Influencer Mapping Report

[Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia]

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Contents

Executive Summary

This mapping report presents the findings of an influencer mapping exercise conducted in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia to identify and engage key social media influencers driving public discourse on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and feminist advocacy. The study responds to the increasing resistance against SRHR, which is largely driven by conservative religious, political, and patriarchal forces. With digital platforms emerging as critical spaces for public engagement, advocacy, and movement-building, this report explores how influencers can be effectively leveraged to promote gender justice, counter misinformation, and strengthen feminist narratives across the region.

Social media platforms such as X (Formerly Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have reshaped advocacy efforts, providing influencers with the tools to mobilize audiences, challenge restrictive norms, and amplify progressive conversations. Commissioned under the Transform SRHR Project, this mapping exercise identifies the most influential digital actors, examining their reach, content focus, audience engagement, and advocacy strategies. The report also outlines concrete ways civil society organizations can collaborate with these influencers to advance SRHR messaging, broaden public engagement, and respond to online backlash and misinformation campaigns. The mapping was carried out through multi-analyses of influencer survey findings, literature review, and assessment of social media monitoring tools.

Structure

The report is organized into nine key chapters, beginning with a *Background* section that outlines the purpose and objectives of the influencer mapping exercise within Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia. This is followed by a *Literature Review,* which explores key Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) issues in East Africa, the legal frameworks governing SRHR, socio-cultural influences, gender-based violence, and media coverage related to SRHR advocacy.

The chapter on *Understanding Social Media Influencing* provides an in-depth analysis of social media influencing through a feminist lens, categorizing influencers, discussing pricing models, and outlining key considerations for selecting influencers. The *Methodology* chapter details the research approach, including sampling techniques, surveys and interviews, social media monitoring, and an overview of the influencers identified.

The *Findings* chapter presents insights into social media influencing across different contexts, analyzing audience engagement, influencer alignment, pricing structures, and platform narratives. It also examines the challenges and gaps in leveraging social media for SRHR and feminist advocacy, alongside strategies for measuring impact. A dedicated *Feminist Analysis of the Findings* follows, providing a critical perspective on digital advocacy dynamics.

The *'Why Use Social Media for SRHR and Feminist Advocacy?'* Chapter highlights successful campaigns in Eastern and Southern Africa and discusses the contextual relevance of social media advocacy. This leads to the *Recommendations* chapter, which offers actionable strategies for engaging influencers, building partnerships, addressing financial barriers, and countering online censorship. The report concludes with a Conclusion summarizing key insights and strategic takeaways. Additional supporting data and references are compiled in the *Appendices.*

Summary of Findings

The analysis finds that influencers have become central figures in shaping SRHR discourse, particularly among young audiences. Their ability to craft relatable, human-centered narratives makes them highly effective in

promoting gender justice, reproductive rights, and bodily autonomy.

Key findings include:

◆ **Types of influencers:** Influencers were categorized based on their reach (nano, micro, macro, and mega-influencers), niche (SRHR, feminist advocacy, gender-based violence), and platform of engagement (Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook).

◆ **Platform-specific strategies:**

  ◆ Twitter serves as a hub for real-time advocacy, trending conversations, and policy discussions.

  ◆ Instagram is widely used for visual storytelling, awareness campaigns, and influencer collaborations.

  ◆ TikTok has emerged as a key platform for youth engagement, leveraging short-form videos and interactive content to disseminate SRHR information.

◆ **Dominant SRHR narratives:** Influencers frequently address topics such as bodily autonomy, comprehensive sexuality education, access to contraceptives, LGBTQ+ rights, and gender equality.

◆ **Barriers to effective advocacy:** Influencers advocating for SRHR issues often face significant pushback from conservative groups, digital censorship, monetization of digital activism and online harassment, particularly those addressing LGBTQ+ rights and abortion-related topics.

◆ **Effective strategies for advocacy:** The most impactful approaches identified include collaborative campaigns with civil society organizations, hashtag activism (#MyDressMyChoice, #EndFGM, #SheDecidesUganda), personal storytelling to humanize SRHR issues, and interactive engagement through Q&A sessions, polls, and live discussions.

Key Recommendations

To strengthen SRHR advocacy and enhance the impact of influencer-led campaigns, the report outlines the following key recommendations:

◆ **Collaborate with non-influencer professionals:** Partner with doctors, lawyers, investigative journalists, and policy experts to enhance the

credibility of SRHR content. This ensures messaging is evidence-based and fact-driven, bridging the gap between grassroots storytelling and expert-backed advocacy.

- **Organize Values Clarification and Attitude Transformation (VCAT) workshops:** Prioritize facilitated training sessions to equip influencers with the confidence and knowledge to challenge harmful narratives, particularly on sensitive topics like LGBTQ+ rights and safe abortion. Ongoing mentorship will ensure influencers remain well-informed and capable of handling nuanced discussions.

- **Build long-term digital campaigns for sustainable impact:** Move beyond one-off collaborations by designing multi-phase campaigns that span several months. Incorporate education, engagement, and reinforcement strategies, supported by regular feedback mechanisms to adapt to audience needs and shifting discourse.

- **Strengthen content strategies:** Provide influencers with access to up-to-date research, training, and technical support. Prioritize engaging formats such as short-form videos (TikTok, Instagram Reels), testimonials, infographics, and interactive posts tailored to country-specific socio-political contexts.

- **Implement continuous monitoring and evaluation (M&E):** Establish comprehensive M&E frameworks to track reach, engagement, sentiment analysis, and real-world impact. Share periodic assessments with influencers to reinforce the value of their work and encourage sustained commitment.

- **Invest in sustainable resource allocation:** Address financial constraints by funding operational costs, content production tools, professional equipment (cameras, microphones, editing software), and mental health resources to prevent burnout. Support access to podcasting technology, travel opportunities, and global SRHR platforms.

- **Develop clear impact assessment frameworks:** Measure success beyond vanity metrics by tracking audience participation, advocacy engagement, and increased access to SRHR services. Use direct feedback, real-world advocacy participation, and sentiment analysis to refine strategies.

- **Strengthen support for safer online spaces:** Combat digital harassment and censorship by providing digital security training, emergency response

mechanisms, and advocating for platform accountability to protect feminist content.

◆ **Address the systemic underfunding of feminist movements:** Increase financial investment in feminist and SRHR initiatives to ensure long-term sustainability, particularly for micro- and nano-influencers who often engage in unpaid advocacy despite having highly engaged audiences.

◆ **Expand SRHR advocacy beyond urban centers:** Bridge the digital divide by training community-based influencers in local languages, integrating offline engagement methods, and prioritizing low-bandwidth platforms like WhatsApp for rural outreach.

◆ **Counter algorithmic biases and social media censorship:** Use coded language, decentralized content-sharing strategies, and cross-platform distribution to circumvent suppression. Collaborate with digital rights organizations to advocate for fair content moderation policies.

◆ **Encourage intersectional and inclusive SRHR advocacy:** Actively include marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities, sex workers, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Integrate intersectional feminist perspectives and co-create content with underrepresented voices.

◆ **Facilitate cross-border knowledge sharing and regional networks:** Establish platforms for influencers across Eastern and Southern Africa to share best practices, host joint training sessions, and launch collective digital campaigns.

◆ **Develop alternative revenue models for SRHR influencers:** Explore crowdfunding, grant funding, and ethical brand partnerships aligned with feminist values to reduce reliance on commercially driven or anti-feminist sponsorships.

◆ **Boost posts and content reach strategically:** Allocate budgets for paid promotions to counter algorithmic suppression, targeting demographics often excluded from SRHR discourse (e.g., rural youth, persons with disabilities, queer communities). Train influencers in digital marketing to maximize impact while adhering to platform guidelines.

◆ **Adopt platform-specific strategies:** Tailor content to each platform's culture and technical design—e.g., Twitter for real-time discourse, TikTok for storytelling, and WhatsApp for community-based dialogues.

◆ **Prioritize feminist values in influencer selection and training:** Choose influencers based on alignment with reproductive justice and intersectionality, not just reach. Provide co-developed training on SRHR literacy, digital safety, and ethical storytelling.

◆ **Ensure inclusive engagement with persons with disabilities:** Collaborate with disabled influencers to co-create accessible content, integrate screen-reader-friendly formats, and adopt multi-sensory communication approaches.

◆ Sustain ethical engagement and debriefing: Offer post-campaign reflection spaces to address emotional labor, provide feedback, and maintain relationships with care and integrity.

Limitations

While this mapping exercise provides critical insights into influencer-driven SRHR advocacy, several limitations made it challenging to analyze the experiences of social media influencers to scale:

◆ **Monetization of digital activism:** Influencers often expect financial compensation for their participation in any digital related work. The inclusion of monetary compensation to research can lead to biased responses and be a tool of undue coercion.[1] The unavailability of compensation limited the number of influencers willing to take part in the survey.

◆ **Restricted access to social media analytics:** Many advanced monitoring tools require paid subscriptions, limiting the consultant's ability to track data comprehensively.

◆ **Gaps in research on influencer advocacy:** There is limited literature on the influencer movement in Eastern and Southern Africa, particularly within the SRHR and feminist advocacy space. This posed a challenge in critically analyzing the experiences of social media influencers against what was shared in the survey.

◆ **Rapidly evolving digital landscape:** The constantly shifting nature of social media trends, algorithms, and digital regulations means that data is

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1   'The Principle of Respect for Autonomy and Feminist Bioethics' (2022) Journal of Medical Ethics https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9427899/ accessed 27 January 2025.

time-sensitive and requires continuous reassessment. This made it hard to critically hinge on campaigns that were successful in the past since their prominence in the social media public space is often short-lived and their impact on public policy and action is difficult to trace without having access to reports from the specific organizations that they worked with.

◆ **Language barriers:** The selected countries for assessment, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Zambia. have diverse linguistic landscapes, and many influencers post content in local languages not covered by common social media monitoring tools. This resulted in missed data, difficulty in identifying key influencers, and challenges in cross-country engagement.

The findings of the influencer mapping exercise underscore the significant role that social media influencers play in shaping SRHR and feminist advocacy in Eastern and Southern Africa. By strategically engaging with influencers, civil society organizations can expand the reach of progressive SRHR narratives, counter misinformation, and drive social change. However, ensuring sustained impact requires well-structured collaborations, strong content strategies, and continuous evaluation of digital advocacy efforts. This report offers practical recommendations for identifying and engaging influencers as key allies in the fight for reproductive justice and gender equality, providing a blueprint for strengthening SRHR advocacy across digital spaces.

Glossary of terms

Advocacy: Strategic actions or campaigns to influence public opinion, policy, or behavior in support of a particular cause, such as SRHR or feminist issues.

Algorithm: A social media algorithm is a set of rules, signals, and data that govern how content is filtered, ranked, and recommended to users on the platform.

Algorithmic Bias: Prejudices or favoritism embedded in social media algorithms that can amplify or suppress specific content, impacting the visibility of SRHR advocacy.

Algorithmic Suppression: The process by which social media platforms

deprioritize, shadow ban, or remove certain types of content, often disproportionately affecting feminist and SRHR advocacy.

Bodily Autonomy: The right of individuals to have control over their bodies without external influence or coercion.

Cancel Culture: A social phenomenon where individuals or entities are boycotted or ostracized due to controversial or offensive actions, comments, or positions.

Coded Messaging: The practice of using alternative language, symbols, or indirect references to discuss sensitive topics and bypass censorship.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE): Holistic educational programs that address human development, sexual health, consent, relationships, gender, and cultural norms, tailored to various age groups and contexts.

Content Creator: An individual who produces and shares original material, such as videos, blogs, or social media posts, often to engage or educate a specific audience.

Counter-Narrative: Content or messaging created to challenge prevailing stereotypes, misinformation, or harmful societal norms.

De-platforming: The removal or banning of individuals or organizations from social media platforms, often used against feminist and SRHR advocates.

Digital Activism: Using digital tools like social media, blogs, and websites to advocate for social and political change.

Digital Advocacy: The use of digital tools, including social media and online petitions, to drive awareness and policy change.

Digital Divide: The gap between individuals or communities with differing access to technology, such as the internet, devices, or digital literacy, that affects participation in online advocacy.

Digital Gender-Based Violence (DGBV): Online harassment, cyberbullying, doxxing, and other forms of violence targeting individuals based on their gender.

Doxing: The collection of a user's private information across multiple

platforms (including social media) by an unauthorized individual, who then publishes the information in an attempt to shame or embarrass the user. This is a form of cyberbullying.

Engagement Metrics: Data points such as likes, shares, and comments that measure audience interaction with content.

Engagement Rate: A metric used in social media to measure how actively an audience interacts with content, typically calculated through likes, shares, comments, and clicks.

Feminist Lens: A perspective that critically examines issues of power, privilege, and gender inequality to advance social justice and equality.

Gatekeeping: The control of access to information or influence, often used to describe how platforms, institutions, or individuals determine who gets visibility and credibility.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Any harmful act directed at an individual based on their gender identity, often encompassing domestic violence, sexual harassment, and harmful traditional practices like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Hashtag Activism: The strategic use of hashtags on social media to raise awareness, mobilize action, and build communities around social and political issues (e.g., #EndFGM, #MyDressMyChoice).

Influencer Economy: The financial ecosystem where social media influencers monetize their content through sponsorships, partnerships, and brand deals.

Influencer Marketing: A strategy where influencers promote products, services, or causes to their audience to drive awareness and engagement.

Intersectionality: A framework that explores how overlapping identities (e.g., gender, race, class, sexuality) create unique experiences of privilege or oppression.

LGBTQ+: An inclusive acronym representing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Macro-, Micro-, Nano-, and Mega-Influencers: Categories based on audience size:

- **Nano-Influencers:** 1K–10K followers

- **Micro-Influencers:** 10K–50K followers

- **Macro-Influencers:** 50K–1M followers

- **Mega-Influencers:** Over 1M followers

Misinformation vs. Disinformation:

- **Misinformation** refers to false or misleading information spread without harmful intent.

- **Disinformation** refers to false information deliberately spread to deceive.

Misogyny: Dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women, often manifesting as discrimination or hostility.

Patriarchy: A societal system where men dominate in leadership roles, moral authority, and control over resources, often marginalizing women and gender-diverse individuals.

Performative Activism: Advocacy that is done for social capital or visibility rather than genuine commitment to a cause.

Platform Censorship: Restrictions or suppression of content by social media platforms, often disproportionately affecting advocacy topics like SRHR and feminist issues.

Reproductive Coercion: A form of abuse where individuals are pressured, manipulated, or forced into making reproductive decisions against their will.

Reproductive Justice: A concept that integrates reproductive rights with social justice, emphasizing access to resources and systemic change to allow individuals to make autonomous reproductive decisions.

Safe Spaces: Environments, both online and offline, where individuals can freely express themselves without fear of discrimination, harassment, or judgment.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR): A comprehensive set of rights encompassing access to healthcare, education, and autonomy over sexual and reproductive decisions, including contraception, abortion, and maternal health.

Shadowbanning: A form of content suppression where a user's posts are made less visible to others without their knowledge.

Social Media Moderation: The policies and practices used by platforms to regulate content, which often disproportionately impact feminist and SRHR content.

Stigma: Negative societal attitudes or beliefs that discredit or marginalize individuals or groups, particularly in contexts like SRHR or LGBTQ+ rights.

Storytelling Advocacy: Using personal or community narratives to humanize issues, evoke empathy, and create impactful connections with audiences.

Sustainable Partnerships: Long-term collaborations between influencers, organizations, and communities aimed at building trust and achieving systemic change.

Transform SRHR Project: An initiative aimed at leveraging social media and influencer collaborations to promote progressive SRHR narratives in Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda and Zambia.

Values Clarification and Attitude Transformation (VCAT): Educational workshops designed to help individuals explore their beliefs, challenge biases, and develop a nuanced understanding of SRHR issues.

Viral Content: Social media posts or campaigns that gain rapid, widespread attention due to sharing, commenting, and liking.

Youth-Led Advocacy: Campaigns and initiatives spearheaded by young people to amplify issues affecting their communities, often using digital platforms for outreach.

Chapter 1: Background

SRHR remains a highly contentious issue across Eastern and Southern Africa, with much of the public discourse shaped by socio-political conservatism, religious norms, and patriarchal structures that continue to dictate the lives of women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals. In Uganda, legislative measures such as the Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2023,[2] and limitations on comprehensive SRHR information and services represent significant rollbacks in SRHR gains. Similar challenges exist in Kenya, Rwanda, and Zambia, where conservative voices continue to stoke fears around issues like safe abortion, contraceptives, and LGBTQ+ rights.[3]

At the same time, Eastern and Southern Africa is witnessing an evolving media landscape. While still influential, traditional media has seen a decline in its ability to shape public opinion in isolation. Social media platforms such as Twitter (X), Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok increasingly play a central role in informing public debates, particularly among youth. Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for advocacy in the global fight for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and gender equality. In Eastern and Southern Africa, particularly in countries like Uganda, Zambia, Kenya, and Rwanda, feminist movements and SRHR advocates are leveraging platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to raise awareness, mobilize action, and challenge restrictive laws and cultural norms. Social media provides a space for grassroots movements to flourish, bypassing traditional barriers such as media censorship, government repression, and

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2   The Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023
3   Amnesty International, 'Mapping anti-gay laws in Africa' https://www.amnesty.org.uk/lgbti-lgbt-gay-human-rights-law-africa-uganda-kenya-nigeria-cameroon Accessed January 13, 2025; Hagopian, A., Rao, D., Katz, A., Sanford, S., & Barnhart, S. (2017). Anti-homosexual legislation and HIV-related stigma in African nations: What has been the role of PEPFAR? Global Health Action, 10(1), Article 1306391. https://doi.org/10.1080/16549716.2017.1306391

cultural taboos. Influencers, who are not traditional media personalities, have emerged as critical players in shaping narratives, especially on SRHR and feminist issues.

> *"In our interconnected world, social media has become a meeting point for transformative feminist movements, acting as a catalyst for different revolutions and uprisings such as #MeToo and #EatTheRich. It empowers individual activists and organizations to amplify their voices and effect change beyond their contexts." -*
> *Massah Esther Nyally Bockarie[4]*

This influencer mapping was necessitated by the need to identify and collaborate with these digital actors, who hold the power to shift public attitudes, challenge harmful societal norms, and promote the bodily autonomy and integrity of women, girls, and gender-diverse persons.

1.1) Purpose and Objectives

The primary purpose of this influencer report is to provide a clear understanding of the key digital actors—particularly influencers and content creators—who are shaping public opinion on SRHR and women's rights across Eastern and Southern Africa to guide how institutions can utilize their skills for reproductive justice and feminist advocacy.

Specific Objectives:

1. Identify the most prominent influencers and content creators across Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia who engage with SRHR and feminist issues.

2. Understand the digital platforms these influencers use, their audience demographics, and the narratives they employ to engage followers on

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4   African Feminism. (2024). Social media as the new frontier for anti-gender work. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from https://africanfeminism.com/social-media-as-the-new-frontier-for-anti-gender-work/#:~:text=In%20our%20interconnected%20world%2C%20social,change%20beyond%20their%20own%20contexts

SRHR.

3. Explore influencers' engagement strategies to reach their audiences and how these strategies can be harnessed for progressive SRHR advocacy.

4. Recommend how civil society actors can partner with influencers to start more robust, evidence-based SRHR conversations and counter conservative backlash.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) are central to achieving gender equality and improving public health in Sub-Saharan Africa. The region, including countries like Uganda, Zambia, Kenya, and Rwanda, faces unique socio-political challenges and cultural dynamics that influence SRHR policies and practices. This literature review provides an extensive examination of existing academic research, media reports, social media analytics, and advocacy materials to map out the SRHR landscape in these four countries, and how feminist advocacy on social media has played a role in shaping the discourse.

2.1) Understanding SRHR in Eastern and Southern Africa

SRHR encompasses a wide range of issues, including access to contraception, maternal healthcare, abortion rights, education on reproductive health, HIV/AIDS prevention, and gender-based violence (GBV). The global consensus on SRHR is driven by the belief that individuals should have autonomy over their bodies, sexual health, and reproductive choices. However, in East Africa, SRHR is deeply influenced by historical, cultural, religious, and political factors that often limit individuals' ability to exercise these rights freely.[5]

2.2) SRHR and the Legal Framework

The policy and legal landscape on Sexual and Reproductive Health and

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5   This is information obtained from a training manual by the Kenya Legal & Ethical Issues Network on HIV and AID, found https://www.kelinkenya.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/SRHR-Training-Curriculum-Final.pdf

Rights (SRHR) in the countries under review, is shaped by a combination of constitutional guarantees, restrictive abortion laws, and varying levels of commitment to regional and continental frameworks. Uganda has one of the most restrictive SRHR environments, with conservative political and religious influences limiting access to comprehensive sexuality education, contraception, and abortion. Laws such as the Penal Code Act (1950, as amended 2007) and the Anti-Homosexuality Act (2023) further restrict reproductive rights and LGBTQ+ inclusion. Although Uganda is a signatory to the Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) Ministerial Commitments on Sexuality Education, it has not re-committed due to hesitance over inclusive language.[6] Zambia's Termination of Pregnancy Act (1972) theoretically allows abortion under specific conditions, but implementation barriers and societal stigma make access difficult, contributing to unsafe abortions and maternal health risks.

Kenya's 2010 Constitution guarantees the right to health, including reproductive health. However, abortion is restricted except in cases of rape or danger to the mother's life, while societal taboos still hinder access to contraception and SRHR education. Rwanda, recognized for its leadership in gender equality, has made significant progress in maternal healthcare and family planning. Yet, abortion laws remain restrictive, allowing termination only in cases of rape, incest, or health risks to the mother. At the continental level, Uganda, Kenya, and Zambia have aligned with frameworks such as the Maputo Plan of Action and the African Union Continental Policy Framework on SRHR, while Rwanda participated in the development of the ESA Commitment without formally signing. Across the region, legal inconsistencies, cultural opposition, and gaps in policy implementation continue to present barriers to fully realizing SRHR.

2.3) Socio-Cultural and Religious Influences on SRHR

Across Eastern and Southern Africa, SRHR issues are deeply embedded

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6   KIT Royal Tropical Institute, Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future (O3) Programme: Final Evaluation Report (Amsterdam: KIT Royal Tropical Institute, 2023), p.24. https://www.kit.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Our-Rights-Our-Lives-Our-Future-Programme-Final-evaluation-report.pdf
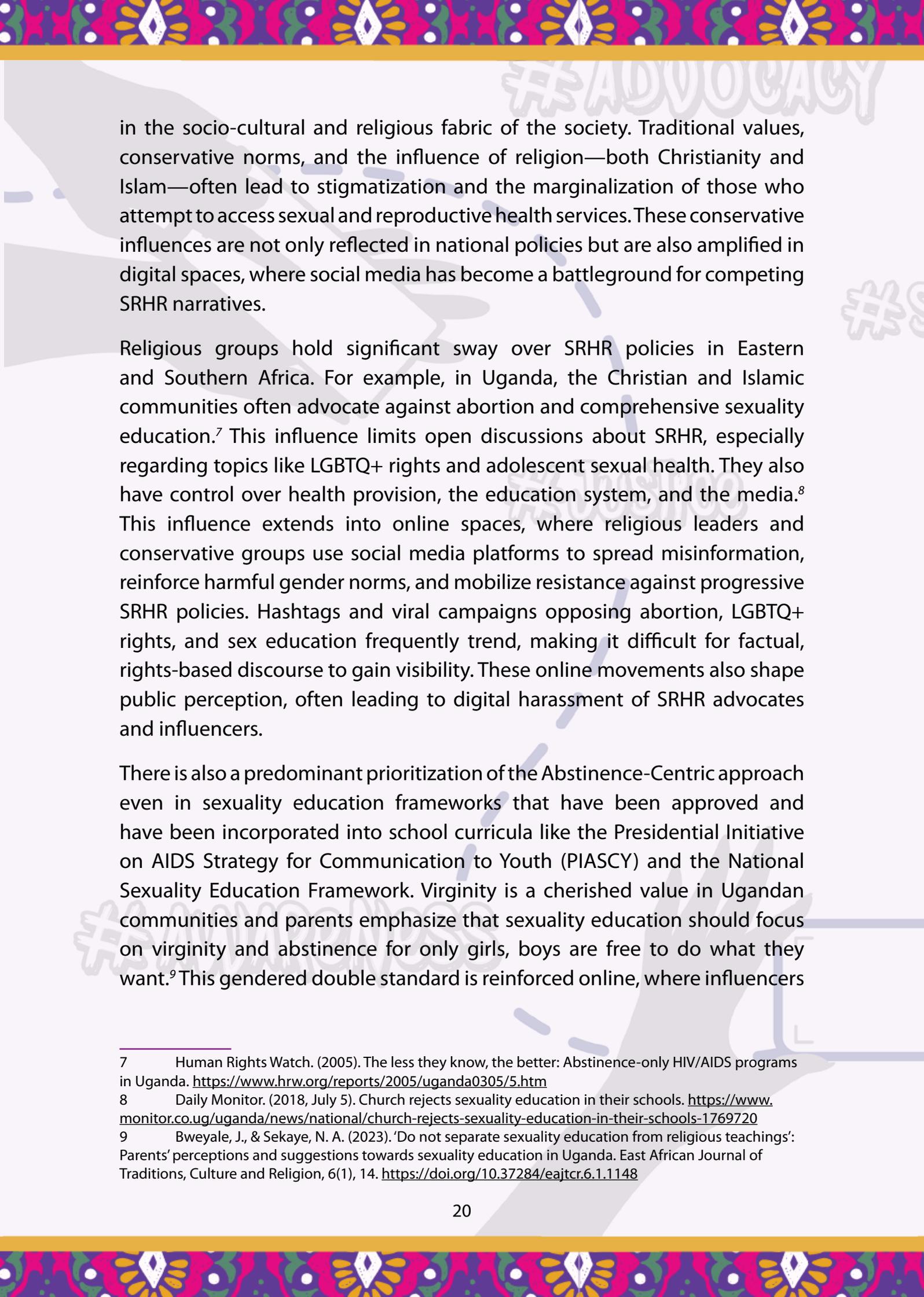
in the socio-cultural and religious fabric of the society. Traditional values, conservative norms, and the influence of religion—both Christianity and Islam—often lead to stigmatization and the marginalization of those who attempt to access sexual and reproductive health services. These conservative influences are not only reflected in national policies but are also amplified in digital spaces, where social media has become a battleground for competing SRHR narratives.

