
Driving Social Changes Through Virtual Space: An Analysis of Armenian Women Activists' Adoption of Social Media

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The purpose of this paper is to illuminate the work of women activists based in Armenia and investigate how these women are producing a voice in the public sphere by using digital media as an avenue for activism. Following the example of India's "Selfie with Daughter" campaign, aiming to celebrate daughters by sharing photos on social media, Sose's Women's Issues NGO from Armenia implemented a similar project, the #SelfiewithDaughter Media Advocacy Campaign. Between February 1-14, 2016, the project encouraged parents to post selfies with their daughters online with the hashtag "#SelfiewithDaughter." The campaign is an example of digital activism with the goal of spreading awareness and to decrease the rate of sex-selection abortion in Armenia by 1) balancing society's preferences towards boys and girls and 2) involving entities beyond the non-profit sector, specifically media, to become more engaged in issues related to sex-selection and son preference. The findings of this study will contribute to media studies research on women activists.

Introduction

In 2016, posting selfies of oneself on social media became a worldwide phenomenon, and Armenia was no different. Making the most of this trend, a civil society organization in the south of Armenia, Sose Women's Issues NGO (Sose's Women), wanted to encourage the sharing of selfies to spread awareness about gender-based violence in society. Sose's Women is a women's rights advocacy organization run by a small staff led by Liana Sahakyan that designs education campaigns to engage large target groups, including men and women in rural and urban regions, through digital outreach programs. Their initial intention transformed into the "#SelfiewithDaughter Media Advocacy

Campaign” (#SelfiewithDaughter) which ran from February 1-14, 2016. During this campaign parents from communities all over Armenia shared selfies with their daughters on social media using the hashtag #SelfiewithDaughter.

This project was inspired by the “Selfie with Daughter” campaign in India, a social media campaign against sex-selective abortions that was aimed at “dealing with the problems arising out of gender imbalance.”¹ The campaign encouraged families in India to show pride in their daughters and post selfies with them on social media using the hashtag, #SelfiewithDaughter. Like India, Armenia has a skewed sex-at-birth ratio, which has been increasing exponentially since the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s with the introduction of ultrasound which allowed pregnant women to know the sex of their child.² The issue of girls being unwanted epitomizes a form of gender-based violence in Armenian society. To address this problem, Sose’s Women began integrating marketing insight from Braind Branding, a design company in Yerevan, Armenia, to launch the #SelfiewithDaughter. Since Twitter was new to Armenia at the time, people were excited to use hashtags in this campaign.

The #SelfiewithDaughter became a seminal project for Sose’s Women because of its scale and the rate of participation by people in Armenia. In the past, their projects had integrated digital activism, such as creating viral videos and animated infographics, but this campaign became the largest-scale project they had created to date. The nationwide participation rate of 3.4 million people over the two weeks of the campaign far exceeded the initial target goal of 1 million people, and celebrities and elected officials also took part in the campaign.³ The #SelfiewithDaughter in Armenia illustrates that digital activism has become an effective tool to create awareness about an issue. It also demonstrates why it is important to take a closer look at the work of women activists in Armenia and how they are using digital spaces to advance women’s rights.

This paper investigates how social media platforms are used to make changes under conditions of social disparity. Women in Armenia are producing a voice in the public sphere and using digital media as an

1 “About the Campaign,” Selfie with Daughter Foundation, accessed on May 27, 2019, <http://selfiewithdaughter.world/about.aspx>.

2 “Gendercide in the Caucasus; Sex-selective abortion,” *The Economist*, September 21, 2013, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2013/09/21/gendercide-in-the-caucasus>.

3 Prudence Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave: Affective Temporality* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 109.

avenue for their activism. This paper will first discuss the definition of social media and social change and argue that technology is empowering voices that are missing from the global stage. Digital users are becoming increasingly dependent on networked spaces as a primary mode of communication. These virtual platforms have become spaces for networks driven by women's advocacy work and are sites of civil society engagement. By examining social media activism by women's civil society organizations in Armenia, this paper seeks to illustrate how they are creating visibility within digital spaces and enacting changes in their country. This paper will then further unpack how Armenian women addressed the problem of sex-selection in Armenia with the #SelfiewithDaughter campaign from 2016.

Influence of Digital Media Tools on Social Activism

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have employed many forms of social activism to advocate for social issues, such as representation and reproductive health rights. Their efforts have led to direct impact, where individual transformation occurs through education and awareness as well as to the transformation of groups, institutions, and systems through policy reform and public discourse. Traditionally, social changes are mainly driven by mobilizing group resources to advocate for change or policy reform through rallies, marches, and strikes.⁴ However, CSOs have recently incorporated more contemporary methods of social activism, which include the use of digital media tools such as online platforms, social media networks, hashtag activism, and digital content to create awareness and call for action.

CSOs and grassroots movements are impacted by information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as digital media tools. As Jodi Dean et al. writes, CSOs have impacted political reform and policy change with the use of digital tools. Even with their possible limitations, such as restricted internet access and lack of technological hardware and equipment, this decentralized access and equality of voice, participation, and representation has allowed smaller groups to develop power and increase the extent of their impact. With this in mind, Jenkins examines youth movements as they scale up in power through digital spaces. In *By Any Media Necessary*, he focuses on how youth exercise their agency through social media activism.

4 Tracey Friesen, *Story Money Impact: Funding Media for Social Change* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 18.

