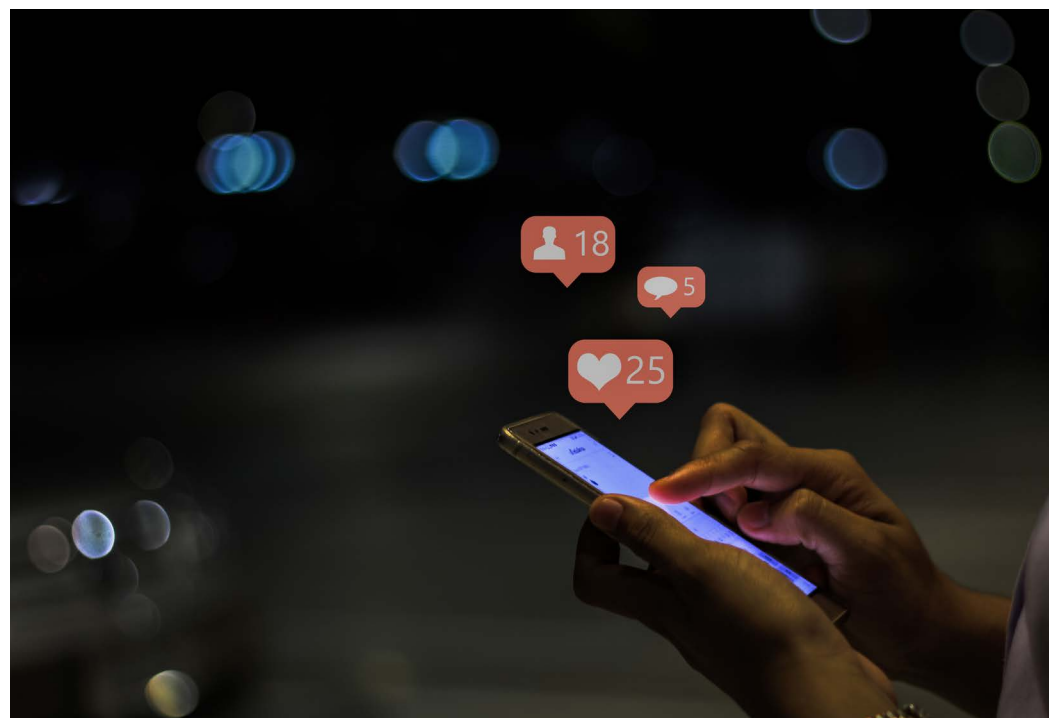
Messages should be in various innovative formats. Infographics, short videos and captivating images should be leveraged; as there is a need to increasingly compete for people's attention and influence their behavior through the various platforms.¹²

⁹ Most popular social networks worldwide as of April 2020, ranked by number of active users. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

¹⁰ Coulson (2013) The importance of a consistent message. Available at: <https://gainesvillebizreport.com/the-importance-of-a-consis->

¹¹ WHO (2017) WHO Strategic Communications Framework for effective communication. Available at: <https://www.who.int/mediacentre/communication-framework.pdf?ua=1>

¹² Butteriss (2020) The world's best Public Health social media campaigns. Available at: <https://www.bangthetable.com/blog/public-health-social-media-campaigns/>



“Sexual violence survivors can be encouraged to speak up more with the right information.”

6. Correct information

Accurate information builds trust.¹³ When the audience knows they can rely on the information from a social media platform, trust is built and they are more likely to accept the information as well as share with their counterparts. When communicating sensitive information in a sexual violence campaign, the importance of correct information cannot be overemphasized. A single piece of wrong information can jeopardize the integrity of the campaign.

Credo Experience

Credo Advisory's expertise in strategic and development communications has gender equality at its core. Credo facilitates the execution of clients' gender mainstreaming component by ensuring disaggregation of target audience data along gender lines, coordinating gender-based workshops and focus group discussions, supporting communication for the eradication of gender-based violence (GBV), amongst others. Credo's current support ensures that data polling results on gender-based violence during the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria are incorporated into tactical messages and communication materials such as eFlyers, videos, GIFs, etc. designed for the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 to curb sexual violence in the country.

Conclusion

Public enlightenment and engagement are important in combatting gender-based sexual violence. Societies need to encourage survivors to speak up and their stories amplified to increase awareness as well as to influence social norms. Social media campaigns have proven to be effective in driving advocacy and education on this societal issue, therefore, governments and civil society groups should have robust communication and engagement frameworks that leverage the power of social and mainstream media in addition to nurturing a social movement to mitigate this “hidden pandemic.”

¹³ WHO (2017) WHO Strategic Communications Framework for effective communication. Available at: <https://www.who.int/mediacentre/communication-framework.pdf?ua=1>