Religious groups hold significant sway over SRHR policies in Eastern and Southern Africa. For example, in Uganda, the Christian and Islamic communities often advocate against abortion and comprehensive sexuality education.[7] This influence limits open discussions about SRHR, especially regarding topics like LGBTQ+ rights and adolescent sexual health. They also have control over health provision, the education system, and the media.[8] This influence extends into online spaces, where religious leaders and conservative groups use social media platforms to spread misinformation, reinforce harmful gender norms, and mobilize resistance against progressive SRHR policies. Hashtags and viral campaigns opposing abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, and sex education frequently trend, making it difficult for factual, rights-based discourse to gain visibility. These online movements also shape public perception, often leading to digital harassment of SRHR advocates and influencers.

There is also a predominant prioritization of the Abstinence-Centric approach even in sexuality education frameworks that have been approved and have been incorporated into school curricula like the Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy for Communication to Youth (PIASCY) and the National Sexuality Education Framework. Virginity is a cherished value in Ugandan communities and parents emphasize that sexuality education should focus on virginity and abstinence for only girls, boys are free to do what they want.[9] This gendered double standard is reinforced online, where influencers

7   Human Rights Watch. (2005). The less they know, the better: Abstinence-only HIV/AIDS programs in Uganda. https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/uganda0305/5.htm
8   Daily Monitor. (2018, July 5). Church rejects sexuality education in their schools. https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/church-rejects-sexuality-education-in-their-schools-1769720
9   Bweyale, J., & Sekaye, N. A. (2023). 'Do not separate sexuality education from religious teachings': Parents' perceptions and suggestions towards sexuality education in Uganda. East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion, 6(1), 14. https://doi.org/10.37284/eajtcr.6.1.1148

promoting comprehensive SRHR face backlash, while those advocating for abstinence gain widespread approval.

In Uganda, conservative groups misrepresented Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as a tool intended to 'promote immoral or homosexual behavior'.[10] A 2016 news report falsely alleged that 100 schools in Kampala were being "duped into training disguised homosexuality" through the **World Starts With Me** program.[11] This moral panic led to the program's immediate ban. As a result, Rutgers' partners, such as Reproductive Health Uganda and Straight Talk Foundation, limited their services to a narrow range of interventions under PIASCY—a program focused on HIV/AIDS prevention and teacher training in guidance and counseling. However, PIASCY lacks the depth and inclusivity of comprehensive sexuality education, making it a far less effective tool for addressing broader SRHR issues.[12]

Today, similar narratives circulate widely on social media, often leading to moral panic that results in policy rollbacks or increased censorship of progressive content. This digital opposition highlights the urgent need for social media influencers who can counter misinformation with credible, engaging, and culturally relevant content.

The Constitution of Zambia, in the preambular clauses of its Constitution, recognizes the state as a Christian country.[13] Due to this, faith-based organizations often promote abstinence-only sexual education, restricting the implementation of comprehensive sexual education (CSE) programs.[14] In the digital space, this influence translates into coordinated efforts to

10   Rutgers International. (2021). Culture, religion, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (p. 9). https://rutgers.international/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Knowledgefile-Culture-Religion-SRHR.pdf

11   Daily Monitor, At least 100 schools tricked into teaching homosexuality (Kampala: Daily Monitor, 6 May 2016), https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/education/at-least-100-schools-tricked-into-teaching-homosexuality-1649494 [Accessed 13 April 2025].

12   Rutgers International. (2021). Culture, religion, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (p. 9). https://rutgers.international/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Knowledgefile-Culture-Religion-SRHR.pdf

13   Preamble of the Constitution of Zambia (Amendment), Act No. 2 of 2016. https://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/documents/amendment_act/Constitution%20of%20Zambia%20%20(Amendment),%202016-Act%20No.%202_0.pdf

14   Chavula, M.P., Zulu, J.M., Goicolea, I. et al. Unlocking policy synergies, challenges and contradictions influencing implementation of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Framework in Zambia: a policy analysis. Health Res Policy Sys 21, 97 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-023-01037-y; Chirwa-Kambole E, Svanemyr J, Sandøy I, Hangoma P, Zulu JM. Acceptability of youth clubs focusing on comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education in rural Zambian schools: a case of Central Province. BMC Health Serv Res. 2020 Jan 16;20(1):42. doi: 10.1186/s12913-020-4889-0. PMID: 31948452; PMCID: PMC6966797.
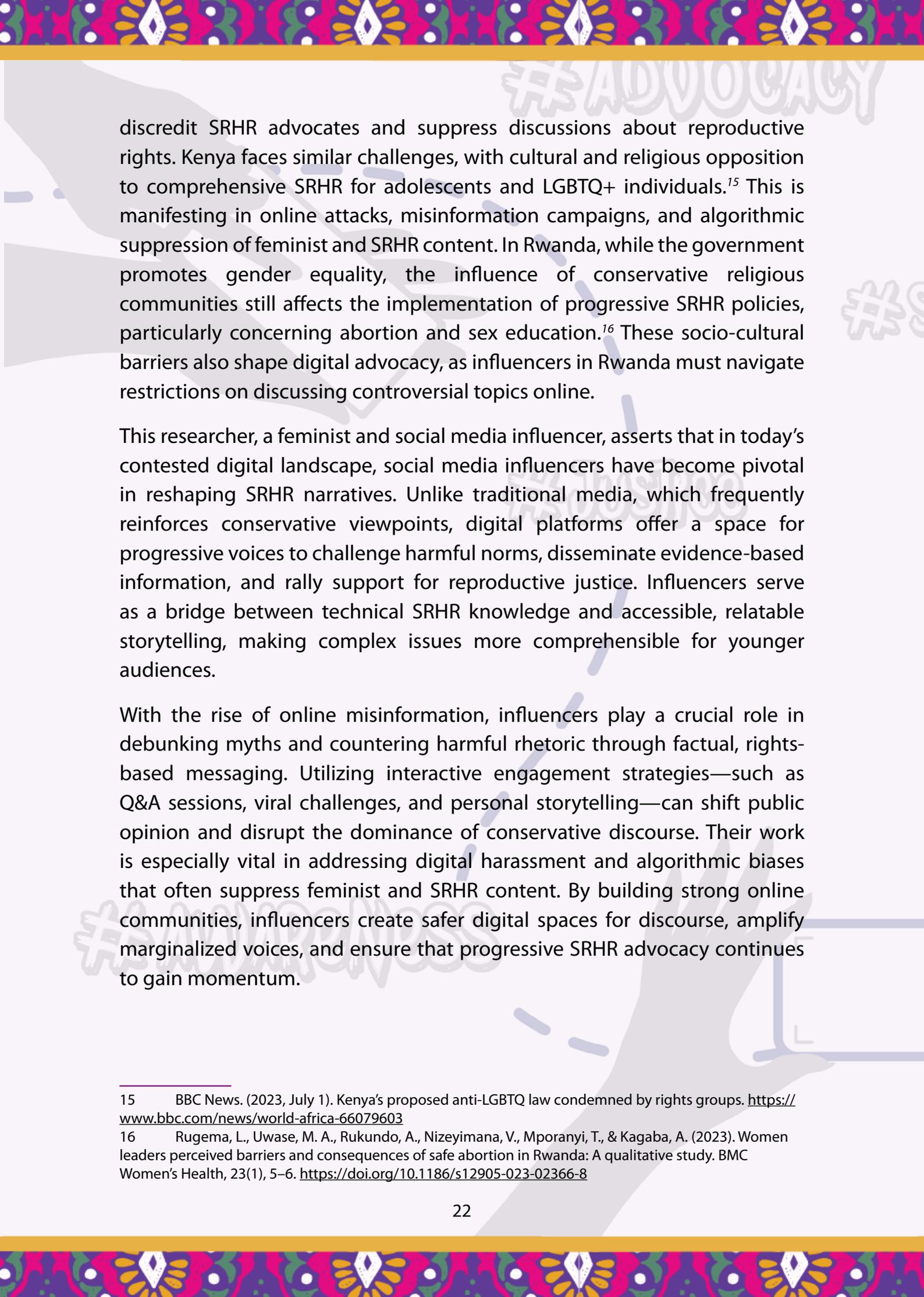
discredit SRHR advocates and suppress discussions about reproductive rights. Kenya faces similar challenges, with cultural and religious opposition to comprehensive SRHR for adolescents and LGBTQ+ individuals.[15] This is manifesting in online attacks, misinformation campaigns, and algorithmic suppression of feminist and SRHR content. In Rwanda, while the government promotes gender equality, the influence of conservative religious communities still affects the implementation of progressive SRHR policies, particularly concerning abortion and sex education.[16] These socio-cultural barriers also shape digital advocacy, as influencers in Rwanda must navigate restrictions on discussing controversial topics online.

This researcher, a feminist and social media influencer, asserts that in today's contested digital landscape, social media influencers have become pivotal in reshaping SRHR narratives. Unlike traditional media, which frequently reinforces conservative viewpoints, digital platforms offer a space for progressive voices to challenge harmful norms, disseminate evidence-based information, and rally support for reproductive justice. Influencers serve as a bridge between technical SRHR knowledge and accessible, relatable storytelling, making complex issues more comprehensible for younger audiences.

With the rise of online misinformation, influencers play a crucial role in debunking myths and countering harmful rhetoric through factual, rights-based messaging. Utilizing interactive engagement strategies—such as Q&A sessions, viral challenges, and personal storytelling—can shift public opinion and disrupt the dominance of conservative discourse. Their work is especially vital in addressing digital harassment and algorithmic biases that often suppress feminist and SRHR content. By building strong online communities, influencers create safer digital spaces for discourse, amplify marginalized voices, and ensure that progressive SRHR advocacy continues to gain momentum.

15   BBC News. (2023, July 1). Kenya's proposed anti-LGBTQ law condemned by rights groups. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66079603
16   Rugema, L., Uwase, M. A., Rukundo, A., Nizeyimana, V., Mporanyi, T., & Kagaba, A. (2023). Women leaders perceived barriers and consequences of safe abortion in Rwanda: A qualitative study. BMC Women's Health, 23(1), 5–6. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-023-02366-8

2.4) SRHR and Gender–Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence is a critical component of SRHR. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable. GBV exacerbates the challenges women face in accessing SRHR services, and feminist advocates often highlight the intersection of violence, poverty, and restricted access to sexual and reproductive rights. In recent years, the rise of digital platforms has led to the increasing visibility of GBV, both in terms of advocacy and how violence is perpetuated online. Digital GBV—including cyberbullying, doxxing, revenge porn, and targeted harassment—has become a significant barrier for women, particularly those who engage in feminist and SRHR activism. Social media platforms often serve as both a battleground for these issues and a tool for amplifying the voices of survivors and advocates.

Online gender-based violence (GBV) is a growing problem in Eastern and Southern Africa, with women and girls facing harassment, abuse, and exploitation in digital spaces. The rise of social media and online platforms has provided new avenues for perpetrators of GBV to target and harm vulnerable individuals. This has serious implications for the safety, well-being, and empowerment of women and girls in the region. It also contributes to broader societal issues, such as gender inequality and social exclusion.[17]

Uganda: GBV, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and female genital mutilation (FGM), remains prevalent. Uganda Bureau of Statistics(UBOS), 2021 National Survey on Violence in Uganda reported that 95% of Ugandan women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. Feminist advocates in Uganda have drawn attention to the lack of sufficient healthcare services and legal protections for survivors of GBV.[18] These same advocates, many of whom are vocal on social media, frequently face online abuse for their activism. Women who challenge gender norms—particularly those advocating for reproductive rights or LGBTQ+ inclusion—are often

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17   Unwanted Witness, Online Gender-Based Violence (2024) https://www.unwantedwitness.org/online-gender-based-violence/ accessed 27 January 2025.

18   Afrobarometer. (2024). Gender-based violence ranks as top women's rights issue for Ugandans (Policy Paper No. AD792). https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/AD792-Gender-based-violence-ranks-as-top-womens-rights-issue-for-Ugandans-Afrobarometer-4april24-.pdf; Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda. (2023). The persistence of female genital mutilation among the Tepeth and Pokot in Karamoja. https://crossculturalfoundation.or.ug/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-persistence-of-Female-Genital-Mutilation-among-the-Tepeth-and-Pokot-in-Karamoja-CCFU-2023-min.pdf

subjected to coordinated harassment, threats, and public shaming. Social media has become a tool both for perpetuating gendered violence and for exposing it, as seen in the viral campaigns that document cases of domestic violence and femicides like #StopGBV, #MeToo, and #16DaysOfActivism.

Zambia: Similarly, Zambia struggles with high levels of GBV, with many women being forced into early marriages, which affects their reproductive autonomy. Zambia has ratified several international agreements on women's rights, but enforcement at the local level remains weak.[19] Online spaces reflect these systemic challenges, with survivors and activists facing stigma when they speak out about their experiences. Many women fear reporting GBV cases due to the threat of online retaliation, including cyber harassment and doxxing. This digital hostility reinforces silence around GBV, making the work of influencers and activists crucial in breaking the cycle of shame and misinformation.

Among the most prominent incidents of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) include sextortion, extortion, online harassment, hate speech, and dissemination of obscene material. These incidents of OGBV had severe consequences related to withdrawal from online platforms, suicidal thoughts, low self-esteem, emotional and economic costs, and sexual exploitation among others.[20]

Kenya: Kenya has high rates of GBV– a femicide crisis, with FGM, still practiced in some communities despite being outlawed.[21] Kenya has also dealt with cases of forced sterilization for women especially those living with HIV[22] even after the passing of a landmark judgment recognizing it as a violation of their

19   Afrobarometer. (2023). Zambians see gender-based violence as a top priority, though many consider domestic violence a private matter (Policy Paper No. AD685). Retrieved January 13, 2025, from https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad685-zambians-see-gender-based-violence-as-a-top-priority-though-many-consider-domestic-violence-a-private-matter/ ; Ministry of Gender (Zambia). (2024). Second quarter gender-based violence data analysis. https://www.gender.gov.zm/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/2024-SECOND-QUARTER-GENDER-BASED-VIOLENCE-DATA-ANALYSIS.pdf
20   UNDP, Online Gender-Based Violence Among Women and Girls in Zambia: An Assessment (2024) https://www.undp.org/zambia/publications/online-gender-based-violence-among-women-and-girls-zambia-assessment accessed 27 January 2025.
21   Africa Data Hub. (2016). Femicide in Kenya. Retrieved January 13, 2025, from https://www.africadatahub.org/femicide-kenya
22   'How Kenyan medics are abusing women with forced sterilisations and getting away with it', Nation, 22 January 2025, https://nation.africa/kenya/health/how-kenyan-medics-are-abusing-women-with-forced-sterilisations-and-getting-away-with-it-4582526, accessed 27 January 2025.

human rights.[23] Feminist organizations have been instrumental in pushing for stronger enforcement of anti-FGM laws, better protection for survivors of sexual violence, and ending GBV. Social media has played a significant role in raising awareness, with movements like #EndFemicideKE gaining traction online. However, digital activism also comes with risks, as women's rights advocates frequently experience trolling, mass reporting of their accounts, and organized smear campaigns aimed at discrediting their work.

Rwanda: Rwanda has made remarkable progress in reducing GBV through legal reforms, but challenges remain in the rural areas where patriarchal norms are still deeply entrenched.[24] Online, discussions around GBV often focus on urban experiences, leaving rural survivors with limited representation in digital advocacy efforts. Influencers and digital advocates have the potential to bridge this gap by leveraging online platforms to amplify the voices of rural women, making their struggles more visible and ensuring they are included in policy discussions.

Given the increasing prevalence of digital GBV, social media influencers play a crucial role in shifting narratives, holding perpetrators accountable, and providing educational content to combat harmful gender norms. Influencers with large followings can highlight GBV cases, push for justice, and counteract victim-blaming narratives that often dominate online discussions. By using their platforms for advocacy, influencers create virtual safe spaces where survivors can share their experiences without fear of judgment or retaliation.

Additionally, influencers help challenge the normalization of online harassment against women and SRHR advocates. They can amplify feminist-led movements, fact-check misinformation, and provide resources for survivors, making their work instrumental in dismantling the digital aspects of GBV. By leveraging interactive content like live discussions, Q&A sessions, and storytelling, they humanize the issue, making it more relatable and harder to ignore. However, for their efforts to be effective, social media platforms must also take greater responsibility in addressing algorithmic biases and

23   'Court victory: Landmark ruling exposes discrimination in forced sterilization of HIV-positive women', KELIN Kenya, https://www.kelinkenya.org/court-victory-landmark-ruling-exposes-discrimination-in-forced-sterilization-of-hiv-positive-women/, accessed 27 January 2025.
24   KT Press. (2024, November). Activists highlight areas where GBV remains prominent in Rwanda. Retrieved January 13, 2025, from https://www.ktpress.rw/2024/11/activists-highlight-areas-where-gbv-remains-prominent-in-rwanda/#google_vignette

improving protections against digital GBV, ensuring that progressive voices are not silenced through online abuse.

2.5) Media Coverage and SRHR Advocacy

Media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). As a primary source of information for many, traditional and digital media influence how SRHR issues are understood, debated, and addressed in society. Media can be a powerful tool for advocacy, amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, exposing injustices, and driving policy change. However, it can also reinforce harmful stereotypes, spread misinformation, and contribute to the stigmatization of critical SRHR topics such as abortion, contraception, and LGBTQ+ rights. The framing of SRHR issues in news reports, television programs, and online platforms significantly impacts public attitudes and government responses, making it essential for media coverage to be accurate, inclusive, and rights-based.

While traditional media—radio, television, and newspapers—remain influential, the rise of social media has revolutionized SRHR advocacy by providing activists, civil society organizations, and social media influencers with direct access to large audiences. Digital platforms allow for real-time engagement, counter-narratives against misinformation, and grassroots mobilization, all of which are essential in advancing SRHR in restrictive or hostile environments. Given that mainstream media in many Eastern and Southern African countries often reflects conservative societal norms, social media offers an alternative space where progressive voices can challenge stigma, educate the public, and advocate for policy reforms.

Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMWA), a feminist organization, conducted a significant analysis of the role of Ugandan media in shaping public discourse around SRHR. *The Report on Ugandan Media Coverage of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights[25]* highlights how media coverage both reinforces and

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25   Akina Mama wa Afrika, Report on Ugandan Media Coverage of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (2024) https://akinamamawaafrika.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/AMWA_REPORT-ON-UGANDAN-MEDIA-COVERAGE-OF-SEXUAL-AND-REPRODUCTIVE-HEALTH-AND-RIGHTS.pdf accessed 27 January 2025.

challenges societal norms related to SRHR. The AMwA report identifies several key trends in Ugandan media including Stigmatization and bias The media frequently frames SRHR issues, particularly those related to abortion and LGBTQ+ rights, in ways that reinforce stigma and negative stereotypes. Coverage often reflects the deeply conservative and religiously influenced attitudes prevalent in Ugandan society, with journalists portraying SRHR as a moral or cultural issue rather than a human rights concern.

In addition to that, women's perspectives, particularly those of marginalized groups, are often underrepresented in media discussions about SRHR. This lack of representation marginalizes the very voices that are most affected by restrictive policies and harmful practices such as unsafe abortions or inadequate maternal healthcare.[26]

Despite these challenges, there are some positive shifts in media coverage. Increasingly, civil society organizations are using social media to challenge dominant narratives and push for more inclusive coverage of SRHR issues. The AMwA report points out that, through the strategic use of digital platforms, SRHR, and feminist movements have been able to broaden their reach and reshape the public discourse around sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Additionally, a *Retrospective Media Scan*[27] conducted by UNICEF's *2gether 4 SRHR Programme* further expands on how SRHR, HIV, and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) are covered in media across Eastern and Southern Africa. The report reveals that while SRHR topics receive substantial attention in countries such as Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, much of the coverage is event-driven and focused on official sources rather than centering the voices of affected individuals. This results in a lack of depth and human-centered narratives, limiting the potential for public engagement and policy influence.

A key issue identified is that media outlets tend to present SRHR and SGBV stories as news items rather than exploring their root causes or societal

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26   As above.

27   UNICEF, Retrospective Media Scan: Executive Summary – Coverage of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights, HIV, and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Eastern and Southern Africa, 2gether 4 SRHR Programme, 2021.
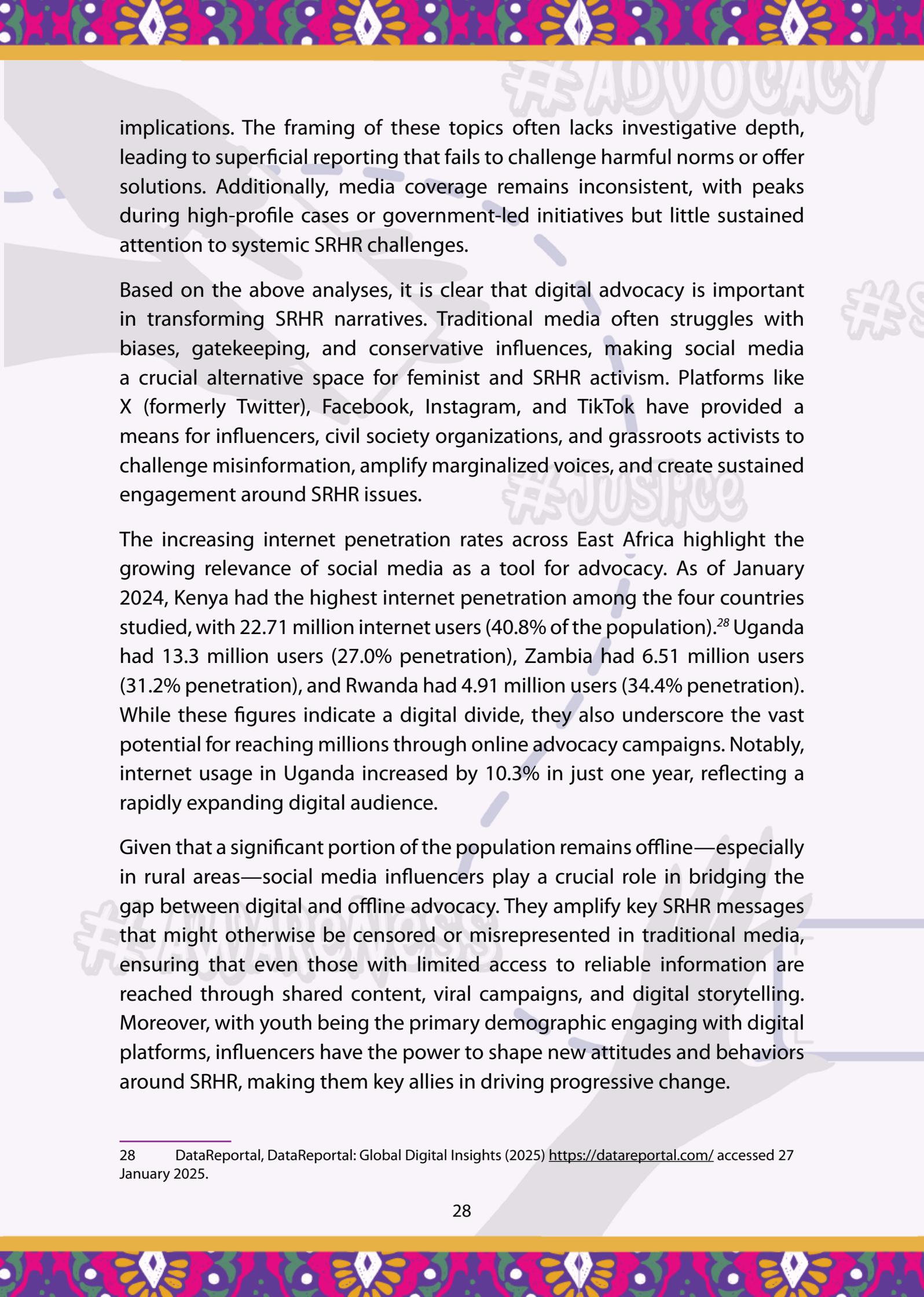
implications. The framing of these topics often lacks investigative depth, leading to superficial reporting that fails to challenge harmful norms or offer solutions. Additionally, media coverage remains inconsistent, with peaks during high-profile cases or government-led initiatives but little sustained attention to systemic SRHR challenges.

Based on the above analyses, it is clear that digital advocacy is important in transforming SRHR narratives. Traditional media often struggles with biases, gatekeeping, and conservative influences, making social media a crucial alternative space for feminist and SRHR activism. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have provided a means for influencers, civil society organizations, and grassroots activists to challenge misinformation, amplify marginalized voices, and create sustained engagement around SRHR issues.

The increasing internet penetration rates across East Africa highlight the growing relevance of social media as a tool for advocacy. As of January 2024, Kenya had the highest internet penetration among the four countries studied, with 22.71 million internet users (40.8% of the population).[28] Uganda had 13.3 million users (27.0% penetration), Zambia had 6.51 million users (31.2% penetration), and Rwanda had 4.91 million users (34.4% penetration). While these figures indicate a digital divide, they also underscore the vast potential for reaching millions through online advocacy campaigns. Notably, internet usage in Uganda increased by 10.3% in just one year, reflecting a rapidly expanding digital audience.

Given that a significant portion of the population remains offline—especially in rural areas—social media influencers play a crucial role in bridging the gap between digital and offline advocacy. They amplify key SRHR messages that might otherwise be censored or misrepresented in traditional media, ensuring that even those with limited access to reliable information are reached through shared content, viral campaigns, and digital storytelling. Moreover, with youth being the primary demographic engaging with digital platforms, influencers have the power to shape new attitudes and behaviors around SRHR, making them key allies in driving progressive change.

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28   DataReportal, DataReportal: Global Digital Insights (2025) https://datareportal.com/ accessed 27 January 2025.

In Uganda, for instance, platforms like X and Facebook have been instrumental in mobilizing support for campaigns such as *#SheDecidesUganda,* which advocates for women's rights to make their own reproductive health decisions. Similarly, in Kenya, online movements like #EndFemicideKE have sparked national conversations on gender-based violence, pushing media outlets to provide more in-depth coverage of these issues. Influencers and digital activists play an increasingly central role in shaping discourse, particularly as traditional media remains constrained by political and cultural sensitivities.[29]

By leveraging social media's interactive nature, influencers not only counteract stigma but also facilitate knowledge-sharing through real-time engagement, storytelling, and audience participation. Given the limitations of mainstream media in covering SRHR and SGBV issues comprehensively, social media influencers are critical in filling this gap—driving advocacy, holding institutions accountable, and pushing for progressive policy change.

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29   UNICEF, 27 above.

Chapter 3: Understanding Social Media Influencing

The Social Media Influence Theory, devised by Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad and released in his 2023 publication "Phoenix Cactus Book Publishing, Special Edition,"[30] investigates the mechanisms through which social media platforms exert influence over public opinion, behaviors, and cultural trends. It defines social media influence as the ability of platforms and their users to alter or reinforce norms, values, and behaviors through content creation, sharing, and interaction. This influence is mediated through algorithms that prioritize certain content, the persuasive power of social networks, and the ease of disseminating information across global networks. The theory highlights the role of key influencers, viral content, and the interactive nature of these platforms in shaping public discourse and personal identities.

3.1) Understanding Social Media Influencing with a Feminist Lens

A feminist analysis of social media goes beyond merely observing digital interactions to interrogating who is included, who is silenced, and how power operates in online spaces.[31] Social media presents itself as a space for openness, collaboration, and networking, however, these platforms are not neutral; they are shaped by capitalist business models, algorithmic biases, and entrenched social inequalities that dictate whose voices are amplified and whose are suppressed.

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30   Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad, Social Media Influence Theory (Phoenix Cactus Book Publishing, Special Edition 2023) https://doi.org/10.17605/osf.io/6mqa5 accessed 27 January 2025.
31   Banet-Weiser, S., 'Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny: Resilience and Resistance' (2018) 17(4) Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 31 https://muse.jhu.edu/article/690811/pdf accessed 27 January 2025.

While social media can be a tool for feminist resistance and movement-building, it also risks reinforcing existing harmful hierarchies that are characteristic of misogyny and gender-based violence. The very algorithms that claim to build engagement often privilege sensationalism over justice, favoring mainstream, male-dominated narratives while punishing feminist dissent through de-platforming, shadowbanning, and online abuse. Additionally, engagement on social media platforms does not happen in a vacuum; they are expressions of users' societal biases which they transpose into these digital spaces; replicating the same structures of oppression, racism, and patriarchy that exist offline.

Social media influencing is a powerful tool for shaping public discourse, amplifying underrepresented voices, and driving societal change. When examined through a feminist lens, influencing goes beyond mere engagement metrics to emphasize values like inclusivity, intersectionality, and advocacy for systemic change. A feminist social media assessment, then, must interrogate who controls digital narratives, whose labor is exploited for engagement, and how these platforms can be reclaimed as sites of feminist resistance rather than tools of capitalist exploitation.

3.2) Influencer Categories

Influencers can be categorized in multiple ways, depending on their reach, content focus, and audience engagement. However, these categorizations are not neutral; they are shaped by patriarchal politics, digital power structures, and the capitalist dynamics that influence who gains visibility and legitimacy online. The researcher, a feminist and social media influencer, emphasizes that feminists must critically engage with these structures to ensure that digital advocacy remains an inclusive and transformative space for SRHR and gender justice.

Audience Size: Power, Visibility, and the Politics of Verification

- **Nano-influencers (1K–10K followers):** Known for their high engagement rates and strong community connections, nano-influencers are essential in grassroots advocacy. However, their limited visibility within the broader digital ecosystem often reflects how feminist and SRHR conversations—particularly those led by marginalized voices—are deprioritized in
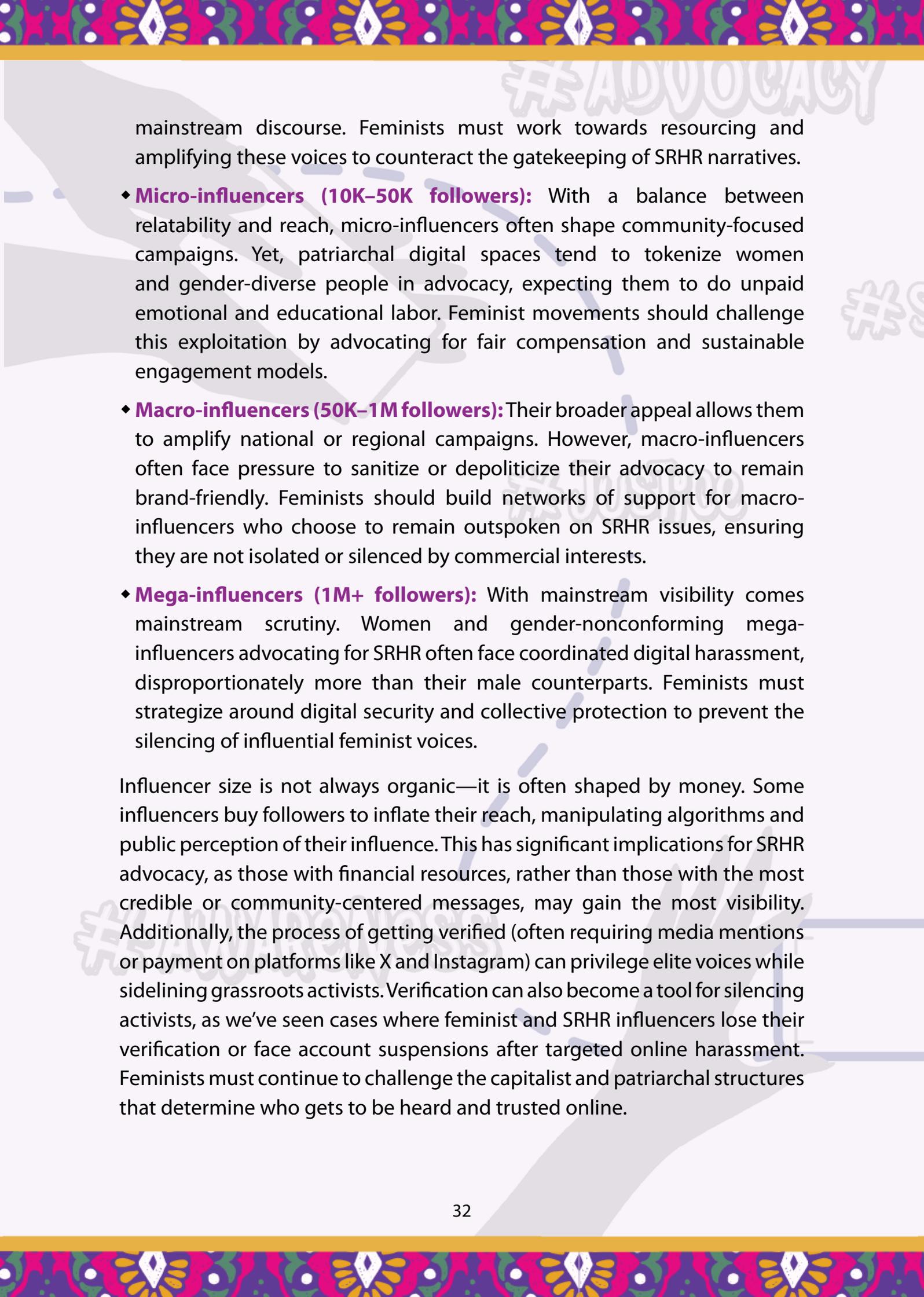
mainstream discourse. Feminists must work towards resourcing and amplifying these voices to counteract the gatekeeping of SRHR narratives.

- **Micro-influencers (10K–50K followers):** With a balance between relatability and reach, micro-influencers often shape community-focused campaigns. Yet, patriarchal digital spaces tend to tokenize women and gender-diverse people in advocacy, expecting them to do unpaid emotional and educational labor. Feminist movements should challenge this exploitation by advocating for fair compensation and sustainable engagement models.

- **Macro-influencers (50K–1M followers):** Their broader appeal allows them to amplify national or regional campaigns. However, macro-influencers often face pressure to sanitize or depoliticize their advocacy to remain brand-friendly. Feminists should build networks of support for macro-influencers who choose to remain outspoken on SRHR issues, ensuring they are not isolated or silenced by commercial interests.

- **Mega-influencers (1M+ followers):** With mainstream visibility comes mainstream scrutiny. Women and gender-nonconforming mega-influencers advocating for SRHR often face coordinated digital harassment, disproportionately more than their male counterparts. Feminists must strategize around digital security and collective protection to prevent the silencing of influential feminist voices.

Influencer size is not always organic—it is often shaped by money. Some influencers buy followers to inflate their reach, manipulating algorithms and public perception of their influence. This has significant implications for SRHR advocacy, as those with financial resources, rather than those with the most credible or community-centered messages, may gain the most visibility. Additionally, the process of getting verified (often requiring media mentions or payment on platforms like X and Instagram) can privilege elite voices while sidelining grassroots activists. Verification can also become a tool for silencing activists, as we've seen cases where feminist and SRHR influencers lose their verification or face account suspensions after targeted online harassment. Feminists must continue to challenge the capitalist and patriarchal structures that determine who gets to be heard and trusted online.

Content Specialization: Whose Knowledge is Valued?

◆ **Advocacy influencers:** These influencers explicitly engage in social justice topics like gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and SRHR. However, patriarchal politics often dictate who is seen as a legitimate activist. Women, queer individuals, and grassroots organizers frequently face credibility challenges compared to men in the same space. Feminists should prioritize disrupting this bias by uplifting diverse voices and ensuring intersectionality in SRHR advocacy.

◆ **Lifestyle influencers:** These influencers share aspects of their daily life, personal interests, and experiences to inspire and engage their audience. They typically focus on topics like fashion, travel, wellness, fitness, beauty, home decor, and personal development. While lifestyle influencers can integrate SRHR messaging into everyday narratives, there is often tension between visibility and activism. Women's lifestyle influencers, particularly those discussing sexuality, contraception, or body autonomy, are frequently policed, while male lifestyle influencers rarely face the same backlash. Feminists must continue challenging these double standards and advocating for safer digital spaces where feminist discourse can flourish.

◆ **Entertainers and Pop Culture Figures:** Entertainers—especially musicians, comedians, and content creators on platforms like TikTok—play a significant role in shaping public perceptions including those of SRHR. Songs, skits, and viral challenges frequently touch on themes of relationships, consent, reproductive health, and gender dynamics, sometimes reinforcing harmful stereotypes but also opening up opportunities for progressive messaging. Feminists and SRHR advocates must explore creative collaborations with entertainers to infuse feminist perspectives into popular culture, making SRHR advocacy more accessible and relatable.

◆ **Educators and Specialists:** Professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and researchers add credibility to SRHR campaigns. However, patriarchal structures often elevate male experts over women, particularly in fields like medicine and law. Feminist digital strategies should actively promote women and gender-diverse professionals, ensuring their expertise is recognized and valued in advocacy spaces.

Governments and political aspirants have increasingly leveraged social
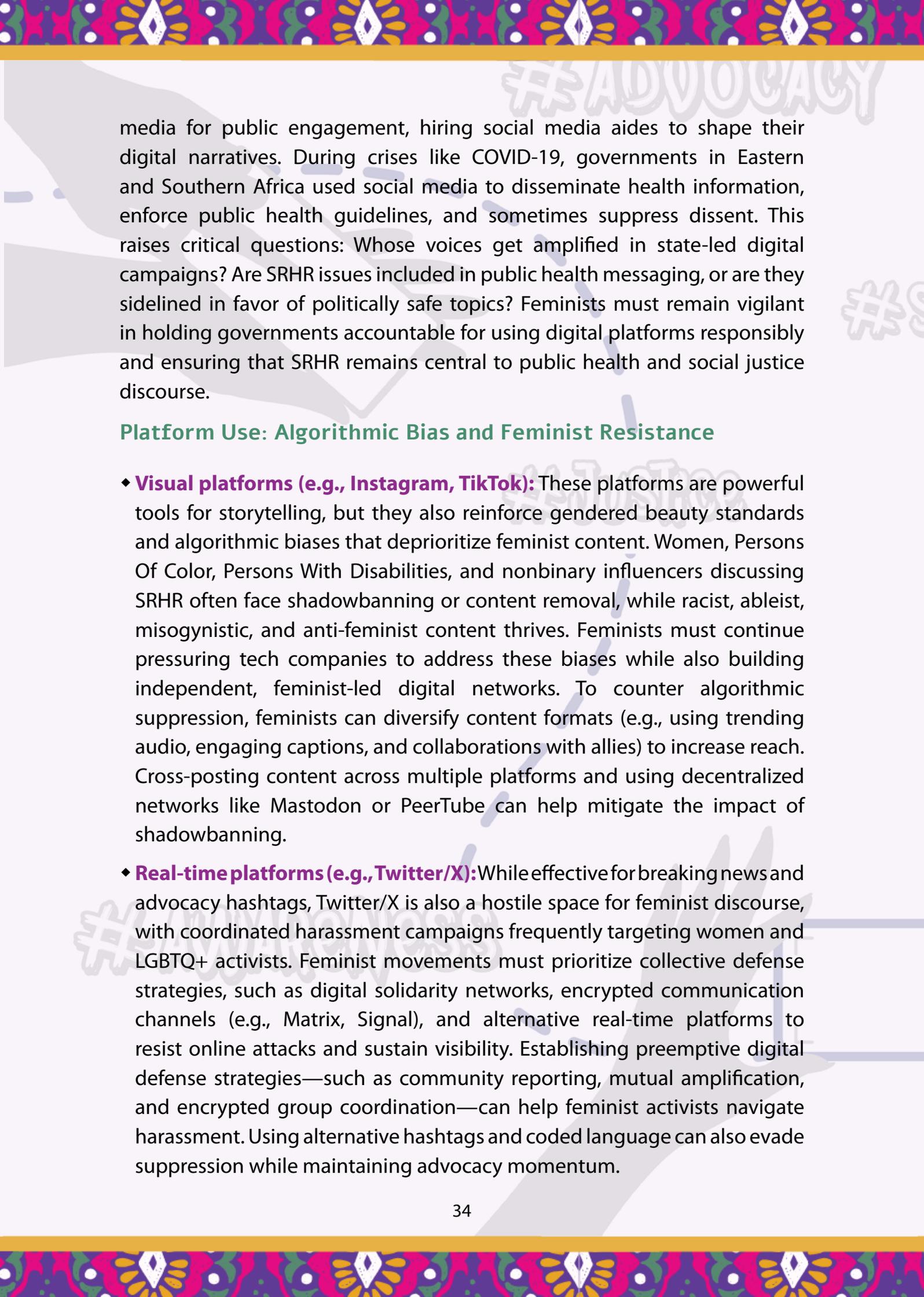
media for public engagement, hiring social media aides to shape their digital narratives. During crises like COVID-19, governments in Eastern and Southern Africa used social media to disseminate health information, enforce public health guidelines, and sometimes suppress dissent. This raises critical questions: Whose voices get amplified in state-led digital campaigns? Are SRHR issues included in public health messaging, or are they sidelined in favor of politically safe topics? Feminists must remain vigilant in holding governments accountable for using digital platforms responsibly and ensuring that SRHR remains central to public health and social justice discourse.

Platform Use: Algorithmic Bias and Feminist Resistance

◆ **Visual platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok):** These platforms are powerful tools for storytelling, but they also reinforce gendered beauty standards and algorithmic biases that deprioritize feminist content. Women, Persons Of Color, Persons With Disabilities, and nonbinary influencers discussing SRHR often face shadowbanning or content removal, while racist, ableist, misogynistic, and anti-feminist content thrives. Feminists must continue pressuring tech companies to address these biases while also building independent, feminist-led digital networks. To counter algorithmic suppression, feminists can diversify content formats (e.g., using trending audio, engaging captions, and collaborations with allies) to increase reach. Cross-posting content across multiple platforms and using decentralized networks like Mastodon or PeerTube can help mitigate the impact of shadowbanning.

◆ **Real-time platforms (e.g., Twitter/X):** While effective for breaking news and advocacy hashtags, Twitter/X is also a hostile space for feminist discourse, with coordinated harassment campaigns frequently targeting women and LGBTQ+ activists. Feminist movements must prioritize collective defense strategies, such as digital solidarity networks, encrypted communication channels (e.g., Matrix, Signal), and alternative real-time platforms to resist online attacks and sustain visibility. Establishing preemptive digital defense strategies—such as community reporting, mutual amplification, and encrypted group coordination—can help feminist activists navigate harassment. Using alternative hashtags and coded language can also evade suppression while maintaining advocacy momentum.

◆ **Long-form platforms (e.g., Blogs, YouTube):** These platforms allow for in-depth discussions, but they also demand high labor investment. Women and gender-diverse creators often struggle with resource constraints, making it harder for feminist content to compete with corporate-backed media. Feminists must invest in alternative funding models to sustain independent feminist media and ensure that nuanced SRHR conversations reach wider audiences. Leveraging crowdfunding, partnerships, and subscription models (e.g., Patreon, Ko-fi) can help sustain independent feminist content. Collaborations with allied creators and platforms can amplify reach while embedding feminist media in broader educational initiatives ensures longevity and impact. Decentralized video-sharing platforms like PeerTube can also provide alternative spaces for feminist discourse.

3.3) What to Consider when Choosing an Influencer

A feminist approach to social media influencing prioritizes values alignment, community engagement, and authenticity over sheer follower count. Influencers are not just content creators; they are agenda-setters who shape digital conversations. Given the patriarchal structures that often dominate media spaces, selecting influencers who challenge harmful norms and promote gender justice is critical. Here are key feminist considerations when choosing an influencer:

◆ **Advocacy alignment:** Does the influencer consistently share and uphold the values of gender equality, SRHR, and feminist principles? Many influencers engage in performative activism—aligning with progressive causes for visibility rather than commitment. Feminists must assess whether an influencer's engagement with SRHR issues is sustained and intentional rather than opportunistic.

◆ **Community connection:** How effectively does the influencer engage with their audience? Nano- and micro-influencers often have stronger personal connections, allowing for deeper and more meaningful dialogue. However, due to gendered power dynamics, women influencers advocating for SRHR often face higher risks of online harassment. Feminists must not only prioritize influencers who promote community engagement but also

create mechanisms for their protection and digital security.

◆ **Content style and accessibility:** Is the influencer's content accessible, inclusive, and culturally relevant?[32] Feminist digital strategies emphasize storytelling and relatable narratives that resonate with diverse audiences. However, mainstream platforms often favor influencers who align with commercial interests, sidelining radical feminist voices. Feminist movements should work to elevate content that centers on lived experiences and intersectional perspectives.

◆ **Credibility and power dynamics:** For sensitive topics like abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, or bodily autonomy, influencers with subject matter expertise or partnerships with professionals add legitimacy to campaigns. However, expertise is often gatekept, with male professionals receiving more credibility than their female or nonbinary counterparts. Feminists should challenge these biases by uplifting diverse knowledge sources, including lived experience as a valid form of expertise.

◆ **Engagement metrics beyond vanity:** Follower count is an insufficient measure of influence, as algorithmic biases and financial power often determine who gains visibility. Beyond likes and shares, feminists should assess qualitative engagement—who is participating in discussions, how narratives are shifting, and whether marginalized voices are being centered in the conversation. The goal should not just be high numbers but meaningful impact.

◆ **Safety and political risks:** SRHR advocacy is inherently political, and influencers engaging in feminist digital activism often face online harassment, censorship, and state surveillance. When selecting influencers, feminist organizations should consider their digital safety, offer support where needed, and ensure that advocacy campaigns include strategies for dealing with online attacks and platform suppression.

◆ **Commercial interests vs. activism:** Many influencers rely on brand deals and sponsorships, which can shape their messaging. Feminist movements must be wary of influencers who dilute feminist messages to maintain

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32   Forbes, Five Steps for Finding the Right Influencer for Your Brand (28 June 2022) https://www.forbes.com/councils/theyec/2022/06/28/five-steps-for-finding-the-right-influencer-for-your-brand/ accessed 27 January 2025.

corporate partnerships. Collaborating with influencers who can navigate activism without compromising their feminist stance is crucial for sustaining meaningful advocacy.

3.4) Understanding Analytics [Metrics to Track]

Evaluating the success of influencer campaigns is essential for refining strategies and ensuring impact. However, conventional social media analytics often prioritize capitalist metrics—favoring reach and virality over depth and transformation. A feminist approach to metrics considers not just numbers but also the power shifts that digital campaigns create.

◆ **Reach and impressions:** While important, these numbers can be misleading. Feminists must question whether reach translates into real engagement or if SRHR content is simply being consumed passively. Algorithmic biases often suppress feminist content, meaning virality should not be the sole measure of success.

◆ **Engagement rates with a critical lens:** Likes, shares, comments, and saves indicate resonance, but feminist movements should also track who is engaging. Are marginalized groups finding representation in these discussions? Is there evidence of shifting attitudes? Engagement should not just be about volume but about cultivating communities of resistance and solidarity.

◆ **Audience growth and sustainability:** A spike in followers after a campaign can be useful, but feminist analysis must go deeper. Are these new followers engaging meaningfully, or are they passive spectators? Are influencers able to sustain feminist messaging beyond the campaign, or do they move on to less controversial topics once the campaign ends?

◆ **Behavioral impact:** Website traffic, event attendance, or direct actions (e.g., signing petitions, donating, seeking SRHR services) can indicate whether a campaign leads to real-world change. However, feminists should be mindful of accessibility—are these metrics only capturing privileged audiences with digital access, or are offline and rural communities being reached as well?

◆ **Audience sentiment and resistance:** Sentiment analysis tools help

assess whether conversations surrounding content are positive, neutral, or negative. However, feminist campaigns often attract backlash from patriarchal and anti-right groups. Rather than seeing negative sentiment as a failure, feminists should analyze resistance as an indicator of whether their campaigns are effectively challenging oppressive systems.

◆ **Advocacy-specific feminist metrics:** Conventional metrics rarely capture the full impact of feminist digital activism. For SRHR campaigns, tracking the use of hashtags, mentions of key issues, or participation in Q&A sessions is crucial, but qualitative measures also matter. Are audiences developing a more nuanced understanding of SRHR? Are feminist narratives gaining ground over conservative misinformation? These deeper reflections should guide advocacy strategy.

◆ **Digital safety metrics:** As online harassment of feminist and SRHR activists increases, campaigns should also track instances of digital attacks, censorship, and shadowbanning. Analyzing patterns of suppression can help feminists develop better strategies for digital security and resistance.

◆ **Influencer retention and impact over time:** Do influencers continue to engage with feminist and SRHR issues beyond a single campaign, or do they disengage once the partnership ends? Evaluating long-term commitment can help feminist organizations identify influencers who are genuinely invested in gender justice.

3.4) Pricing Models

Influencer pricing is not just a financial negotiation—it is a reflection of digital power structures, gendered labor dynamics, and the capitalist commodification of advocacy. Feminists must critically examine how pricing models reinforce inequalities and ensure that SRHR advocacy remains both impactful and financially sustainable for influencers and organizations.

◆ **Platform-based pricing and algorithmic bias:** Costs vary depending on the platform, with TikTok posts often being less expensive than Instagram reels and YouTube videos. However, feminist content—especially around SRHR—often faces algorithmic suppression, requiring more strategic effort to reach audiences. Feminists must advocate for fair pricing that reflects the additional labor needed to counteract digital censorship and ensure

visibility.

- **Follower count and engagement rates:** Pricing models often favor influencers with higher follower counts, but these numbers are shaped by gendered and racialized biases. Male influencers, even in feminist spaces, often command higher rates due to mainstream credibility, while women and gender-diverse influencers must work harder for the same recognition. Feminist advocacy must push for equitable pay structures that compensate marginalized influencers fairly, regardless of follower count.

- **Content type and emotional labor:** Static posts typically cost less than videos or interactive content like live Q&A sessions. However, feminist influencers engaging in SRHR advocacy often provide more than just content—they offer emotional labor, community support, and crisis response. For instance, an influencer discussing abortion access may receive direct messages from people seeking urgent help, adding an unpaid emotional toll to their work. Feminists must recognize and account for this labor in pricing negotiations.

- **Niche focus:** Advocacy for SRHR or LGBTQ+ rights may require higher compensation due to potential backlash, online harassment, or even threats to personal safety. Unlike commercial influencers who promote products with minimal risk, feminist influencers put their reputations— and sometimes their well-being—on the line. Pricing models should reflect these risks, ensuring that those advocating for marginalized communities are not left to bear the costs alone.

- **Campaign complexity and sustainability:** Long-term partnerships, co-created content, and campaigns requiring professional production demand higher investment. However, many feminist organizations operate on limited budgets, creating tension between paying influencers fairly and sustaining advocacy efforts. Feminists must push for funding models that prioritize digital advocacy as essential labor, ensuring that feminist influencers are not forced to choose between activism and financial survival.

3.5) Influencer Marketing Tools

In the digital age, data is power. For SRHR advocacy to be effective, feminist movements must not only create compelling content but also track its impact,

counter misinformation, and navigate online resistance. Influencer marketing tools provide critical insights into audience engagement, message reach, and narrative shifts, helping activists and organizations refine their strategies. However, these tools must be used with a feminist lens—prioritizing not just numbers but the quality of engagement, the voices being centered, and the resistance being faced. For feminist advocacy to be effective, it must be strategic, data-driven, and responsive to evolving digital landscapes. These tools help to:

◆ **Counter digital suppression:** SRHR content—especially around abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, and bodily autonomy—is often shadowbanned or deprioritized by algorithms. Tracking tools help detect suppression patterns and allow activists to adjust their strategies.

◆ **Measure advocacy effectiveness:** Beyond traditional metrics, these tools can assess whether campaigns are shifting attitudes, sparking conversations, and mobilizing offline action. Are people using campaign hashtags to share personal stories? Are feminist messages breaking into mainstream discussions? These qualitative insights are crucial for long-term movement building.

◆ **Detect online harassment and misinformation:** Feminist and SRHR influencers often face targeted attacks from anti-rights groups. Monitoring sentiment and engagement trends allows activists to anticipate and respond to coordinated harassment campaigns, ensuring digital safety and advocacy resilience.

◆ **Strengthen accountability and transparency:** Feminist organizations working with influencers must ensure that partnerships align with movement goals. These tools help track whether influencer collaborations genuinely amplify SRHR issues or merely boost individual brand visibility.

Here are some key influencer marketing tools and how they can be leveraged for feminist digital advocacy:

◆ **Brandwatch:** This tool monitors social media trends, audience sentiment, and campaign reach. In SRHR advocacy, Brandwatch can help identify how feminist narratives are being received online—whether they are

gaining traction, facing backlash, or being misrepresented. It can also track misinformation campaigns and help activists respond strategically.

- **Sprout Social:** An all-in-one platform for scheduling posts, tracking engagement, and generating reports, Sprout Social is useful for maintaining consistency in feminist advocacy. Given that feminist and SRHR content often faces algorithmic suppression, scheduling posts at optimal times and analyzing engagement trends can help activists maximize their reach.

- **Traackr:** Specializing in influencer identification and campaign performance analysis, Traackr can help feminist organizations find aligned influencers who are genuinely committed to SRHR advocacy. Many influencers claim to support gender justice but may dilute their messaging for commercial appeal. Traackr can help assess whether an influencer's audience engagement reflects sustained activism or performative allyship.

- **Determ:** As a media monitoring solution, Determ helps prove the value of PR efforts without manual work. For feminist campaigns, this tool can track how SRHR topics are being covered in the media, flagging narratives that require intervention. It is particularly useful for identifying shifts in mainstream discourse—such as whether a hashtag campaign is influencing policy discussions or driving media coverage on neglected SRHR issues.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1) Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select influencers with substantial reach and influence in the SRHR space. Criteria included:

◆ A follower count of at least 10,000 on X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok and YouTube.

◆ Active engagement with SRHR topics.

◆ Geographic diversity to ensure representation from Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Zambia.

4.2) Surveys and Interviews

An online survey was distributed to a broader set of influencers and content creators to capture quantitative data on their audience demographics, content reach, and engagement on SRHR issues. This was supplemented by semi-structured interviews with selected influencers to gain deeper qualitative insights into their strategies, challenges, and experiences when addressing SRHR.

The combination of these methods enabled a holistic understanding of the digital landscape and the role influencers play in shaping SRHR discourse across Eastern and Southern Africa.

4.3) Social Media Monitoring

In addition to the literature review, social media monitoring tools such as Hootsuite and Sprout Social, TweetBinder were used to analyze online

conversations around SRHR topics. The monitoring focused on platforms like Twitter (X), Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, tracking:

◆ Follower counts, engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments), and trending SRHR-related hashtags.

◆ Sentiment analysis of public responses to SRHR content, allowing for the identification of key narratives and counter-narratives promoted by influencers.

4.4) Overview of Influencers:

The following table provides a summary of key influencers across Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia, including their platforms, number of followers, and content focus:

Influencer	Country	Platform	Niche	Followers[Range]
Faith Mulungi	Uganda	Instagram, Twitter (X) and YouTube	SRHR, GBV, and Feminist politics	10,000 - 50,000
Sharon Nabiwemba	Uganda	Instagram, Twitter (X)	SRHR, Women's rights & GBV	10,000 - 50,000
Onyango Otieno	Kenya	Instagram, Twitter (X), Facebook, TikTok	Abortion, promoting healthy masculinity, SRHR, SGBV, and comprehensive sex education	50,001 - 100,000
Brendah Rukundo	Uganda	Twitter (X)	SRHR and Feminist Politics	10,000 - 50,000
Ruth Namatama Kanyanga Kamwi	Zambia	Twitter (X), Facebook, LinkedIn	Menstrual Hygiene	10,000 - 50,000
Bernard Olupot [Beewol]	Uganda	Instagram, Twitter (X)	FGM, SRHR, SGBV, Abortion rights, and HIV & Aids	50,001 - 100,000
Alice Kanyana	Rwanda	Twitter [X], Instagram	SRHR, SGBV, Child Pregnancies and Feminist Politics	50,001 - 100,000

Influencer	Country	Platform	Niche	Followers[Range]
Luyinda Hindu Gloria	Uganda	Twitter (X), WhatsApp	SRHR, disability inclusion, comprehensive sex education, HIV/AIDs, and GBV	10,000 - 50,000
Micheline Mutuzo [Michie]	Uganda	Instagram, X, TikTok	GBV and Sexual Violence	10,000 - 50,000
Eric Zachary Mugisha	Uganda	Instagram, X	SRHR	10,000 - 50,000
Fahe Kerubo	Kenya	Instagram, X, Facebook, LinkedIn	SRHR rights for LBQGNC folks, Youth's Social, Economic, and Health Empowerment	500,001 and above
Innocent Immaculate Acan	Uganda	X	SRHR, SGBV, and Feminist Politics	10,000 - 50,000
Ritah Asiimire	Uganda	X	SRHR, Abortion rights, and SGBV	10,000 - 50,000
Mwape Kaunda	Zambia	X, Facebook	Ending teenage pregnancy, access to SRHR services, gender equality, and family planning	10,000 - 50,000
Mukamwiza Sophia	Uganda	X	Child pregnancies and early/forced marriage and SGBV	50,001 - 100,000
Ann K Holland	Zambia	X	SRHR and SGBV	50,001 - 100,000
Miranda Violet Bagamba	Uganda	Instagram, X	SRHR, menstruation & gender equality	10,000 - 50,000
Patience Ahumuza	Uganda	X, Instagram	SRHR, SGBV, LGBTQ+ rights, FGM & Feminist Politics	10,000 - 50,000
Juliette Karitanyi	Rwanda	X, Instagram, LinkedIn	SRHR, SGBV, CSE & Feminist Politics	10,000 - 50,000
Njeri Wa Migwi	Kenya	X	LGBTQ+ rights, SRHR and SGBV	10,000 - 50,000
Afrika	Kenya	X, TikTok	LBQ, SRHR, and SGBV	10,000 - 50,000

Influencer	Country	Platform	Niche	Followers[Range]
Jude Mugabi	Uganda	X	Maternal mortality, HIV, contraception and access to SRH services	50,001 - 100,000
Patricia Zawedde	Uganda	Instagram, X and TikTok	Menstruation, Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Bodily Autonomy	10,000 - 50,000

Chapter 5: Findings

This study analyzed social media influencing SRHR advocacy across Eastern and Southern Africa through social media monitoring and an online survey. 16 influencers from Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Zambia took part in the survey. These influencers collectively engage 728,473 followers across platforms, including Twitter (X), Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn. The use of social media monitoring tools offered a wider analysis of the survey- of the social media sphere and how audiences engage in campaigns.

Influencer followings range from 10,000 to over 500,000, with content focusing on abortion rights, gender-based violence (GBV), menstrual health, LGBTQ+ rights, family planning, and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). Each country presents distinct challenges, opportunities, and digital strategies in advocacy.

5.1 Social Media Influencing Across Different Contexts

SRHR digital advocacy varies across Eastern and Southern African countries due to cultural attitudes, legal frameworks, and platform accessibility. This section highlights key platforms, topics, and strategies shaping SRHR conversations in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Zambia.

Kenya Key Topics

◆ Abortion rights and stigmatization of reproductive health choices.

◆ Healthy masculinity and gender equality in social and policy discourse.

◆ LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion in SRHR conversations.

Key Strategies

- Viral trends and creative storytelling (e.g., dance, spoken word, and humor).
- Hashtag campaigns and real-time discussions on Twitter (X) to push policy conversations.
- Short-form videos on TikTok and Instagram Reels to simplify complex SRHR topics.

Key Platforms

- Twitter (X) for policy-driven discourse and hashtag activism.
- TikTok for youth engagement and viral content.
- Instagram for personal storytelling and interactive discussions.

Uganda Key Topics

- Maternal health and high teenage pregnancy rates as urgent issues.
- Limited access to contraceptives and abortion services due to legal restrictions.
- Gender-based violence (GBV) and efforts to challenge harmful cultural norms.

Key Strategies

- WhatsApp-based education campaigns for local engagement, especially in rural areas.
- Facebook groups and closed communities for stigma-free discussions.
- Twitter (X) advocacy using policy-based campaigns and influencer threads.
- Alternative engagement methods due to Uganda's Facebook ban (e.g., VPN use, shifting to Twitter).

Key Platforms

- WhatsApp for grassroots community engagement and group discussions.
- Twitter (X) for large-scale advocacy on SRHR issues.

◆ Facebook for long-form, detailed engagement (despite access limitations).

Rwanda Key Topics

◆ Menstrual health and hygiene education in rural communities.

◆ Access to contraception and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE).

◆ Combating misinformation surrounding reproductive health.

Key Strategies

◆ Collaboration with grassroots organizations to reach rural populations.

◆ Localized content in native languages to increase accessibility.

◆ Blended offline and online engagement to bridge the digital divide.

Key Platforms

◆ Facebook for community-based advocacy and long-form discussions.

◆ Twitter (X) for public awareness and advocacy engagement.

◆ WhatsApp for direct engagement with rural audiences.

Zambia Key Topics

◆ Menstrual health and tackling period stigma in schools and rural communities.

◆ Gender equality and reproductive health access in restrictive environments.

◆ Teen pregnancy prevention and family planning awareness.

Key Strategies

◆ WhatsApp and Facebook for trusted community engagement.

◆ Policy advocacy through Twitter (X), but with limited rural reach.

◆ Offline integration with social media efforts to engage communities with limited internet access.

Key Platforms

◆ WhatsApp for rural and community-centered discussions.

◆ Facebook for menstrual health advocacy and engagement with NGOs.

◆ Twitter (X) for broader public engagement and advocacy campaigns.

5.2) Audience Insights

5.2.1 Demographics

Influencers primarily engage urban, middle-class audiences aged 18–35, with a significant focus on youth advocacy. Audiences are often younger and more responsive to educational campaigns presented through storytelling or community-centered narratives. Rural audiences are harder to reach, but health educators and micro-influencers on Facebook have achieved meaningful engagement.

Access to the internet plays a pivotal role in determining which audiences engage with SRHR advocacy in Kenya, Rwanda, Zambia, and Uganda. While urban populations with reliable internet connectivity are more likely to interact with influencer-driven campaigns on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter, rural communities—where internet access is limited or costly— often remain underserved in these conversations. This digital divide creates a disparity in the reach and effectiveness of SRHR messaging, particularly for marginalized groups who may already face barriers to healthcare and information access. The uneven distribution of digital access also means that the most visible SRHR conversations tend to be driven by urban voices, while the perspectives of those in lower-income or rural areas may go unheard.

Tracking digital engagement patterns highlights these disparities, showing that urban-based influencers, particularly those on Twitter/X, TikTok, and Instagram, dominate SRHR conversations, while rural audiences remain underrepresented. The effectiveness of influencers working in limited-connectivity spaces like WhatsApp and Facebook is evident, as they tend to have deeper trust within their communities despite having a smaller overall reach. This suggests that campaigns should prioritize a mix of high-reach urban influencers and localized community-based voices to ensure inclusivity

in SRHR advocacy.

Censorship and platform restrictions further complicate the situation. For instance, Facebook, historically one of the most widely used platforms in Uganda, has been banned since 2021. This restriction significantly limits the reach of influencers and organizations trying to engage Ugandan audiences through what was previously their primary platform for advocacy.

> *Godwin Toko, a lawyer, said that away from connecting people and doing business, Facebook is also used as a means of coordinating civic engagements, and blocking it limits such engagements.[33]*

Many users have shifted to alternative platforms or resort to using VPNs to access Facebook, but these workarounds can exclude less tech-savvy or resource-constrained individuals. This adds another layer of complexity to SRHR campaigns, forcing influencers to adapt their strategies to platforms that are accessible, less restricted, and capable of reaching a broader audience. Together, internet accessibility and censorship underscore the need for innovative and flexible approaches to ensure SRHR messaging reaches diverse and often underserved populations.

Patterns in online engagement reflect this shift, with Ugandan activists increasingly using Twitter/X and TikTok to sustain advocacy efforts. However, restrictions and content moderation biases on these platforms continue to affect the organic reach of feminist and SRHR messaging, requiring influencers to collaborate strategically to amplify their content and navigate these barriers effectively.

> *"Recently I have taken the approach of one-to-one mentorship. The topics depend on the challenges that the center is facing. Menstrual Hygiene and teen pregnancy are among the most engaging topics."*
> *- Ruth Namatama Kanyanga Kamwi, Zambia[34]*

33   Nile Post. (2023, January 16). Ugandan Facebook ban is killing digital markets, civic space. Nile Post. https://nilepost.co.ug/news/111374/ugandan-facebook-ban-is-killing-digital-markets-civic-space

34   Quote 1 from survey

5.2.2 Engagement Trends

Engagement trends in Kenya, Rwanda, Zambia, and Uganda reveal significant variations influenced by platform dynamics, content preferences, and audience behavior. Social media users across these countries tend to gravitate towards sensational and emotionally charged content, which often drives higher engagement rates. While this trend can amplify SRHR campaigns, it also creates risks, as nuanced and evidence-based messages may struggle to compete with more sensational or misleading narratives.

The choice of platform heavily influences engagement styles. Short-form video platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels are highly popular among younger audiences, particularly in urban areas, where visually engaging and relatable content often garners substantial attention.

> *"China's TikTok, which has become one of the fastest-growing social media platforms on the continent, follows closely with a 60% active user rate. Instagram, TikTok's main competitor globally and on the continent, captured the attention of 54% of participants, while X (formerly Twitter), which remains a key platform for real-time communication, news dissemination, and political discourse, secured an active user percentage of 49%. LinkedIn achieved 28% engagement and Snapchat achieved a 25% active user base."[35]*

Digital engagement trends show that different SRHR topics attract varying levels of interaction. While discussions around teenage pregnancy and contraceptive access tend to generate steady engagement, more contentious issues—such as abortion rights, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and CSE—see sharp spikes in activity due to polarized debates. This fluctuation in engagement suggests that high interaction rates do not always equate to widespread support, as some of these conversations are fueled by misinformation, opposition groups, or ideological clashes.

However, the prevalence of sensationalism and misinformation on these

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35   Yieke, L. (2024, November 4). Social media giants stream into Africa. African Business. https://african.business/2024/11/technology-information/social-media-giants-stream-into-africa

platforms can undermine trust in SRHR content. For example, posts promoting SRHR myths or stigmatized views often go viral due to their polarizing nature, making it essential for influencers to produce reliable, evidence-based content that is both engaging and easily digestible. Balancing emotional appeal with factual accuracy is critical to promoting meaningful and informed engagement. Influencers who incorporate interactive elements like Q&A sessions, polls, or relatable anecdotes tend to achieve higher reliability and trust with their audiences, creating opportunities for deeper conversations about sensitive SRHR topics.

Observing audience interactions highlights the power of interactive content. Live Questions and Answers (Q&As), personal storytelling, and audience polls tend to generate sustained engagement, as they allow for direct community participation. Influencers who provide safe spaces for anonymous questions or who present SRHR topics through relatable cultural narratives (such as storytelling, music, or humor) tend to build stronger audience trust and long-term credibility.

*"I prioritize creating judgment-free zones for my audience, especially through anonymous Q&A sessions on Instagram. By allowing people to ask questions anonymously about sex, relationships, and reproductive health, I give them the freedom to engage without fear of shame or embarrassment. This openness encourages more interaction and participation, making difficult conversations easier." - **Onyango Otieno, Kenya**[36]*

"I frame SRHR issues to resonate with my audience by using clear, relatable language and storytelling to make complex topics accessible. I share personal and community stories to create emotional connections, break stigma, and normalize conversations around contraception, abortion, and menstrual health. I also engage followers through interactive content like polls and quizzes and ensure a non-judgmental, inclusive tone to make them feel

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36   Quote 2 from Survey

*comfortable participating in discussions. This approach helps make SRHR topics relevant and approachable for my audience." - **Ann K Holland, Zambia**[37]*

While online conversations (specifically on X, formerly known as Twitter) focused heavily on teenage pregnancy, other SRHR topics sparked extensive engagement: abortion (530 mentions), sexual and reproductive rights in Uganda (429 mentions), national community SRHR advocacy (1,253 mentions), contraceptives (149 mentions), and the controversial Anti-Homosexuality bill/Act (70,620 mentions). This highlights the broad spectrum of SRHR issues discussed online and the platform's potential for cultivating dialogue on diverse aspects of sexual and reproductive health. Posts by civil society workers and individuals were particularly effective in generating engagement on SRHR topics. Their efforts significantly contributed to the volume and reach of online discussions, demonstrating the crucial role of civil society actors in shaping the online SRHR narrative and driving positive change.[38]

Trends in digital conversations show that while activists and civil society influencers effectively drive engagement, opposition narratives—particularly against LGBTQ+ rights and abortion—often dominate high-traffic discussions. This reflects the need for more coordinated, rights-based digital advocacy strategies that amplify feminist voices and counter misinformation to ensure progressive SRHR messaging reaches and resonates with broader audiences.

5.3) Influencer Alignment

Values and Advocacy History: The alignment of influencers' values and advocacy history with feminist and SRHR principles is a critical factor in determining their effectiveness. Influencers who have consistently demonstrated a commitment to gender equality, youth empowerment, and community development tend to resonate more authentically with

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37   Quote 3 from survey
38   Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA). (2024, September). Report on Ugandan media coverage of sexual and reproductive health and rights (p. 8). https://akinamamawaafrika.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/AMWA_REPORT-ON-UGANDAN-MEDIA-COVERAGE-OF-SEXUAL-AND-REPRODUCTIVE-HEALTH-AND-RIGHTS.pdf

audiences. In Kenya and Uganda, for instance, influencers who use their platforms to address issues like menstrual health, contraceptive access, or gender-based violence often build strong trust with their followers. However, in contexts like Rwanda and Zambia, where cultural sensitivities around SRHR are heightened, influencers may limit their advocacy to less controversial topics such as general health education.

> *"My journey as a content creator and influencer has been deeply intertwined with my passion for storytelling, mental health, and advocating for gender equity. What truly sparked my interest in SRHR and feminist issues was seeing the stigma and shame that often surrounds conversations about sex, sexuality, and reproductive health in Kenya. I felt a strong desire to challenge these narratives and create safe spaces for open, judgment-free discussions. Through my platforms, I address topics around masculinity, sexual health, and mental wellness. My journey was also shaped by my own experiences, particularly in addressing harmful masculinity and the need for men to heal emotionally. I realized that advocating for gender justice isn't just a women's issue—it's about transforming societal norms that affect everyone. This is why I began exploring themes around abortion stigma, sexual violence against men, and healthy masculinity in my work, using storytelling, dance, and interactive campaigns to drive these conversations."- **Onyango Otieno, Kenya**[39]*

Past advocacy efforts also provide a reliable indicator of influencers' potential impact. Those with a history of addressing taboo issues, such as safe abortion or LGBTQIA+ rights, exhibit both the courage and the experience needed to tackle complex SRHR topics. However, this alignment is not universal. Some influencers with large followings may focus on unrelated or apolitical content, requiring significant capacity-building to engage effectively with SRHR messaging. Identifying influencers with overlapping interests in women's rights, youth empowerment, or public health ensures a foundation for shared

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39   Quote 4 from survey

values, increasing the likelihood of meaningful and impactful collaboration.

> *"Through an experience I went through, undergoing corrective rape, getting pregnant as a result, and going through quite a hard time accessing safe abortion. Realizing later that my incident was not isolated and that most LBQ-GNC Folks go through ordeal situations and most end up not accessing essential SRH Services. Through these insights, I settled on utilizing online spaces to advocate for and talk about Queer Health and Rights. Online platforms such as X, LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram have played a key role in my advocacy and influencing journey. Additionally, I am a storyteller with a keen eye on Human Stories to impact change. My current and future goals are, as a founder and team lead of a queer-led and center Community-based organization that advocates for the Health and Rights of LBQGNC folks in Informal settlements in Nairobi. My goals are to utilize my storytelling skills and put the LBC-GNC stories and Experiences that otherwise are never told to inform the change we want to see." - **Grace, Kenya [not real name]***

Online discussions also indicate that influencers advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights or abortion access often experience targeted harassment and de-platforming, making it harder for them to sustain advocacy. To counter this, feminist and SRHR organizations must build long-term collaborations with such influencers, providing support systems that help them navigate digital risks while maintaining their advocacy. Additionally, partnerships with influencers who have cross-cutting interests—such as mental health, masculinity, or youth empowerment—can create entry points for SRHR topics in broader, less polarized conversations.

Potential for Long-term Collaboration: Sustainable partnerships are crucial for maximizing the impact of influencer engagement in SRHR advocacy. Influencers who are deeply rooted in their communities or maintain strong connections with their audiences are more likely to drive long-term behavior change. Nano- and micro-influencers, in particular, often excel in this area due to their high engagement rates and personal interactions with followers. While their reach may be smaller, their influence is more localized and trusted,

making them invaluable for grassroots advocacy.

> *"I started my influencer journey in 2016 and fully embraced my identity as a feminist in 2018/19. I was inspired by the teachings of the first Ugandan feminists on Twitter and felt obliged to carry the mantle by using my platforms to address crucial issues in SRHR. My current goal has been attaining adequate training so that I speak from a more informed point of view and grow. My plans are expanding my network of like-minded women and broadening my current podcast to reach a bigger audience in more than one language."- **Mulungi Faith, Uganda.**

Trends show that influencers who remain committed to SRHR advocacy tend to build more resilient online communities. Their audiences become more proactive in sharing SRHR-related content, debunking misinformation, and participating in advocacy campaigns.

Macro- and mega-influencers can amplify SRHR campaigns on a broader scale, particularly for raising awareness or influencing public opinion on national or regional levels. However, they may require ongoing support to maintain consistent alignment with feminist values and avoid reputational risks associated with superficial partnerships. Long-term collaborations can be cultivated through co-created content, regular capacity-building workshops, and shared campaigns that allow influencers to integrate SRHR themes into their broader narratives organically.

> *"There is plenty of SRHR information and data that needs to be shared with the world and many people are often stuck with problems that arise from ignorance. I would love to share as much information and help as many people open up their minds about SRHR issues and the importance of advancing the cause for feminism. Many men are unaware of the dangers they expose women to by the seemingly little or insignificant things they do and say. I would love to help as many men open up their eyes to the harsh realities that women face lives of disadvantage, ridicule, and hindrance." - **Bernard Olupot, Uganda.**

Observations from digital interactions suggest that influencers who frame SRHR issues through relatable, everyday experiences—such as gender roles, relationships, and community well-being—maintain stronger engagement over time. Content that feels too technical or heavily academic often struggles to retain audience interest, particularly on fast-paced platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Feminist organizations working with influencers should prioritize content formats that balance depth with accessibility, ensuring that advocacy remains both impactful and digestible.

In all cases, nurturing genuine relationships with influencers—built on trust, mutual respect, and shared goals—enhances the sustainability and authenticity of SRHR advocacy efforts. By prioritizing influencers with a demonstrated commitment to feminist and social justice causes, organizations can ensure their campaigns are led by credible voices capable of influencing both attitudes and behaviors over time.

*"My journey as a content creator and influencer began with a deep passion for storytelling and a desire to see underrepresented narratives in media. Growing up, I always gravitated toward writing, crafting stories from the age of 9, and later finding my voice through social media platforms. What inspired me to focus on SRHR and feminist issues was witnessing the many gaps in access to sexual and reproductive health information, particularly for young women and girls in my community. I saw how societal norms and patriarchal systems limited their freedom and autonomy. My work with the Sistah Sistah Foundation and as a Gender Equity Specialist only solidified my drive to use digital platforms to advocate for women's rights, bodily autonomy, and intersectional feminism. I wanted to create content that reflects the realities of African women—stories that go beyond trauma but still address the struggles we face due to misogyny, lack of access to healthcare, and the persistence of harmful cultural norms." - **Ann K Holland, Zambia**[40]*

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40   Quote 4 from survey

5.4) Pricing and Compensation

5.4.1 Influencer Payment Structures

The ways influencers are paid in Kenya, Rwanda, Zambia, and Uganda vary widely, with compensation often determined by factors such as platform preference, audience size, and the nature of the SRHR campaign. Nano- and micro-influencers (1K–50K followers), who are commonly engaged for grassroots advocacy, tend to charge lower fees—ranging from $50 to $500 per post—while macro- and mega-influencers (50K+ followers) often command higher rates, sometimes in the thousands of dollars. Payment structures also differ depending on the type of content, with static posts generally costing less than more complex formats like videos, which require additional time, equipment, and production skills.

Analysis of digital engagement patterns shows that micro- and nano-influencers often generate deeper audience interactions despite charging lower rates. Their followers engage more actively in discussions, particularly around taboo SRHR topics, indicating that their impact extends beyond sheer numbers. However, these influencers often struggle with financial sustainability, as they do not attract the same commercial sponsorships as larger influencers. Organizations investing in SRHR advocacy must consider how to ensure fair compensation for these influencers, given their critical role in building authentic, community-driven engagement.

Additionally, platform dynamics influence pricing. TikTok and Instagram influencers tend to charge more for video content due to high production costs and algorithmic preferences for visual storytelling. Twitter/X influencers, on the other hand, may have lower rates but offer strong engagement in policy-driven discourse. This distinction is particularly relevant for SRHR campaigns that require a balance between high-visibility advocacy and in-depth conversations.

5.4.2 Non-Monetary Compensation

In many cases, especially when working with smaller influencers or those with strong personal commitments to social justice, organizations may offer non-monetary incentives such as training opportunities, access to networks, or

visibility in broader advocacy campaigns. These alternatives can be effective for promoting long-term collaborations, though they may not suffice for influencers relying on their platforms as primary income sources.

> *"Financial compensation would enable me to step back from some of my work obligations and dedicate more time to my online work. It would also help to be part of a network of people speaking on similar issues and amplifying each other's voices, as it can be hard to keep the audience's attention and interest on issues that are not scandalous like SRHR." - **Acan, Uganda**[41]*

Engagement trends suggest that influencers who receive institutional support—whether through training, community-building, or networking opportunities—tend to remain more active and consistent in their advocacy. Those lacking such support often struggle to sustain SRHR content in the long term, particularly when faced with online harassment or shifting platform algorithms that reduce the reach of their content.

> *"As a feminist and SRHR advocacy influencer, I've faced relentless online bullying and harassment from individuals, media platforms, and bloggers. However, I've found support in the community I've built online, which rallies around me during times of harassment or contentious discussions. Moreover, organizations like Pollicy have provided me with invaluable training on digital safety and security, empowering me to protect myself in the online sphere. Having access to these critical safety measures has been instrumental in sustaining my work while ensuring my online well-being." - **Patience Ahumuza, Uganda.***

Additionally, influencers who promote SRHR often face higher risks of censorship, demonetization, and coordinated digital attacks compared to lifestyle or entertainment influencers. These factors make financial compensation even more critical, as advocacy influencers may need additional

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41   Quote 6 from survey

resources to manage crisis response, digital security, and alternative content distribution strategies.

While non-monetary compensation can be beneficial, particularly for activists already embedded in SRHR movements, organizations must recognize that visibility and training do not replace financial sustainability. Providing influencers with fair compensation not only ensures their continued participation but also strengthens the quality and consistency of SRHR advocacy in digital spaces.

5.5) Platforms and Narratives

Influencers in Eastern and Southern Africa engage with their audiences through various platforms, including Instagram, Twitter (X), Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok. Each platform caters to distinct audience preferences, content styles, and engagement dynamics, shaping how SRHR narratives are delivered and received. Monitoring online discourse shows that while all these platforms play a role in advocacy, their effectiveness depends on how influencers tailor their messaging to the unique interaction patterns of each space. The success of SRHR campaigns often hinges on platform-specific strategies that balance visibility, audience trust, and engagement depth.

i. **Instagram:** This highly visual platform is a favorite for sharing personal stories, creating aesthetically pleasing infographics, and hosting live Q&A sessions, offering influencers a space to connect emotionally with their audiences through compelling visuals and relatable experiences. Instagram also enables interactive engagement through features like polls and stickers, advancing direct participation on SRHR issues. Tracking influencer engagement reveals that Instagram excels in building community-driven conversations, with personal storytelling—especially through Stories and Reels—driving high interaction, as audiences are more likely to engage with content that feels authentic and visually appealing. However, SRHR content on Instagram faces algorithmic challenges, with reproductive health topics occasionally being flagged or shadowbanned, requiring influencers to be strategic in their wording and imagery.

ii. **Twitter (X):** This is a powerful tool for real-time interaction, allowing

influencers to participate in trending conversations, address misinformation, and deliver concise yet impactful messages about SRHR. Hashtags, threads, and direct replies are leveraged to engage in debates and amplify advocacy campaigns, making the platform particularly effective for discussions on current events and policy changes. Data from SRHR-related hashtags suggests that Twitter remains the go-to platform for policy-driven advocacy and digital activism, with conversations around abortion rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and reproductive justice often sparking large-scale engagement, though they also attract significant opposition. While highly effective for mobilizing audiences around urgent issues such as legal reforms or government crackdowns on reproductive rights, feminist and SRHR influencers frequently face coordinated harassment, highlighting the need for additional digital safety measures.

iii. **Facebook:** Despite its ban in Uganda, Facebook remains a dominant platform in countries like Zambia, where it is widely used for detailed discussions and community-building activities. Influencers leverage the platform to post longer narratives, share in-depth resources, and host live sessions that enable interactive dialogues on SRHR, with its familiarity and data efficiency making it accessible to diverse audiences, including those in rural areas. As one of the most trusted platforms for community-driven SRHR advocacy, Facebook is particularly valuable among older demographics and grassroots activists, with private groups and pages providing safe spaces for in-depth discussions, resource sharing, and peer support. While younger users are shifting to more visual platforms, Facebook continues to serve as a key hub for SRHR education, especially in regions where digital literacy and internet access remain limited.

iv. **TikTok:** Increasingly popular among younger demographics, TikTok allows influencers to create short, engaging videos that simplify complex SRHR topics into digestible and relatable content. Through trends, music, and humor, influencers capture the attention of youth and bring up conversations on sensitive issues like contraception or consent in a less formal and more approachable manner. Monitoring engagement patterns indicates that TikTok is one of the most effective platforms for shifting attitudes among youth, as content that incorporates humor, personal anecdotes, or viral challenges tends to perform well, making
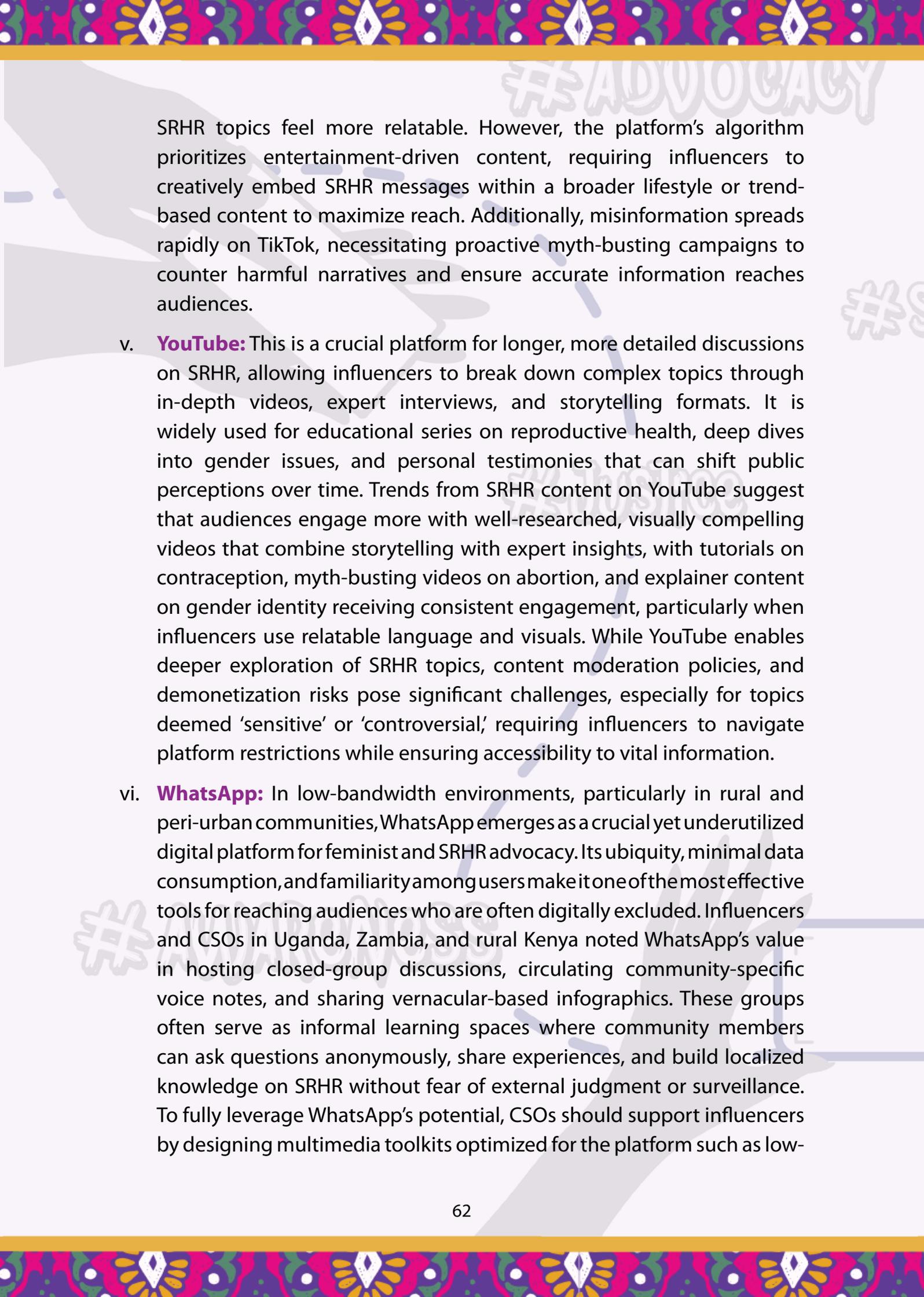
SRHR topics feel more relatable. However, the platform's algorithm prioritizes entertainment-driven content, requiring influencers to creatively embed SRHR messages within a broader lifestyle or trend-based content to maximize reach. Additionally, misinformation spreads rapidly on TikTok, necessitating proactive myth-busting campaigns to counter harmful narratives and ensure accurate information reaches audiences.

v. **YouTube:** This is a crucial platform for longer, more detailed discussions on SRHR, allowing influencers to break down complex topics through in-depth videos, expert interviews, and storytelling formats. It is widely used for educational series on reproductive health, deep dives into gender issues, and personal testimonies that can shift public perceptions over time. Trends from SRHR content on YouTube suggest that audiences engage more with well-researched, visually compelling videos that combine storytelling with expert insights, with tutorials on contraception, myth-busting videos on abortion, and explainer content on gender identity receiving consistent engagement, particularly when influencers use relatable language and visuals. While YouTube enables deeper exploration of SRHR topics, content moderation policies, and demonetization risks pose significant challenges, especially for topics deemed 'sensitive' or 'controversial,' requiring influencers to navigate platform restrictions while ensuring accessibility to vital information.

vi. **WhatsApp:** In low-bandwidth environments, particularly in rural and peri-urban communities, WhatsApp emerges as a crucial yet underutilized digital platform for feminist and SRHR advocacy. Its ubiquity, minimal data consumption, and familiarity among users make it one of the most effective tools for reaching audiences who are often digitally excluded. Influencers and CSOs in Uganda, Zambia, and rural Kenya noted WhatsApp's value in hosting closed-group discussions, circulating community-specific voice notes, and sharing vernacular-based infographics. These groups often serve as informal learning spaces where community members can ask questions anonymously, share experiences, and build localized knowledge on SRHR without fear of external judgment or surveillance. To fully leverage WhatsApp's potential, CSOs should support influencers by designing multimedia toolkits optimized for the platform such as low-

resolution videos, translated audio guides, and conversational scripts for community engagement. This strategy ensures that digital advocacy is not only accessible to urban audiences but also inclusive of rural voices often marginalized in SRHR discourse.

5.6) SRHR Narratives Promoted by Influencers

i.   **Bodily autonomy:** Influencers across Eastern and Southern Africa are championing bodily autonomy as a cornerstone of SRHR advocacy, often connecting this principle to specific issues such as safe abortion and LGBTQ+ rights. For example, Onyango Otieno in Kenya uses her platform to highlight the intersection of bodily autonomy with human rights, particularly for marginalized groups. Similarly, Ugandan influencers like Innocent Immaculate Acan emphasize abortion rights as essential to women's control over their bodies, reflecting a growing movement to destigmatize these topics. These narratives aim to challenge societal norms and restrictive laws that undermine individuals' ability to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

ii. **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE):** Influencers in Rwanda and Zambia prioritize integrating Comprehensive Sexuality Education into school curriculums. This is echoed in the work of influencers like Ruth Namatama Kanyanga Kamwi from Zambia, who focuses on menstrual hygiene and empowerment, emphasizing the importance of equipping young people with accurate knowledge about their bodies and reproductive health. By addressing issues such as teenage pregnancy and early marriages, influencers advocate for a future where youth have the information and confidence to make informed decisions, despite resistance from conservative communities.

iii. **Reproductive rights:** The right to access reproductive health services is a recurring theme among influencers in Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia. Advocates like Luyinda Hindu Gloria from Uganda emphasize the importance of contraception and family planning services, particularly for vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities and those facing stigma in healthcare settings. Additionally, Kenyan influencers like Onyango Otieno use storytelling and creative formats to discuss abortion and contraception, focusing on destigmatizing these topics

and advocating for affordable, accessible care.

iv. **LGBTQ+ rights:** LGBTQ+ advocacy remains highly sensitive in the region, with influencers navigating significant resistance to address these issues. Influencers like Fahe Kerubo in Kenya focus on promoting the health and rights of LBQ-GNC (lesbian, bisexual, queer, gender non-conforming) individuals. By framing these discussions within broader narratives of vulnerability and human rights, these campaigns seek to promote understanding and challenge discriminatory norms. However, the risks associated with LGBTQ+ advocacy, including legal and societal backlash, limit the scope and visibility of such efforts in countries like Uganda and Zambia.

5.7) Strategies Employed by Influencers in SRHR and Feminist Advocacy

i. **Collaborative campaigns:** Influencers frequently collaborate with civil society organizations, other activists, and like-minded individuals to amplify their SRHR messaging. For example, Onyango Otieno in Kenya leverages partnerships to co-host advocacy campaigns, workshops, and digital campaigns, focusing on topics like abortion stigma and healthy masculinity. Similarly, influencers such as Ruth Namatama in Zambia participate in consultative work and create joint initiatives with organizations like UNFPA to address issues such as teen pregnancy and menstrual health. Collaboration provides influencers with access to additional resources and amplifies their reach, making campaigns more impactful.

ii. **Hashtag campaigns:** The use of hashtags is a prominent strategy for driving engagement and increasing visibility on platforms like Twitter (X) and Instagram. Influencers tailor their hashtags to specific campaigns or trending topics, encouraging broader participation. For instance, influencers often create campaign-specific hashtags during international observances like International Safe Abortion Day or campaigns focusing on gender-based violence. Hashtags help connect influencers with their audience and create a collective momentum for SRHR advocacy.

iii. **Personal narratives:** Sharing personal stories is a powerful tool used by

influencers to humanize SRHR issues and facilitate emotional connections with their audience. Fahe Kerubo from Kenya utilizes her personal experience with reproductive challenges to advocate for queer health and rights. Similarly, influencers like Ann K. Holland in Zambia focus on storytelling to illustrate the struggles and triumphs of African women in accessing SRHR services. By drawing on lived experiences, influencers make SRHR topics relatable, dismantling stigma and nurturing empathy among their audiences.

iv. **Interactive engagement:** Interactive content such as Q&A sessions, polls, and quizzes is widely used to engage audiences on platforms like Instagram and Twitter. Onyango Otieno's anonymous Q&A sessions allow followers to ask questions about sensitive topics like sexual health and contraception without fear of judgment, creating safe spaces for dialogue. Influencers like Mukamwiza Sophia in Uganda use polls to determine which SRHR topics resonate most with their followers, ensuring content is tailored to audience needs.

v. **Educational content and myth-busting:** Many influencers focus on dispelling myths and educating their audiences about SRHR through simplified, factual content. Michie in Uganda emphasizes breaking stereotypes and correcting misinformation about sexual offenses and family planning through her posts. Infographics, short videos, and informational threads on platforms like Instagram and Twitter make complex topics accessible to a broader audience.

vi. **Creative formats:** The use of creative storytelling formats such as dance, spoken word, or visual art is gaining popularity among influencers. For instance, Onyango Otieno incorporates dance performances into his campaigns to convey the emotional depth of topics like abortion stigma and sexual violence. These formats add a layer of relatability and memorability to SRHR advocacy, appealing to diverse audiences.

vii. **Safe spaces for marginalized groups:** Influencers actively create spaces for marginalized voices, particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals, persons with disabilities, and rural women. Fahe Kerubo organizes private, queer-centric roundtable discussions to amplify underrepresented perspectives . Similarly, influencers like Luyinda Hindu Gloria in Uganda use platforms such as WhatsApp to connect with specific groups, including the Deaf

community, ensuring inclusivity in SRHR advocacy.

viii. **Evidence-based advocacy:** Several influencers emphasize the use of research and evidence to back their claims. For instance, Innocent Immaculate Acan, a medical professional in Uganda, relies on peer-reviewed articles and credible data to inform her posts on reproductive healthcare and abortion rights. This approach helps establish credibility and counters misinformation effectively.

5.8) Measuring Impact

Evaluating the impact of influencer-led SRHR advocacy in Kenya, Rwanda, Zambia, and Uganda requires a nuanced approach that considers both quantitative metrics and qualitative outcomes. Measuring success goes beyond reach and impressions, focusing instead on how effectively influencers drive meaningful engagement, behavior change, and social action. Tracking digital conversations and audience interactions highlights the importance of assessing not just numbers, but the depth of engagement, the spread of narratives, and the ability of influencers to shift perceptions over time.

Measuring the impact of your digital campaign can be tricky for several reasons such as unpredictable timeframes as policy change can take years to come into effect. Oftentimes, local contexts change and this means shifting milestones. It is important to think more of your contribution towards your goals, rather than attributing the success of advocacy strategy to your work. As part of this, we should think of the journey, rather than just the destination. Be sure to measure progress along the way to make sure you can see the impact of your work over time.[42]

i. **Reach and engagement:** Metrics such as views, likes, comments, and shares provide a snapshot of an influencer's ability to attract attention. However, deeper engagement—such as audience interactions through direct messages, question submissions, or participation in live events—offers a more meaningful gauge of the campaign's resonance. For instance, in platforms like TikTok and Instagram, where short-form videos

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42   Pollicy. (2021, November). Digital advocacy toolkit (p. 17). https://pollicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Digital-Advocacy-Toolkit-Final-1.pdf

dominate, audience comments often reflect curiosity or a willingness to learn, particularly when influencers address less familiar SRHR topics like contraception myths or reproductive justice.

ii. **Behavioral conversions:** A critical measure of impact is whether influencers can inspire their audiences to take action. This might include driving traffic to SRHR resources, increasing helpline usage, encouraging event attendance, or motivating petition signatures. In campaigns promoting contraceptive access or maternal health, for example, success can be assessed by tracking how many people seek out related services or resources after viewing influencer content. Tools like UTM codes and affiliate links help organizations monitor these conversions effectively.

> *"I measure SRHR content impact through engagement, reach, and website traffic. I also track feedback, attitude changes, and conversations. Key indicators include increased awareness, improved attitudes, advocacy, and behavior changes. I use social media analytics, surveys, and focus groups to monitor progress, aiming for policy changes, cultural shifts, improved health outcomes, and empowered communities." - Luyinda Hindu Gloria, Uganda [Quote from the survey]*

iii. **Sentiment and trust:** Qualitative feedback through comments, shares, or testimonials provides insights into audience sentiment. Positive reactions, such as expressions of support or gratitude for informative content, indicate trust and resonance. On the other hand, polarized or negative feedback—while challenging—can offer opportunities to address misinformation or cultural resistance. Sentiment analysis tools can help organizations assess the tone of audience interactions and refine messaging strategies accordingly.

> *"I measure reach & audience engagement of my content by using reporting templates that generate these analytics and the positive shift in narratives (in conversations) usually indicate impact."- Ritah Asiimire, Uganda.*

iv. **Amplification and advocacy ripple effects:** The ability of influencers to catalyze wider discussions, collaborations, or media coverage is another key indicator of success. For instance, an influencer's post sparking discussions on SRHR in schools or among local policymakers demonstrates a ripple effect that extends beyond social media. Similarly, increased earned media coverage or new partnerships stemming from influencer campaigns reflect a broader societal impact.

Monitoring content amplification shows that influencers with strong community ties are more likely to trigger real-world conversations. When advocacy posts are reshared by journalists, policymakers, or other influencers, their reach extends beyond traditional digital activism, influencing mainstream discourse. Additionally, influencers who participate in panel discussions, workshops, or media interviews often serve as bridges between online activism and institutional advocacy.

> *"The collaborations I've been invited to—whether for campaigns, workshops, or speaking engagements—are another way I measure impact. Being approached by organizations or individuals who want to partner with me on SRHR campaigns shows that my work is being recognized and trusted. These opportunities allow me to expand my reach and influence beyond my platforms." - **Onyango Otieno, Kenya [Quote from Survey]***

v. **Inclusivity and reach across marginalized groups:** Finally, measuring the extent to which campaigns reach marginalized or underserved populations—such as rural communities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, or persons with disabilities—is essential. While overall audience growth is a valuable metric, targeted outcomes like increased participation in SRHR services by specific groups reveal the campaign's equity and inclusivity.

In sum, measuring impact requires a combination of real-time analytics, audience feedback, and post-campaign evaluations. This ensures a comprehensive understanding of how influencers contribute to advancing feminist and SRHR goals in culturally and contextually diverse settings.

"To measure the impact of my SRHR content, I use several indicators. I analyze engagement metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and retweets to gauge audience interaction while tracking follower growth helps me assess interest in SRHR topics. Gathering direct feedback through polls and surveys allows me to refine my content, and sharing personal stories and testimonials serves as qualitative evidence of my influence. I also evaluate knowledge retention by conducting quizzes or surveys to measure understanding before and after educational posts. Monitoring discussions in online groups helps me observe how my content shapes SRHR conversations, and I track actions taken by followers, such as seeking resources or participating in related campaigns, to measure tangible impact." -
Ann K Holland, Zambia

5.9) Challenges and Gaps in Using Social Media for SRHR and Feminist Advocacy

While social media has emerged as a powerful platform for advancing SRHR and feminist advocacy, it is fraught with challenges and gaps that limit its full potential. These obstacles include underrepresented voices, government-imposed restrictions, online harassment, content quality issues, and financial constraints. The perspectives shared in the influencer mapping survey shed light on the nuanced realities of digital advocacy in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Zambia.

i.   **Underrepresented voices:** A significant gap in SRHR advocacy is the underrepresentation of marginalized groups, including LGBTQIA+ individuals, persons with disabilities, adolescents, sex workers, and rural populations. These communities often face compounded barriers to accessing SRHR services and advocacy platforms. Influencers frequently shy away from amplifying these voices due to societal stigmas or legal risks, such as Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act and Kenya's criminalization of LGBTQIA+ identities.

This lack of representation perpetuates inequalities by silencing those most in need of support. For example, rural communities, where internet access and digital literacy are low, are often excluded from online campaigns.

Influencer Onyango Otieno noted, *"There's a lack of accessible, accurate information on SRHR issues for many people in East Africa, particularly in rural areas. Not everyone has internet access or digital literacy to engage with online resources".* Addressing these gaps requires deliberate efforts to involve diverse voices and ensure equitable access to advocacy platforms.

ii. **Government restrictions and internet access:** Governments in East Africa frequently impose restrictions on social media under the guise of national security or public order. In Uganda, the blocking of Facebook since 2021 and the OTT tax introduced in 2018 have severely limited access for low-income populations and rural audiences. Influencers must resort to VPNs, increasing the cost and complexity of advocacy. Luyinda Hindu Gloria shared how these barriers hinder the ability to reach marginalized groups effectively.

In Kenya, internet disruptions during the #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests exemplify the vulnerability of digital advocacy to political interference. Influencers like Onyango Otieno reported delays in sharing time-sensitive information, which undermined their ability to engage effectively with audiences.

iii. **Online harassment and backlash:** Advocating for SRHR topics exposes influencers to significant risks, including trolling, threats, and cyberbullying.

In Kenya and Uganda, influencers like Michie and Fahe Kerubo detailed experiences of hateful comments and reputational harm when addressing topics such as abortion and LGBTQ+ rights. *"The criminalization of LGBTQ in Kenya is a challenge,"* Fahe noted, highlighting the chilling effect this has on public discourse.

Female influencers face targeted attacks, including sexist remarks and threats of violence, creating an unsafe environment for open discussions. Ann K. Holland from Zambia stated, *"Advocating often leads to trolling, threats, and cyberbullying, creating an unsafe environment".* These challenges frequently lead to self-censorship, limiting the scope of SRHR campaigns and the diversity of voices in these discussions.

iv. **Content quality and lack of resources:** Many influencers lack the

training, tools, or resources needed to produce high-quality, culturally sensitive content. Without adequate support, some inadvertently spread misinformation, undermining the credibility of their campaigns.

Influencers such as Mulungi Faith from Uganda highlighted a lack of continuity in mentorship and insufficient resources to expand personal platforms. Similarly, Eric Zachary Mugisha emphasized that short campaign timelines make it difficult to achieve sustained behavior change communication.

To attract followers, influencers often prioritize sensational content over accuracy, which compromises the reliability of SRHR messaging. Capacity-building programs are essential to ensure influencers have the skills to create impactful and responsible content.

v.   **Financial challenges and pricing complexities:** The sensitive nature of SRHR topics increases reputational risks for influencers, often leading to higher compensation demands. However, SRHR organizations frequently operate on limited budgets, making it difficult to secure long-term collaborations with high-profile influencers.

Due to budget and funding limitations, feminist organizations often prioritize collaborations with nano- or micro-influencers, who charge lower rates but have smaller audiences. This limits the reach of campaigns.

Logistical issues, such as inconsistent payment timelines and limited access to international payment platforms, further complicate partnerships. Transparent and equitable payment structures are crucial for maintaining positive relationships with influencers.

vi.   **Lack of conflict resolution frameworks:** Influencers frequently cite miscommunications, unclear deliverables, or delayed payments as sources of tension with organizational partners. These unresolved issues can fracture relationships, undermine trust, and ultimately weaken the advocacy impact of campaigns. To mitigate this, organizations must institutionalize conflict resolution frameworks that provide clear channels for feedback, negotiation, and mediation. These could include partnership agreements with dispute resolution clauses, dedicated liaison officers, or third-party feminist collectives that can arbitrate grievances in a way that centers mutual respect and care.

vii. **Lack of fact-checking support:** The spread of misinformation, often unintentional, by well-meaning influencers presents a reputational risk to both content creators and the SRHR movement. Influencers often operate without direct access to up-to-date SRHR research or technical partners who can validate their content. This highlights the urgent need for CSOs to create collaborative fact-checking systems, such as rapid response teams comprising SRHR professionals who can vet information before it is shared. This not only enhances credibility but also protects audiences from the harm of misinformation.

Chapter 6: A Feminist Analysis Of The Findings

This analysis, informed by survey findings and social media monitoring, highlights the transformative potential of social media influencers in SRHR advocacy in Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Zambia. Influencers play a central role in shaping public discourse, raising awareness, and addressing GBV. However, a feminist perspective reveals systemic barriers rooted in capitalism, algorithmic bias, social inequality, and digital misogyny that limit the sustainability and effectiveness of their work.

Influencers often select advocacy campaigns based on personal experiences, observed SRHR awareness gaps, and a commitment to challenging patriarchal narratives that restrict bodily autonomy and reproductive rights. Their content is tailored to platform-specific audience behaviors, with Twitter/X, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube emerging as dominant platforms. Strategies such as storytelling, humor, personal testimonies, and interactive engagement make SRHR topics more accessible, while feminist influencers prioritize marginalized communities—including LGBTQ+ individuals, persons with disabilities, and rural women—challenging stigma through inclusive dialogue, myth-busting, and resource-sharing.

However, operating within capitalist structures means influencers must navigate the commodification of feminist activism. Many rely on engagement metrics, corporate partnerships, and NGO funding cycles that prioritize palatable narratives over radical, transformative advocacy. While micro- and nano-influencers—who are deeply embedded in feminist movements—drive the most meaningful engagement, they receive the least financial support. This reinforces a gendered economy where digital feminist labor is undervalued and underpaid, forcing influencers into self-censorship or
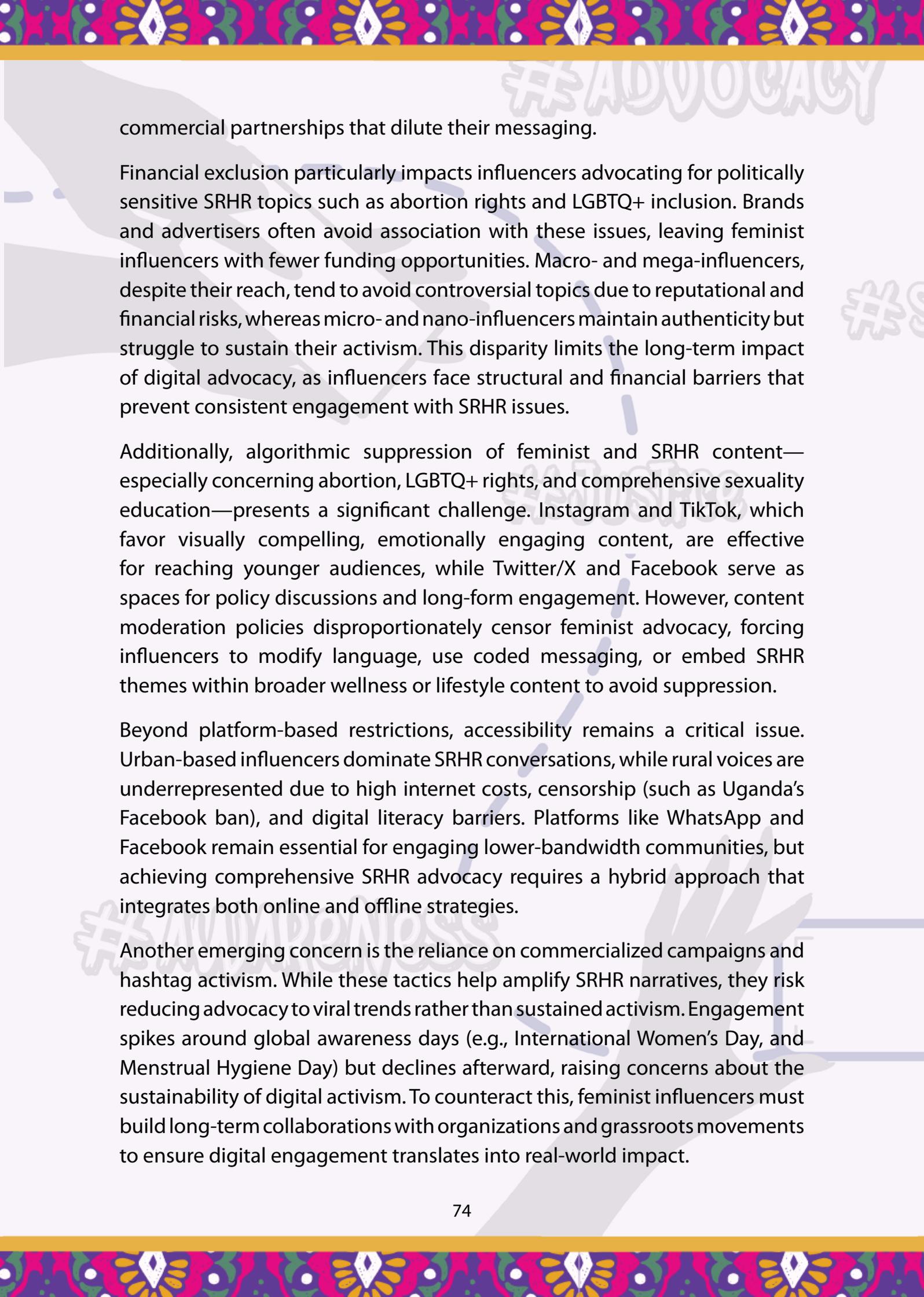
commercial partnerships that dilute their messaging.

Financial exclusion particularly impacts influencers advocating for politically sensitive SRHR topics such as abortion rights and LGBTQ+ inclusion. Brands and advertisers often avoid association with these issues, leaving feminist influencers with fewer funding opportunities. Macro- and mega-influencers, despite their reach, tend to avoid controversial topics due to reputational and financial risks, whereas micro- and nano-influencers maintain authenticity but struggle to sustain their activism. This disparity limits the long-term impact of digital advocacy, as influencers face structural and financial barriers that prevent consistent engagement with SRHR issues.

Additionally, algorithmic suppression of feminist and SRHR content—especially concerning abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, and comprehensive sexuality education—presents a significant challenge. Instagram and TikTok, which favor visually compelling, emotionally engaging content, are effective for reaching younger audiences, while Twitter/X and Facebook serve as spaces for policy discussions and long-form engagement. However, content moderation policies disproportionately censor feminist advocacy, forcing influencers to modify language, use coded messaging, or embed SRHR themes within broader wellness or lifestyle content to avoid suppression.

Beyond platform-based restrictions, accessibility remains a critical issue. Urban-based influencers dominate SRHR conversations, while rural voices are underrepresented due to high internet costs, censorship (such as Uganda's Facebook ban), and digital literacy barriers. Platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook remain essential for engaging lower-bandwidth communities, but achieving comprehensive SRHR advocacy requires a hybrid approach that integrates both online and offline strategies.

Another emerging concern is the reliance on commercialized campaigns and hashtag activism. While these tactics help amplify SRHR narratives, they risk reducing advocacy to viral trends rather than sustained activism. Engagement spikes around global awareness days (e.g., International Women's Day, and Menstrual Hygiene Day) but declines afterward, raising concerns about the sustainability of digital activism. To counteract this, feminist influencers must build long-term collaborations with organizations and grassroots movements to ensure digital engagement translates into real-world impact.
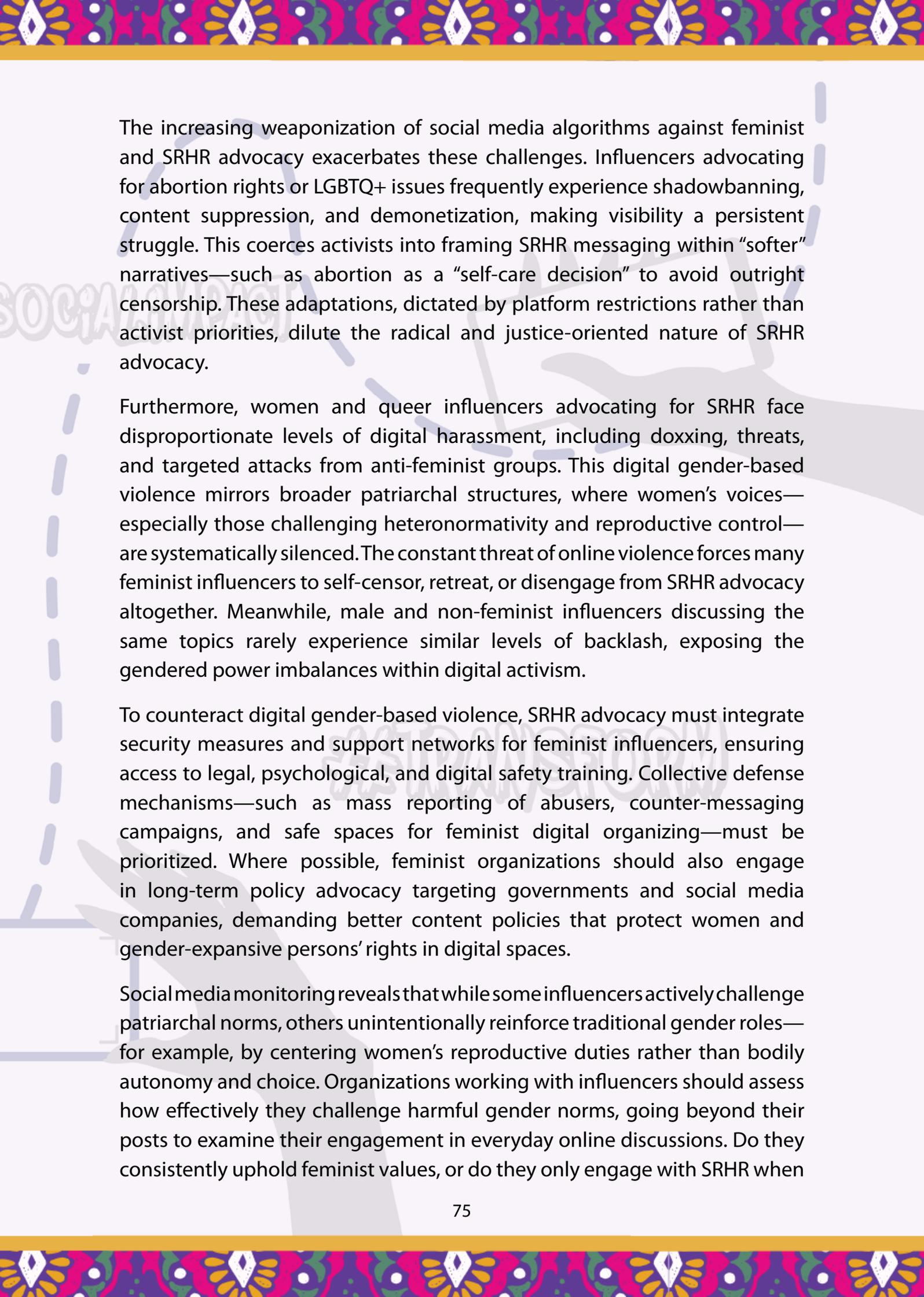
The increasing weaponization of social media algorithms against feminist and SRHR advocacy exacerbates these challenges. Influencers advocating for abortion rights or LGBTQ+ issues frequently experience shadowbanning, content suppression, and demonetization, making visibility a persistent struggle. This coerces activists into framing SRHR messaging within "softer" narratives—such as abortion as a "self-care decision" to avoid outright censorship. These adaptations, dictated by platform restrictions rather than activist priorities, dilute the radical and justice-oriented nature of SRHR advocacy.

Furthermore, women and queer influencers advocating for SRHR face disproportionate levels of digital harassment, including doxxing, threats, and targeted attacks from anti-feminist groups. This digital gender-based violence mirrors broader patriarchal structures, where women's voices—especially those challenging heteronormativity and reproductive control—are systematically silenced. The constant threat of online violence forces many feminist influencers to self-censor, retreat, or disengage from SRHR advocacy altogether. Meanwhile, male and non-feminist influencers discussing the same topics rarely experience similar levels of backlash, exposing the gendered power imbalances within digital activism.

To counteract digital gender-based violence, SRHR advocacy must integrate security measures and support networks for feminist influencers, ensuring access to legal, psychological, and digital safety training. Collective defense mechanisms—such as mass reporting of abusers, counter-messaging campaigns, and safe spaces for feminist digital organizing—must be prioritized. Where possible, feminist organizations should also engage in long-term policy advocacy targeting governments and social media companies, demanding better content policies that protect women and gender-expansive persons' rights in digital spaces.

Social media monitoring reveals that while some influencers actively challenge patriarchal norms, others unintentionally reinforce traditional gender roles—for example, by centering women's reproductive duties rather than bodily autonomy and choice. Organizations working with influencers should assess how effectively they challenge harmful gender norms, going beyond their posts to examine their engagement in everyday online discussions. Do they consistently uphold feminist values, or do they only engage with SRHR when
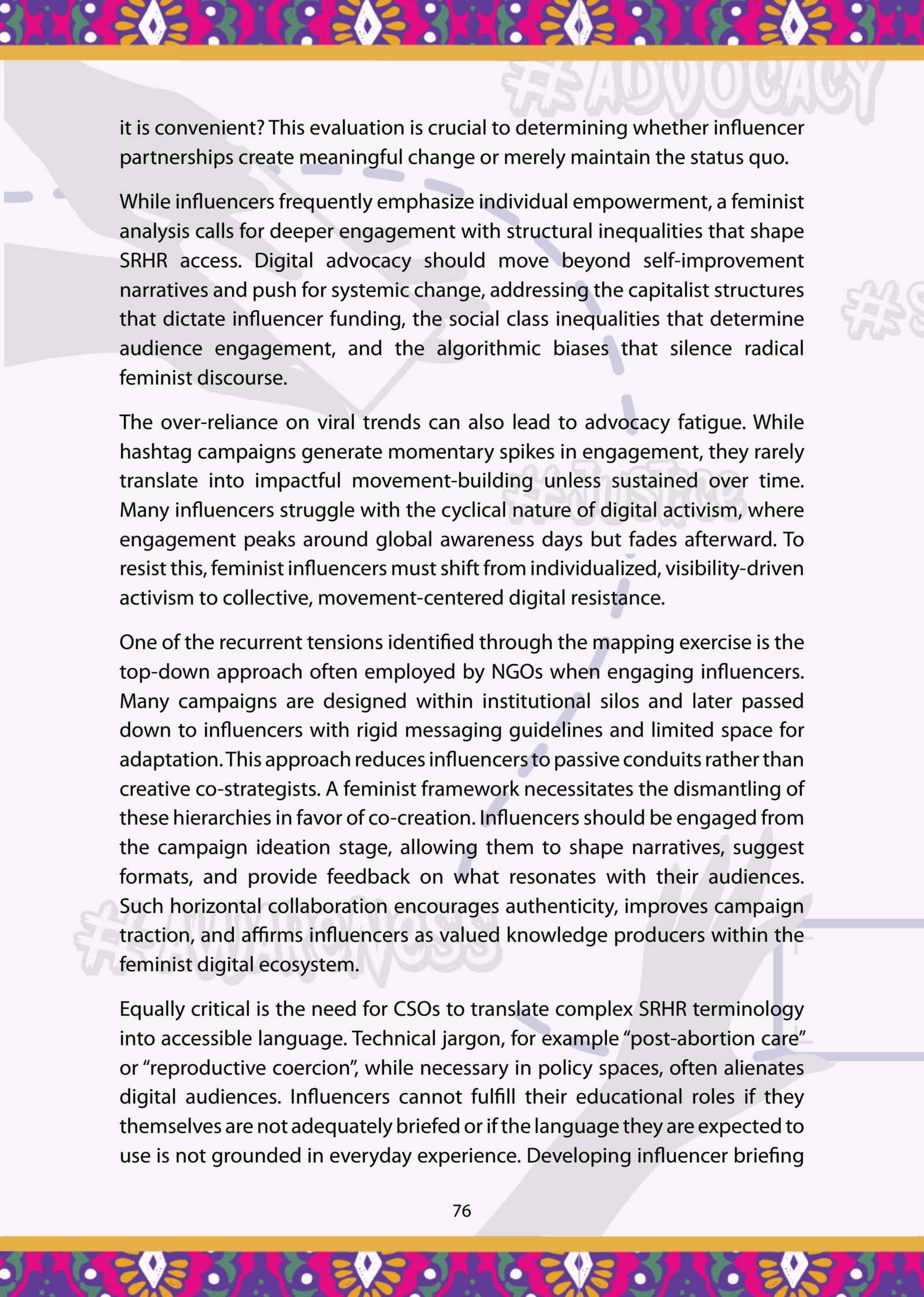
it is convenient? This evaluation is crucial to determining whether influencer partnerships create meaningful change or merely maintain the status quo.

While influencers frequently emphasize individual empowerment, a feminist analysis calls for deeper engagement with structural inequalities that shape SRHR access. Digital advocacy should move beyond self-improvement narratives and push for systemic change, addressing the capitalist structures that dictate influencer funding, the social class inequalities that determine audience engagement, and the algorithmic biases that silence radical feminist discourse.

The over-reliance on viral trends can also lead to advocacy fatigue. While hashtag campaigns generate momentary spikes in engagement, they rarely translate into impactful movement-building unless sustained over time. Many influencers struggle with the cyclical nature of digital activism, where engagement peaks around global awareness days but fades afterward. To resist this, feminist influencers must shift from individualized, visibility-driven activism to collective, movement-centered digital resistance.

One of the recurrent tensions identified through the mapping exercise is the top-down approach often employed by NGOs when engaging influencers. Many campaigns are designed within institutional silos and later passed down to influencers with rigid messaging guidelines and limited space for adaptation. This approach reduces influencers to passive conduits rather than creative co-strategists. A feminist framework necessitates the dismantling of these hierarchies in favor of co-creation. Influencers should be engaged from the campaign ideation stage, allowing them to shape narratives, suggest formats, and provide feedback on what resonates with their audiences. Such horizontal collaboration encourages authenticity, improves campaign traction, and affirms influencers as valued knowledge producers within the feminist digital ecosystem.

Equally critical is the need for CSOs to translate complex SRHR terminology into accessible language. Technical jargon, for example "post-abortion care" or "reproductive coercion", while necessary in policy spaces, often alienates digital audiences. Influencers cannot fulfill their educational roles if they themselves are not adequately briefed or if the language they are expected to use is not grounded in everyday experience. Developing influencer briefing

kits that include definitions, analogies, and localized examples will enable influencers to become more effective communicators and educators.

Feminist SRHR advocacy must reclaim social media as a site of resistance, not just visibility—one that challenges capitalist, patriarchal, and algorithmic oppression rather than merely surviving within it. Without deliberate feminist intervention, digital activism risks becoming a tool of elite, corporate-driven advocacy rather than a transformative movement for gender justice. The future of digital feminism must be intersectional, justice-oriented, and unapologetically disruptive. When approached with a feminist perspective, social media has the power to transform SRHR advocacy and create lasting policy impact.

Chapter 7: Why Use Social Media for SRHR for Feminist Advocacy?

i. **Widespread accessibility:** Social media platforms have deeply penetrated Eastern and Southern African societies, particularly among the youth. According to the East African Communications Organization, the average mobile internet penetration rate in the East African Community (EAC) region increased from 49% in 2022 to 51% in 2023, a year-over-year growth of 16%.[43] Even in rural areas, where traditional forms of communication may be less accessible, mobile phones provide a critical link to information and networks. Social media allows feminist movements and SRHR advocates to reach a broader and more diverse audience, including marginalized communities such as LGBTQ+ individuals and adolescents, who might otherwise be excluded from these conversations.

> *"Social media has a wide audience so using it for SRHR and feminist advocacy creates an opportunity for us to interact with different people but also get feedback on what their take is on certain issues. Additionally, there's an increase in the number of people who seek information on social media. SRHR campaigns like #SRHR4ALL make it easy for them to access the information they need." -*
> *Miranda Violet Bagamba, Uganda*

According to Business Insider Africa, Kenya has 22 million internet users, ranking at number 8 (and number 1 in East Africa) in the top 10 African

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43   East African Community. (2024). Statistics full report. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from https://eaco.int/29thAssemblies/files/StatisticsFullReport.pdf

countries with the highest number of internet users in 2024. highest internet penetration rates in East Africa.[44] Platforms like Twitter and Facebook are widely used by activists to discuss SRHR and gender equality issues. The hashtag movements #MyDressMyChoice and #EndFGM are excellent examples of how Kenyan feminists have utilized social media to challenge oppressive gender norms and advocate for women's bodily autonomy.

> *"I discovered that social media has an incredible ability to spread messages to a wider public. This taught me its power in advocating for important causes, raising awareness, and driving positive change in my society."- Joselyn [Rwandan women's rights advocate]*

ii.   **Cost-effective and rapid mobilization:** Compared to traditional forms of advocacy, social media is cost-effective and allows for rapid mobilization. Activists and feminist organizations can launch campaigns, organize protests, and circulate petitions with minimal financial resources. For example, online petitions on platforms like Change.org or hashtags on Twitter can go viral, generating massive attention and putting pressure on policymakers in a matter of days.

> *"It has been proved that these online spaces are already quite accessible and cost-effective for feminist and women's rights organizations working towards social change and gender equality."*
> *- Mireia Faro Sarrats*

The #WomensMarchUG campaign, which went viral in 2018, is an example of how quickly social media can mobilize public action. Within days of the campaign starting, thousands of women took to the streets in Uganda to protest against gender-based violence and victim-blaming, demonstrating the speed at which social media can ignite change.[45]

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44   Business Insider Africa. (2024). 10 African countries with the highest number of internet users in 2024. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from https://africa.businessinsider.com/local/lifestyle/10-african-countries-with-the-highest-number-of-internet-users-in-2024/mjrgvbr
45   African Feminism. (2018). In solidarity with Uganda women's protest. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from https://africanfeminism.com/in-solidarity-with-uganda-womens-protest/

iii. **Amplification of marginalized voices:** Social media provides a platform for the amplification of marginalized voices, including women, adolescents, and LGBTQ+ communities. In many Eastern and Southern African countries, mainstream media often perpetuates conservative and patriarchal views on SRHR. Social media allows individuals to bypass these gatekeepers and share personal stories, advocate for policy changes, and challenge harmful stereotypes.

LGBTQ+ communities in Kenya, who are often excluded from public discourse due to harsh anti-gay laws and stigmatization, have used platforms like Twitter to highlight their struggles. Movements like #Repeal162, which called for the repeal of Uganda's anti-homosexuality law, have relied heavily on social media to raise awareness and garner international solidarity.[46]

iv. **Global solidarity and international attention:** Social media connects local SRHR and feminist movements with global networks of solidarity. Activists can easily share their campaigns with international organizations, journalists, and human rights advocates, amplifying their reach and securing support from global allies. This international visibility can put pressure on local governments to enact reforms or enforce existing laws related to reproductive health and gender-based violence.

The #EndFGM campaign, driven by Kenyan activists and supported by global feminist movements, gained international attention, leading to stronger enforcement of anti-FGM laws. Social media was crucial in spreading awareness beyond national borders, making FGM a global issue.[47]

The #SheDecidesUganda movement, which campaigns for access to safe abortions and contraception, has drawn significant attention from global SRHR organizations, leading to increased funding and support for local advocacy efforts.[48]

46   FAR Uganda. (2019, February 13). 8 days to repeal I62 ruling. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from https://faruganda.org/2019/02/13/8-days-to-repeal-i62-ruling/
47   United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). (2022). Presidential commitment to end female genital mutilation by 2022. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from https://kenya.unfpa.org/en/news/presidential-commitment-end-female-genital-mutilation-2022
48   SheDecides. (2019). The first SheDecides festival in Uganda. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from https://www.shedecides.com/news/the-first-shedecides-festival-in-uganda/

> *"Cross-borders and cross-boundaries solidarity and support are building up, and feminist solidarity is creating real differences. It is extending from the exchange of supportive messages over social media to collective influential advocacy campaigns that make a difference."* - **Qazzaz**

v. **Challenging traditional power structures:** In patriarchal societies, traditional media and public spaces are often dominated by male voices. Social media democratizes advocacy, allowing women and young people to challenge existing power structures and question cultural norms around gender and sexuality. Feminist movements can create narratives that counter the dominant patriarchal discourse, pushing for a more inclusive understanding of SRHR.

Online discussions around SRHR in Zambia have often centered on breaking taboos surrounding sexual health, particularly for young women and adolescents. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram are being used to share information on contraceptives, HIV prevention, and safe sex practices, especially among youth-led feminist organizations like Choose Yourself.

7.1) Examples of Prominent Social Media SRHR & Feminist Campaigns in Eastern and Southern Africa

Feminist movements have increasingly turned to social media to advocate for SRHR and broader gender justice. Online activism has provided a platform to challenge systemic inequalities, mobilize communities, and pressure policymakers into action. From combating gender-based violence to advocating for bodily autonomy, digital campaigns have played a crucial role in shifting public discourse and driving change. The following examples highlight some of the most impactful social media-driven feminist campaigns in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Zambia. These movements, despite facing resistance, have successfully used digital platforms to amplify marginalized voices, engage diverse audiences, and demand accountability. By analyzing their strategies and achievements, we can better understand the power of social media in advancing feminist advocacy and SRHR across the region.

a. **#EndFemicideKE / #TotalShutdownKE:** This is an ongoing social justice movement in Kenya aimed at combating the rising cases of femicide—the killing of women and girls, often as a result of gender-based violence. The movement has become a powerful platform for raising awareness, demanding justice for victims, and pushing for systemic reforms to ensure women's safety.

The campaign gained momentum through social media activism and on-ground protests, including the #TotalShutdownKenya march on January 27, 2024, where thousands took to the streets to demand government action against femicide. This public mobilization, alongside digital advocacy, has increased pressure on policymakers to prioritize gender-based violence prevention and accountability for perpetrators.

"The coordinators of the #EndFemicideKE protests are staging another civic action on the day of the opening of the Kenyan Parliament and County Assembly, to demand that women's lives are secured and perpetrators are punished."[49]

49   OkayAfrica, More Actions Needed to End Femicide in Kenya (2024) https://www.okayafrica.com/more-actions-endfemicideke/ accessed 27 January 2025.

INFLUENCER POSTS
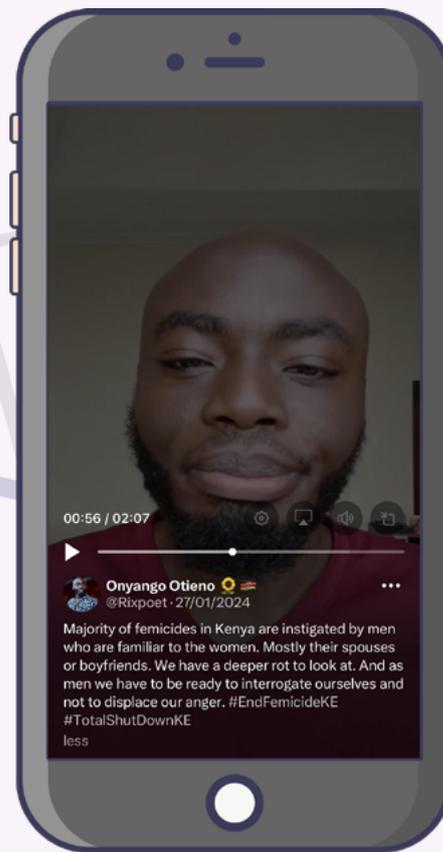
The key objectives of this movement are to raise awareness about the rising cases of femicide and advocate for stronger protections for women, while demanding government accountability and policy reforms to address gender-based violence. Additionally, the movement seeks to ensure justice for victims by pushing for swift investigations and the prosecution of offenders. To achieve these goals, large-scale demonstrations such as the Nairobi march, have been digitally documented in real-time, serving as pivotal moments to pressure authorities into action. Public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives further encourage open discussions on gender-based violence and the need for policy changes. The movement also advocates for the creation of a Commission on the Elimination of Femicide and Violence Against Women and Girls, the inclusion of feminists in public decision-making bodies, disciplinary measures against leaders who promote misogyny, and stronger law enforcement efforts to combat these issues effectively.

Despite its impact, #EndFemicideKE faces challenges, including resistance from groups that downplay femicide as a societal crisis and those attempting to shift the narrative away from structural gender inequalities. However, the movement's growing public engagement signals a collective push toward policy reforms and a demand for a safer society for Kenyan women and girls. Femicide is a national crisis in Kenya, and #EndFemicideKE is at the forefront of pushing for lasting change. It stands as part of the global fight against gender-based violence, reinforcing that a woman's right to live free from violence is non-negotiable.

b.   **#16DaysOfActivism:** This is an annual international campaign dedicated to the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls. Running from November 25 (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) to December 10 (Human Rights Day), the initiative highlights gender-based violence (GBV) as a fundamental human rights violation and calls for global action. Launched in 1991 by activists at the Women's Global Leadership Institute and organized by the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) at Rutgers University, the campaign symbolically connects violence against women with human rights, reinforcing that women's rights are human rights.[50] Over the years, #16DaysOfActivism has gained international momentum, engaging governments, NGOs, civil society groups, and individuals in raising awareness and advocating for systemic change.

In Eastern and Southern Africa, the campaign has been instrumental in addressing gender-based violence in women's sports, an often overlooked issue. Advocacy efforts have exposed harassment, exploitation, and systemic inequalities in male-dominated spaces, sparking necessary conversations on reform and accountability. #16DaysOfActivism has become a coordinated international effort, with participation from diverse communities and institutions. It continues to serve as a catalyst for policy reform, survivor support, and cultural shifts toward a world where women and girls can live free from violence.

50   Equal Times, '#16Days of Activism: How Collective Action is Driving Change to End Gender-Based Violence', Equal Times, 2023, https://www.equaltimes.org/16days-of-activism-how-collective?lang=en#:~:text=Launched%20in%201991%20by%20the,Women [accessed 6 February 2025].

INFLUENCER POSTS

Juliette Karitanyi
@JujuLaBelle

For every woman died from femicide
For those who were raped
For those who are constantly abused&can't
leave for different reasons
For those women who saw their daughters being
abused.
For every GBV experience.
MPORE.
It shouldn't have happened to you
#EndGBV #16DaysOfActivism

NOVEMBER 25TH 2022

IMINSI 16
Y'ubukangurambaga
Bwo Kurwanya Ihohoterwa
Rishingiye Ku Gitsina

"DUFATANYE. Twubake
umuryango uzira ihohotera"
25 NOV - 10 DEC 2022

#EndGBV

#EndFemicideKE
@DecolonialBruja

"Empowering women and girls with disabilities
and ensuring equality and inclusitivity."
@ThinkCREA
#16DaysOfActivism
#CreaAgainstViolence
#IDPD2018

👤 CREA and 9 others

12:16 PM · 03/12/2018

Ms. Ahumuza ✨   Boost
@PeshAhumuza

Honoring the women we've lost to femicide &
intimate partner violence:

Rebecca Cheptegei was a cross country long
distance runner who was burnt to death by her
ex partner. She is one of the many women we've
lost to GBV in the sports world.

#NotAnotherHashtag
#16DaysOfActivism

Feminist Witch 🇨🇩🇹🇿🇸🇩 🌙
@DonCorleANN

Zambian Feminists, 16 days of activism is about
to start and this year's theme is on rape. I want
to know how many of you would be interested in
a "reclaim the night" March to show how tired we
are of living in fear of getting raped, especially at
night.

6:55 PM · 20/11/2019

💬 17   🔁 79   ❤️ 178   🔖 1   ⬆️

Most relevant replies ⌄

Feminist Witch 🇵🇸🇹🇿🇨🇩 … · 20/11/2019   Ⓖ ···
The idea comes from England, it's something
they do every year and no men are allowed. I
am skeptical of doing it because I would want
everyone to be safe but if I got permits and a
police escort would you ladies be interested?

💬 1   🔁 4   ❤️ 29   📊   🔖   ⬆️

This movement aims to highlight the widespread prevalence and devastating impact of gender-based violence (GBV) across different societies while advocating for stronger legislation, greater accountability, and improved support systems for survivors. It also seeks to address the root causes of violence, including patriarchal norms and structural inequalities, while encouraging local, national, and global initiatives to combat violence against women and girls. Key activities include organizing marches and protests to demand justice for survivors and push for policy reforms, as well as facilitating discussions on critical issues such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and human trafficking. The movement leverages social media advocacy, particularly through the hashtag #16DaysOfActivism, to amplify survivor stories and mobilize collective action. Additionally, exhibitions, performances, and storytelling are used as powerful tools to raise awareness and promote change through creative expression.

c.   **#SRHR4ALL:** This is a social media-driven advocacy campaign dedicated to promoting SRHR for all, with a particular focus on Uganda. The movement amplifies the need for accessible, youth-friendly SRHR services, education, and policy reforms to ensure bodily autonomy and reproductive rights. While rooted in Uganda, #SRHR4ALL connects to the global SRHR movement, emphasizing that health, rights, and well-being must be accessible to all, regardless of age, gender, or socio-economic status. By amplifying these conversations online, the movement bridges grassroots activism with global advocacy, ensuring that reproductive rights remain a key part of human rights discourse.
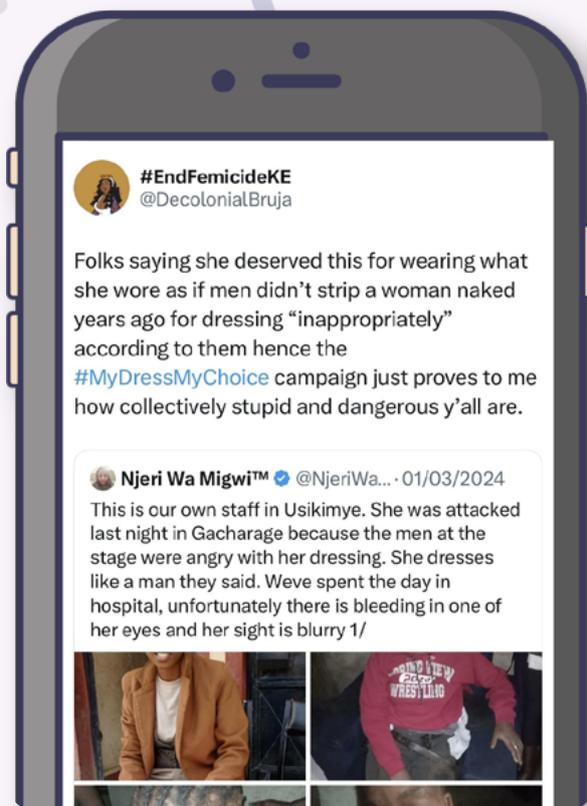
The movement advocates for young people's access to accurate sexual and reproductive health and rights information to enable informed choices, challenge stigma, and facilitate peer education, while opposing restrictive policies like the Global Gag Rule that limit access to contraceptives, HIV prevention, and maternal health services. It strengthens local SRHR advocacy networks by recognizing activists' contributions and engaging stakeholders, including parents, guardians, and teachers, in SRHR education. Through raising awareness about SRHR policies on healthcare access, teenage pregnancies, HIV infections, and maternal mortality, the movement encourages youth participation in reproductive health discussions and celebrates community-led initiatives, while calling for an inclusive HIV response and sustainable solutions to SRHR challenges in Uganda.

d. **#MyDressMyChoice:** This was a groundbreaking social movement in Kenya that emerged in November 2014 after a series of violent incidents where women were publicly stripped and assaulted for wearing miniskirts. Sparked by a viral video showing a woman being attacked at a Nairobi bus stop, the movement quickly gained traction, demanding an end to gender-based violence and the right for women to dress as they choose

without fear of harassment or assault. #MyDressMyChoice remains a landmark movement in Kenya's fight for gender equality, demonstrating the power of social media in mobilizing change and advancing women's rights to bodily autonomy and safety in public spaces.

INFLUENCER POSTS

Njeri Wa Migwi™ ✔
@NjeriWaMigwi

2014.
7 years ago. Nairobi streets were not safe, many women were be stripped naked and even beaten. On a day like this we filled the streets, we marched for our dress ourchoice. We changed history.

We made her story. Never forget.
#mydressmychoice
@bonifacemwangi

3:45 PM · 17/11/2021

💬 21   ↻ 206   ♡ 819   🔖 4

#EndFemicideKE
@DecolonialBruja

Folks saying she deserved this for wearing what she wore as if men didn't strip a woman naked years ago for dressing "inappropriately" according to them hence the #MyDressMyChoice campaign just proves to me how collectively stupid and dangerous y'all are.

Njeri Wa Migwi™ ✔ @NjeriWa... · 01/03/2024
This is our own staff in Usikimye. She was attacked last night in Gacharage because the men at the stage were angry with her dressing. She dresses like a man they said. Weve spent the day in hospital, unfortunately there is bleeding in one of her eyes and her sight is blurry 1/

The campaign focused on personal freedom, bodily autonomy, and women's safety in public spaces, going beyond just clothing. Advocates demanded justice for victims and stricter enforcement of laws against sexual violence and harassment while challenging patriarchal norms that control women's bodies and dictate their attire. Thousands marched in Nairobi with signs saying "My Dress, My Choice," as women wore miniskirts in solidarity, and the hashtag #MyDressMyChoice trended globally on Twitter and Facebook, sparking discussions on gender rights in Kenya. Key leaders, including the

Deputy President, denounced the attacks, pressuring law enforcement to respond.

The Security Laws (Amendment) Act of 2014 addressed public assaults, though enforcement gaps persisted, while opposition under #NudityIsNotMyChoice fueled debates on public decency and dress codes. The movement exposed deep-seated gender inequalities, highlighting the need for cultural and legal reforms to safeguard women.

> *"The online campaign and a demonstration on November 17, 2014, which gathered nearly a thousand people in the center of Nairobi, prompted Kenyan leaders to respond. William Thwere Okelo, chief of state of the Inspector-General's Office, denounced the mob in the videos as "criminal[s]" and promised the public that "the police will take action." Similarly, Kenyan President William Ruto denounced the attack as "barbaric" and ordered a criminal investigation. As a result, the accused were arrested on November 27 and, if convicted, they will face a minimum sentence of ten years to a maximum of lifetime imprisonment."[51]*

e. **#SheDecidesUganda:** This is a women's rights movement advocating for bodily autonomy, reproductive rights, and gender equality in Uganda. As part of the global #SheDecides movement, which emerged in response to policies restricting funding for sexual and reproductive health (SRH) programs, the Ugandan campaign aligns with efforts to ensure that women and girls can make independent choices about their reproductive health without legal, cultural, or financial barriers. #SheDecidesUganda is part of a global feminist struggle, but it addresses localized challenges unique to Uganda's social and legal landscape. The campaign remains a powerful force in advocating for women's right to control their bodies, ensuring that reproductive choices are recognized as fundamental human rights.

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51   World Bank. (2015). #MyDressMyChoice: Tackling gender discrimination and violence in Kenya, one tweet at a time. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/mydressmychoice-tackling-gender-discrimination-and-violence-kenya-one-tweet-time

"SheDecides aims to (1) become stronger by attracting new allies. This will allow it to (2) take more political action to push for stronger commitments globally, both financial and political, to promote women's physical autonomy. That in turn will allow it (3) to speak with a much louder voice to counter opposition. Because the goal remains undiminished: to give all women, girls, and young people the right to decide about their bodies, lives and futures."[52]

The movement advocates for contraceptive access, safe abortion rights, and maternal health services in Uganda while pushing for reforms to protect and expand sexual and reproductive health rights, including challenging restrictive laws like the Global Gag Rule. It promotes comprehensive sexuality education in schools and communities to empower youth with knowledge about their health and rights, and collaborates with activists, NGOs, and policymakers to shift cultural narratives that obstruct gender equality.

However, strict abortion laws and limited contraceptive access continue to restrict women's reproductive choices, compounded by high rates of gender-based violence and a lack of accountability for perpetrators. Societal beliefs also sustain myths about contraception, abortion, and women's roles. Despite these barriers, the movement engages young activists through digital campaigns, grassroots organizing, and policy dialogues to advance sexual and reproductive health rights. It partners with international organizations to secure funding and elevate Ugandan perspectives in global reproductive rights discussions while lobbying for stronger legal protections and inclusive healthcare policies that uphold women's rights.

f. **#EndFGM:** This is a nationwide and global movement aimed at eradicating Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Kenya. Despite being criminalized under the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act (2011), FGM remains prevalent in several communities, particularly in Mandera, Wajir, Kuria, and West Pokot, where rates can exceed 90%. The movement works to eliminate the practice through legal enforcement, community engagement, and advocacy efforts. Kenya's anti-FGM efforts

52   Belgium Federal Public Service. (2022, June 15). 5 years of SheDecides: Because women's rights are fundamental human rights. https://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/policy-areas/highlighted/5-years-shedecides-because-womens-rights-are-fundamental-human

have garnered international recognition, with support from organizations like UNICEF and UNFPA. The movement remains a leading force in East Africa's fight against gender-based violence, though continued vigilance and commitment are necessary to fully eradicate the practice.

The movement works to enforce anti-FGM laws and ensure accountability for perpetrators while involving cultural leaders, men, and boys in changing social norms through campaigns like #MenEndFGM. School-based forums educate youth about bodily autonomy and gender rights, and alternative cultural ceremonies without FGM are promoted to maintain traditions while safeguarding girls. However, challenges persist as some health professionals illegally perform FGM, and families take girls to neighboring countries like Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Somalia to bypass Kenyan law. Cultural beliefs continue to sustain the practice despite awareness efforts.

Current strategies include community dialogues, school programs, and stronger policy enforcement, with data analysis being used to track FGM patterns for more effective interventions. Kenya's High Court recently upheld the anti-FGM law, reaffirming the country's commitment to ending the practice.

"In March 2021, a three-judge bench of the High Court of Kenya upheld and validated the constitutionality of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2011, advancing the rights of women and girls to a positive cultural context and protection against harmful practices."[53]

g.   **#Obulamu:** This is a health communication campaign in Uganda designed to integrate health discussions into everyday life through a culturally relevant and participatory approach. The word "Obulamu" translates from Luganda to "How's Life?", a common greeting that encourages more meaningful conversations about well-being beyond simple responses like 'good' or 'bad'. By blending traditional communication styles with modern health strategies, #Obulamu has successfully made health a

53   Equality Now. (2020). The global movement to end FGM. Equality Now. https://equalitynow.org/the-global-movement-to-end-fgm/
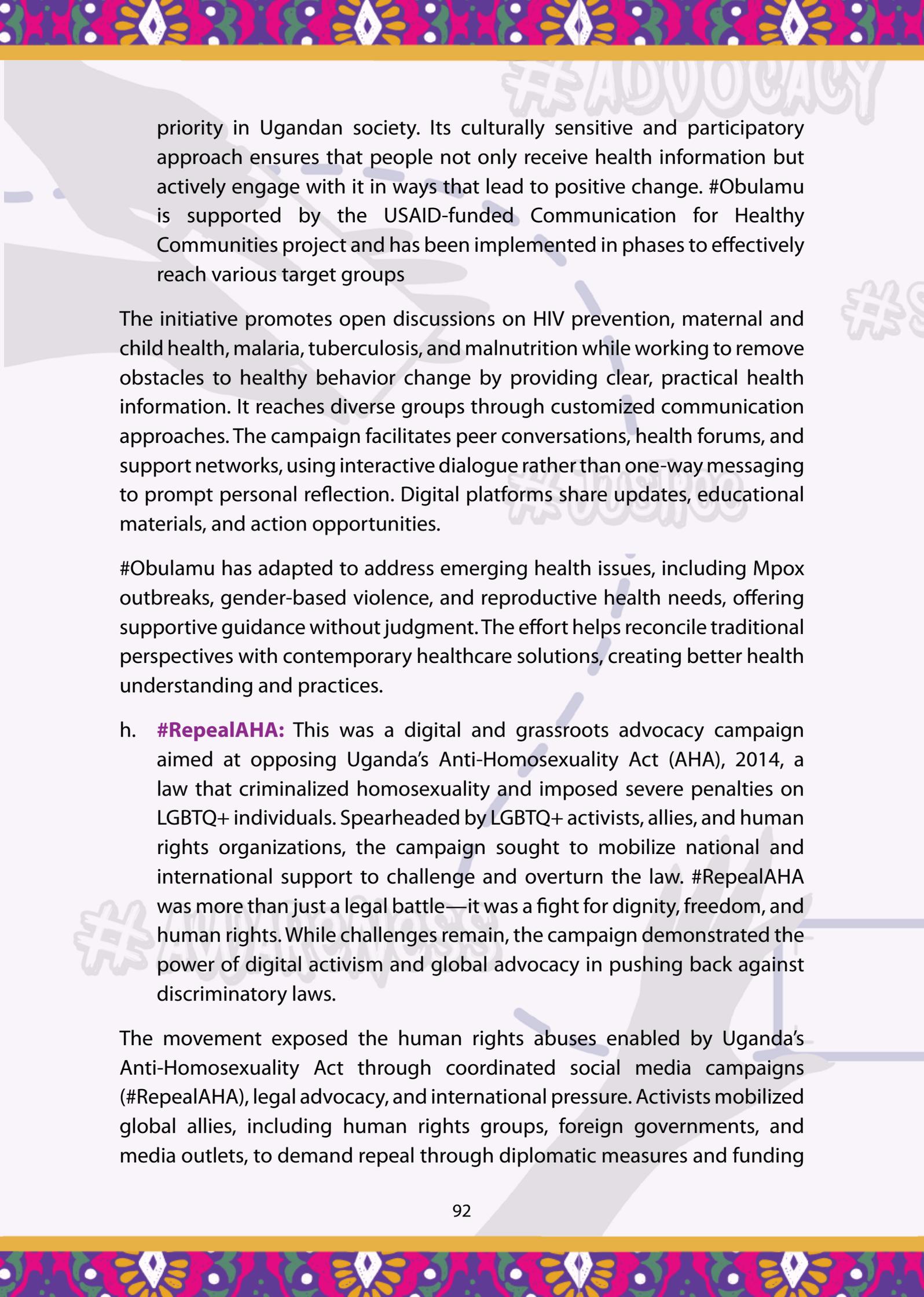
priority in Ugandan society. Its culturally sensitive and participatory approach ensures that people not only receive health information but actively engage with it in ways that lead to positive change. #Obulamu is supported by the USAID-funded Communication for Healthy Communities project and has been implemented in phases to effectively reach various target groups

The initiative promotes open discussions on HIV prevention, maternal and child health, malaria, tuberculosis, and malnutrition while working to remove obstacles to healthy behavior change by providing clear, practical health information. It reaches diverse groups through customized communication approaches. The campaign facilitates peer conversations, health forums, and support networks, using interactive dialogue rather than one-way messaging to prompt personal reflection. Digital platforms share updates, educational materials, and action opportunities.

#Obulamu has adapted to address emerging health issues, including Mpox outbreaks, gender-based violence, and reproductive health needs, offering supportive guidance without judgment. The effort helps reconcile traditional perspectives with contemporary healthcare solutions, creating better health understanding and practices.

h. **#RepealAHA:** This was a digital and grassroots advocacy campaign aimed at opposing Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA), 2014, a law that criminalized homosexuality and imposed severe penalties on LGBTQ+ individuals. Spearheaded by LGBTQ+ activists, allies, and human rights organizations, the campaign sought to mobilize national and international support to challenge and overturn the law. #RepealAHA was more than just a legal battle—it was a fight for dignity, freedom, and human rights. While challenges remain, the campaign demonstrated the power of digital activism and global advocacy in pushing back against discriminatory laws.

The movement exposed the human rights abuses enabled by Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act through coordinated social media campaigns (#RepealAHA), legal advocacy, and international pressure. Activists mobilized global allies, including human rights groups, foreign governments, and media outlets, to demand repeal through diplomatic measures and funding

sanctions. This culminated in August 2014 when Uganda's Constitutional Court invalidated the law due to procedural irregularities in its passage.

While the legal victory marked progress, LGBTQ+ Ugandans continue facing discrimination as lawmakers propose new repressive measures. The #RepealAHA campaign demonstrated the power of transnational activism against anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and established critical legal precedents, though Ugandan advocates still operate under significant threat while maintaining East Africa's growing movement for queer rights.

i.   **#WearThatMini:** This is a feminist social media campaign that emerged in response to the victim-blaming culture surrounding Ugandan women's clothing choices. Initiated by feminist and social media influencer Pesh Ahumuza, the campaign encourages women to embrace their autonomy in dressing and advocates for the right to wear miniskirts without fear of harassment or legal repercussions.

The movement directly challenges patriarchal norms that dictate how women should dress and fights against Uganda's anti-pornography laws, which have historically been used to police women's bodies. At a time when Ugandan women were facing violations and society was blaming them instead of holding perpetrators accountable, #WearThatMini became a rallying call for bodily autonomy, gender equality, and freedom of expression.

Beyond its feminist roots, the campaign also contributed to tangible social change. It led to the establishment of #AHelpingHand, a crowdfunding initiative that has supported over 100 survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and natural disasters. The international recognition of #WearThatMini helped amplify discussions around women's rights in Uganda and beyond, reinforcing the importance of safe spaces and community support for survivors.

By leveraging social media platforms, #WearThatMini sparked conversations on gender justice, body positivity, and intersectionality, highlighting how different identities—such as race, class, and sexuality—shape experiences of oppression. More than just a fashion statement, wearing a miniskirt during this campaign became an act of political resistance, a declaration that women have the right to exist freely without fear.

INFLUENCER POSTS
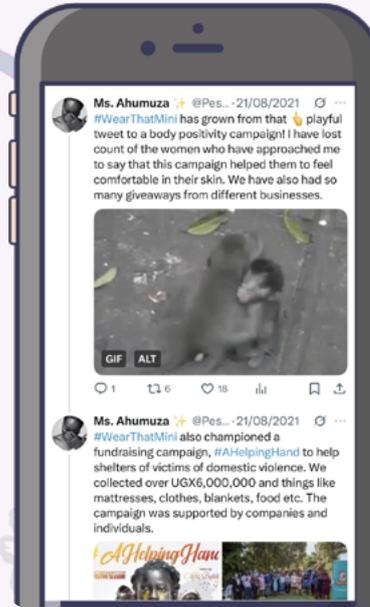
j. **#StopGBV:** This is a nationwide movement in Zambia dedicated to reducing and preventing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). With one of the highest reported rates of GBV globally, Zambia faces an urgent crisis where over a third of women and girls experience

physical violence and 17% face sexual violence in their lifetime.[54]The movement seeks to raise awareness, push for legal reforms, improve survivor support, and drive cultural change to end GBV. The movement works to prevent gender-based violence through education, advocacy, and transforming harmful gender norms while strengthening survivor support by improving access to medical, psychological, legal, and police services. It also focuses on enhancing law enforcement to ensure justice for victims and accountability for perpetrators.

Recent posts on X show increasing political acknowledgment of GBV as a national crisis, with leaders like Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema pledging action, including economic empowerment initiatives for women through Constituency Development Fund allocations and public commitments during campaigns like the 16 Days of Activism. While more survivors are accessing support services and awareness is growing, efforts continue to expand protections, secure funding, and drive cultural change, including demands for additional One-Stop Centers and improved justice mechanisms, particularly in rural areas.

k.   **#EndTeenagePregnancy:** This is a Rwandan campaign dedicated to reducing teenage pregnancy rates and addressing its public health, educational, and socio-economic impacts. Teenage pregnancy remains a major concern in Rwanda, often leading to school dropouts, health risks, and cycles of poverty. The movement seeks to empower young people with knowledge, access to reproductive health services, and policy support to prevent early pregnancies and safeguard their futures.
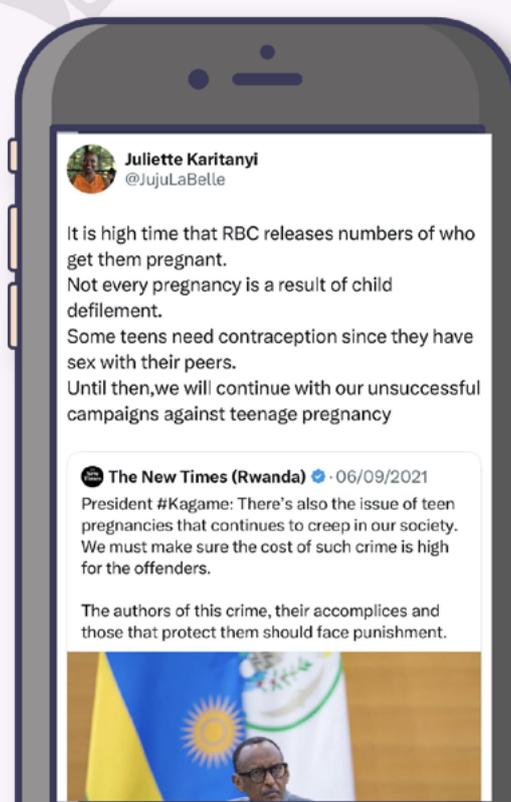
The initiative focuses on educating communities about the risks of teenage pregnancy while promoting responsible sexual behavior. It works to strengthen comprehensive sexuality education in schools and communities, ensuring young people receive accurate information about reproductive health. The campaign also advocates for adolescents' access to contraceptives and healthcare services, while pushing for laws and policies that protect their reproductive rights and education.

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54   Oxford Policy Management, 'Combatting Gender-Based Violence in Zambia', Oxford Policy Management, 2023, https://www.opml.co.uk/insights/combatting-gender-based-violence-zambia#:~:text=More%20than%20a%20third%20of,women%20have%20experienced%20sexual%20violence [accessed 6 February 2025].

These efforts have led to measurable progress, including reduced adolescent pregnancy rates in some regions. The movement has successfully advanced comprehensive sex education initiatives and improved youth access to reproductive health services. Through open discussions about sexual and reproductive health, the campaign has helped decrease stigma surrounding teenage pregnancy and contraceptive use.

INFLUENCER POSTS

Juliette Karitanyi
@JujuLaBelle

It is high time that RBC releases numbers of who get them pregnant.
Not every pregnancy is a result of child defilement.
Some teens need contraception since they have sex with their peers.
Until then, we will continue with our unsuccessful campaigns against teenage pregnancy

The New Times (Rwanda) · 06/09/2021
President #Kagame: There's also the issue of teen pregnancies that continues to creep in our society. We must make sure the cost of such crime is high for the offenders.

The authors of this crime, their accomplices and those that protect them should face punishment.

7.2) Contextual Relevance

The cultural, regional, and linguistic diversity across Kenya, Rwanda, Zambia, and Uganda significantly shapes the effectiveness of social media influencers in SRHR campaigns. These countries share a Global South context where traditional values, community dynamics, and socio-political sensitivities heavily influence public discourse. Unlike strategies often effective in the Global North, such as direct and confrontational advocacy, influencers in these countries must navigate nuanced cultural norms and societal taboos

to resonate with their audiences.

> *Countries opposing SRHR issues often use religious and cultural arguments, mixed with other sentiments, including anti-western or populist ones. This is particularly the case for African governments, who often argue that SRHR and particularly LGBTI rights originate from the West and are 'un-African'. While the opposition against SRHR issues is very diverse, religions, particularly Christian and Islamic values, are a frequently recurring reason for governments to particularly oppose abortion and the rights of people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.[55]*

> *Recognizing the huge diversity in contexts, political circumstances ánd needs, and expressions of culturally diverse people who experience same-sex attractions or gender variance, the strategies to improve their living conditions are also diverse.[56]*

In many cases, SRHR topics like contraception, menstrual health, and maternal care are more readily accepted when framed through culturally appropriate storytelling or integrated into broader themes of health and family well-being. For instance, humor or relatable anecdotes often make sensitive issues like menstrual stigma or adolescent reproductive health more approachable. However, discussions around more controversial topics, such as abortion rights or LGBTQIA+ health, require careful framing to avoid backlash, as these issues often intersect with legal and religious restrictions. The choice of language also matters; using local languages or culturally relevant idioms can enhance relatability, especially in rural areas. This context-specific approach ensures that influencers can drive meaningful engagement while maintaining authenticity and trust with their audiences.

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55   Cense, M., de Neef, M., & Visscher, W. (2018, August). Culture, religion and sexual and reproductive health & rights [Knowledge file]. Rutgers. https://rutgers.international/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Knowledgefile-Culture-Religion-SRHR.pdf
56   As above, pg 13

> *"I've found that humor and creativity are powerful tools for engagement, especially when dealing with topics that people may find uncomfortable or embarrassing. Whether it's through cheeky captions, playful myth-busting videos, or dance performances that tell emotional stories, I try to bring an element of light to serious topics. Humor helps to break down defenses and makes the content more approachable, while creativity adds depth and makes it memorable." - Onyango Otieno, Kenya.*

Intersectionality plays a critical role in shaping the effectiveness of influencers advocating for SRHR in Kenya, Rwanda, Zambia, and Uganda. The overlapping identities of gender, age, class, sexual orientation, and disability influence both the needs of the audience and the capacity of influencers to address these needs authentically. However, restrictive laws and societal norms often limit the ability of influencers to fully embrace an intersectional approach in their advocacy.

For example, Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) criminalizes LGBTQIA+ identities and creates a chilling effect on influencers who might otherwise advocate for inclusive SRHR topics like queer health or access to safe spaces for marginalized groups. Similar legal or cultural constraints exist in other countries, making it risky for influencers to address SRHR issues for groups such as sex workers, individuals with disabilities, or adolescents. These restrictions perpetuate gaps in representation, as many influencers choose to focus on less controversial topics like maternal health or contraception to avoid harassment, backlash, or legal consequences. Despite these challenges, a few bold voices continue to address intersectional SRHR issues, often using coded language or subtle storytelling to circumvent restrictive environments. This highlights the importance of supporting influencers with training and tools to navigate these complexities effectively.

> *"Zambia does not entertain LGBTQ+ issues openly but the messages and content have to leave no one behind." - Ruth Namatama Kanyanga Kamwi, Zambia.*

Chapter 8: Recommendations

1. **Collaborate with non-influencer professionals:** Findings indicate that influencers struggle with misinformation and the need for factually accurate content. Influencers like Onyango Otieno (Kenya) expressed the need for access to research reports, policy briefs, and regional studies to enhance their advocacy. Partnerships with professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and investigative journalists will strengthen credibility and provide influencers with evidence-based knowledge. This will help bridge the gap between grassroots storytelling and expert-backed advocacy, ensuring SRHR content is both engaging and accurate.

2. **Organize values clarification and attitude transformation (VCAT) workshops:** Findings highlight the importance of equipping influencers with the confidence and knowledge to challenge harmful narratives. Influencers like Ritah Asiimire (Uganda) emphasized the need for facilitated training sessions to enhance their SRHR knowledge and advocacy skills. VCAT workshops should be prioritized to help influencers engage effectively on sensitive topics like LGBTQ+ rights and safe abortion. Ongoing mentorship and tailored guidance will ensure influencers remain well-informed and capable of handling nuanced discussions.

3. **Build long-term digital campaigns for sustainable impact:** The study found that one-off collaborations lead to fleeting engagement, while sustained campaigns cultivate deeper trust and influence. Influencers like Innocent Immaculate Acan (Uganda) highlighted that financial compensation allows them to dedicate time to consistent advocacy. Civil society organizations should design multi-phase campaigns that span several months, incorporating education, engagement, and reinforcement strategies. Regular feedback mechanisms will ensure that

campaigns evolve in response to audience needs and shifting discourse.

4. **Strengthen content strategies:** Findings show that influencers require access to up-to-date research, training, and technical support to improve the quality of their advocacy. Influencers like Ann K. Holland (Zambia) emphasized the value of digital tools and accessible formats. Effective content strategies should prioritize formats such as:

   ◆ Short-form videos (TikTok, Instagram Reels) for engaging youth.

   ◆ Testimonials and storytelling to humanize SRHR issues.

   ◆ Infographics and interactive posts tailored to country-specific socio-political contexts. For instance, Luyinda Hindu Gloria (Uganda) noted that accessible digital tools enhance the visibility and impact of SRHR messages.

5. **Continuous monitoring and evaluation:** The study found that influencers measure success through audience engagement metrics, feedback, and behavioral changes. Mukamwiza Sophia (Uganda) stressed the importance of receiving audience feedback to assess content effectiveness. Civil society organizations should establish comprehensive M&E frameworks that track reach, engagement, sentiment analysis, and real-world impact. Sharing periodic impact assessments with influencers will reinforce the value of their work and encourage sustained commitment.

6. **Invest in sustainable resource allocation:** Findings indicate that many influencers face financial constraints, limiting their ability to produce high-quality content. Beewol (Uganda) highlighted the need for access to podcasting technology, travel opportunities, and global SRHR platforms to amplify advocacy. Similarly, Fahe Kerubo (Kenya) emphasized the need for core funding to support organizations that create safe spaces for marginalized communities like LBQ-GNC individuals. Adequate funding should cover:

   ◆ Operational costs and content production tools.

   ◆ Professional equipment (cameras, microphones, editing software).

   ◆ Media amplification and mental health resources to prevent burnout.

7. **Develop clear impact assessment frameworks:** Influencers and organizations should assess success beyond vanity metrics. Findings show that impact is reflected in audience participation, advocacy engagement, and increased access to SRHR services. For instance, influencers like Luyinda Hindu Gloria (Uganda) track audience conversions, such as followers seeking SRHR services after engaging with content. Strategies should include direct audience feedback, real-world advocacy participation, and sentiment analysis to refine approaches.

8. **Strengthen support for safer online spaces:** Findings highlight that influencers face digital harassment and censorship, particularly when advocating for LGBTQ+ rights and abortion. Influencers like Fahe Kerubo (Kenya) and Ann K. Holland (Zambia) reported facing online abuse that limits their ability to engage openly. Civil society organizations should:

   ◆ Provide digital security training.

   ◆ Establish emergency response mechanisms for online harassment.

   ◆ Advocate for platform accountability to combat misinformation and protect feminist content from suppression.

9. **Address the systemic underfunding of feminist movements:** The study found that feminist influencers, particularly those advocating for SRHR, receive significantly less funding compared to other sectors. Economic disparities often force micro- and nano-influencers to engage in unpaid advocacy, despite having the most engaged audiences. Increasing financial investment in feminist and SRHR initiatives will ensure long-term sustainability and equitable support for grassroots influencers.

10. **Expand SRHR advocacy beyond urban centers:** Findings indicate that rural communities remain underrepresented in digital SRHR conversations due to internet access barriers and digital literacy challenges. Influencers like Ruth Namatama Kanyanga Kamwi (Zambia) successfully engage rural audiences through WhatsApp and Facebook. To bridge this gap:

    ◆ Community-based influencers should receive training in local languages.

    ◆ Digital strategies should integrate offline engagement methods.

    ◆ Civil society organizations should prioritize low-bandwidth platforms like WhatsApp.

11. **Counter algorithmic biases and social media censorship:** The study found that SRHR content is frequently shadowbanned or suppressed. Influencers navigating these challenges use creative strategies such as embedding SRHR messages within broader themes like wellness and self-care. To counter censorship, influencers should:

- Use coded language and alternative messaging techniques.
- Diversify content distribution across multiple platforms.
- Collaborate with digital rights organizations to advocate for fair content moderation policies.

12. **Encourage intersectional and inclusive SRHR advocacy:** Findings highlight gaps in advocacy for marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities, sex workers, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Grace (Kenya), a queer activist, shared how many LBQ-GNC individuals struggle to access SRHR services due to stigma. Influencers should integrate intersectional feminist perspectives to ensure inclusivity, while organizations provide platforms for underrepresented voices.

13. **Facilitate cross-border knowledge sharing and regional networks:** The study found that influencers across Eastern and Southern Africa face similar challenges but have limited collaboration opportunities. Regional networks should be established to:

- Facilitate best practice sharing.
- Host joint training sessions.
- Strengthen advocacy efforts through collective digital campaigns.

14. **Develop alternative revenue models for SRHR influencers:** Findings indicate that many influencers struggle financially because SRHR content is not commercially viable. Influencers like Acan (Uganda) noted that financial support would allow them to focus more on advocacy. Alternative funding models should include:

- Crowdfunding initiatives.
- Grant funding opportunities.
- Ethical brand partnerships aligned with feminist values.

15. **Boosting posts and content reach:** In an era where algorithmic suppression of feminist and SRHR content is commonplace, boosting posts is not merely a marketing tactic, it is a political necessity. Paid promotions increase the visibility of progressive narratives that are often buried by platform biases favoring sensationalist or conservative content. CSOs must allocate designated budgets for boosting content across platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. These funds should be used not just for reach, but to specifically target demographics often excluded from SRHR discourse, such as rural youth, persons with disabilities, and queer communities. Influencers should be trained in basic digital marketing to ensure that boosted posts adhere to platform guidelines while maximizing message integrity and impact.

16. **Platform-specific strategy:** Each social media platform has unique affordances that influence how SRHR messages are received. Twitter/X remains a critical site for real-time political discourse, but it is also highly adversarial and often hostile to feminist content. On the other hand, TikTok provides an emotionally resonant space where humor, dance, and storytelling can disrupt stigma and normalize conversations about sexual health. WhatsApp offers privacy and localized trust, making it ideal for sensitive or community-based dialogues. CSOs and influencers must develop platform-specific strategies that align with each medium's culture, audience behavior, and technical design.

17. **Training and influencer selection:** Influencer selection must prioritize alignment with feminist values over numerical reach. Influencers who demonstrate consistent commitment to reproductive justice, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and intersectionality should be given precedence. Alongside selection, training programs must be instituted to enhance influencers' literacy in SRHR, digital safety, movement history, and ethical storytelling. These trainings should be co-developed with feminist educators, technologists, and activists to ensure they are both technically robust and politically grounded.

18. **Inclusive engagement with persons with disabilities:** Inclusive digital campaigns must account for the accessibility needs of deaf, blind, and neurodivergent users. This requires more than captioning videos, it involves collaborating directly with disabled influencers to co-create

content, integrating screen-reader-friendly formats, and adopting multi-sensory approaches to communication. CSOs must commit to disability justice as an integral component of feminist SRHR work, not as an add-on.

19. **Sustaining ethical engagement and debriefing:** Ethical feminist practice demands that organizations properly debrief influencers and collaborators at the end of campaigns. SRHR advocacy—especially on stigmatized topics—can be emotionally taxing. Providing space for reflection, feedback, and emotional closure not only affirms the labor of influencers but also ensures that relationships are maintained with care and integrity across future collaborations.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The findings of this influencer mapping exercise reinforce the critical role that social media influencers play in advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and feminist advocacy across East and Southern Africa. In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, influencers have become key actors in shaping public opinion, mobilizing communities, and challenging restrictive social norms. Their ability to create relatable, engaging, and accessible content makes them powerful allies in countering misinformation, amplifying feminist perspectives, and advocating for gender justice.

As opposition to SRHR continues to grow—fueled by conservative religious, political, and patriarchal forces—it is essential to harness the reach and influence of digital advocacy. Social media provides an alternative platform where progressive narratives can thrive, even in contexts where traditional media is restricted, censored, or controlled by anti-right groups. Influencers, by leveraging their authenticity, personal storytelling, and interactive engagement strategies, can build trust, spark dialogue, and mobilize action among diverse audiences, particularly young people, marginalized communities, and online grassroots movements. To effectively engage influencers in SRHR and feminist advocacy, civil society organizations must:

◆ Develop strategic partnerships that support long-term engagement, moving beyond one-off campaigns.

◆ Provide influencers with capacity-building opportunities, ensuring they have the knowledge and tools to address complex SRHR issues with confidence and accuracy.

◆ Co-create engaging and culturally relevant content that resonates with their audiences while maintaining evidence-based and rights-affirming

messaging.

- Protect and support influencers facing online harassment by advocating for safer digital spaces and providing crisis response mechanisms.

- Measure impact and refine strategies through continuous monitoring, ensuring that influencer-led campaigns effectively shift public attitudes and policy discussions.

By strategically incorporating social media influencers into SRHR and feminist advocacy, organizations can expand their reach, build resilient digital communities, and sustain momentum for progressive change. Influencers are not just amplifiers of information; they are catalysts for social transformation, capable of shifting cultural narratives, normalizing rights-based conversations, and inspiring collective action. Investing in their role within advocacy efforts will strengthen movements, counter disinformation, and advance the fight for gender equality and reproductive justice across the region. This report serves as a roadmap for leveraging digital influence as a force for change, ensuring that SRHR and feminist advocacy remain visible, impactful, and responsive to the needs of those it seeks to empower.
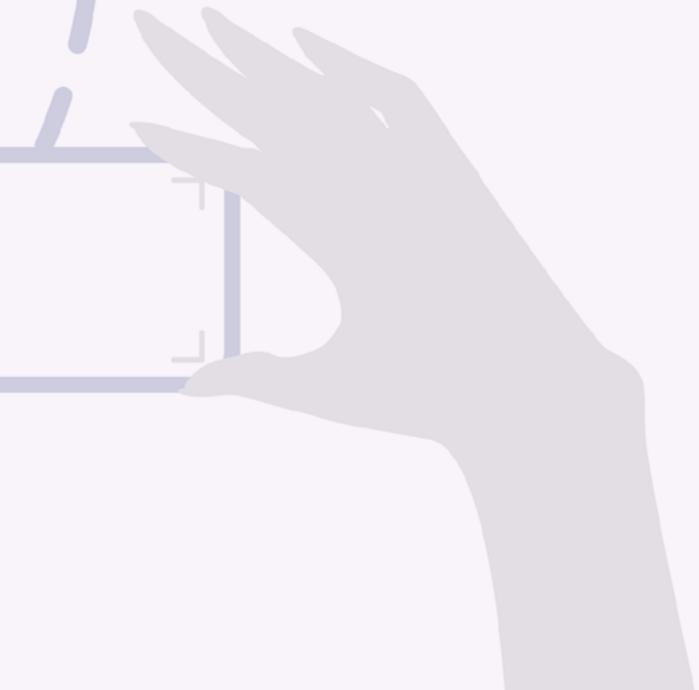
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