He calls these activities “participatory politics” occurring in the margins of political institutions while still engaging in ideas and making demands of the establishment. Like Dean, Jenkins points out that these new alternatives enhance “civic imagination possibilities,” where the opportunities to create desired outcomes are conceived and expanded upon. This research shows us what interaction, reform, and representation can look like in digital spaces.

Within these digital spaces, users are also connected in new ways, resulting in increased visibility of users and collective action by tethered groups. As such, digital networks are becoming “a space of civil society,” according to media scholar Arista Fotopoulou.⁵ In this new space, users bypass temporal or geographic obstacles to connect instantly, thus allowing users who live in both urban cities and the margins to gain access to technology and connectivity, which amplifies their voices and extends their audience reach. To further understand how digital spaces are engaging users and resulting in collective action, Sherry Turkle’s *Alone Together* demonstrates how convergence culture has made digital consumers pool their resources and build a dependency on communications technology. When depending on communications technology, Turkle argues that users have become tethered to each other through networked connections. Turkle expands on this by claiming that consumers are “always on,” meaning always connected, through their digital devices and that as a result this is affecting people, communities, and personal relationships. Consumers are now attached to their new devices, and to each other, and therefore making information more easily accessible and sharable. Turkle calls these devices “a phantom limb” and “a second self, a mirror of mind” because they give people a means to always stay connected within communities.⁶ This connectivity allows communities to be linked to each other, making the promotion of activism and social changes more obtainable.

Furthermore, as a result of convergence culture, politics and participation are being reformatted in new networked societies. Networked spaces have transformed how people protest and use virtual platforms to organize. Media scholar Henry Jenkins uses the term “clicktivism” (click activism) to describe the phenomenon where digital activism complements

5 Aristeia Fotopoulou, *Feminist Activism and Digital Networks: Between Empowerment and Vulnerability* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 37.

6 Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 16.

traditional activism in general.⁷ Click activism leads to democratization of participation in social movements by more groups and grants informal power to individuals or groups who have not had formal institutional power because of their religion, gender, class, or economic or social status.

It is in digital spaces that traditionally marginalized communities can find their voice within transnational networks, as alternatives to political spaces. Twitter is just one example of a social media platform which is widely used to shape political and social movements. It has been a source of disseminating thoughts, opinions, and information on social issues. According to Dhiraj Murthy's *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age*, even before the rise of Twitter and other social media platforms, activism for social change existed and people still organized movements, such as by protesting in the streets. However, with social media, activists are able to reach and engage far beyond their target audiences. Connectivity allows for communities to expedite grassroots organizing, interact with stakeholders, and rapidly share experiences.

Regarding social media's impact on social activism, Murthy acknowledges that from Twitter's inception, "the medium has been prominently associated with wide-ranging forms of sociopolitical activism."⁸ Jenkins also observed youth participation through social media activism and notes that when youth fight for social justice, they gain a renewed sense of "symbolic power."⁹ They lean on new media tools for asserting their voice as they are pushing back against traditional restraints which limit marginalized voices in public spheres. These digital spaces are becoming dominant spaces for activism in addition to offline street protests, and these movements grow organically, without a central organizing structure. Therefore, Jenkins argues this decentralized organizational structure encourages participation in social activism.

Additionally, just as Dean focuses on civil society organizations and cites their success in using digital tools, the movements Jenkins observes are loosely organized groups following a similar road map and making impact, such as the 1960s protest movements in the United States, which created a pop counterculture. These movements were a culmination of pushing back

7 Henry Jenkins, et al, *By Any Media Necessary* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 9.

8 Murthy, *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age*, Chapter 6.

9 Jenkins, et al., *By Any Media Necessary*, 2.

against the mainstream to fight for social justice and promoted the participation and political engagement through shared voices. Modern day digital activism builds upon this legacy of forming decentralized groups to shape policies and call for action. As a result, this form of activism also encourages openness and democracy by being a space for enhancing representation of the participants. As such, digital activism enhances the work of traditional activism.

Digital Spaces and Women's Advocacy Work

According to Sarah Banet-Weiser, "social media has exploded with feminist campaigns" in recent years.¹⁰ These digital advocacy campaigns integrate new fourth-wave feminist mechanisms that embrace technological advances. The fourth wave of feminism is defined by its digital activism. In *The Feminist Fourth Wave: Affective Temporality*, Prudence Chamberlain examines how themes central to the fourth wave include online feminism, humor, intersectionality, and inclusion. Since the number of women using online resources is increasing, more digital feminist campaigns are being launched. Social media allows these users to challenge sexism and misogyny, creating a new environment where feminism can directly engage with opposing forces. Additionally, the conversations occurring on these platforms also create a sense of solidarity.

Online feminist activism is contributing to network building and advocacy work for women. Advocacy work is the "process of working for a particular position, result or solution" within a political, economic, social systems.¹¹ Moreover, there are different approaches to advocacy work and social change; for example, bottom-up and top-down. Bottom-up change begins at the individual level among personal networks and relationships. Top-down change addresses the system by targeting public policy and legal reformation and attempting to improve formal structures of society. Bottom-up resources at the grassroots level can also shore up the potential for top-down change, "if the masses at the 'bottom' are activated, and bottom-up change is finally entrenched when the 'top' is converted."¹² Using digital spaces and media as tools for advocacy work incorporates both top-down

10 Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 8.

11 Gillian Caldwell, "Using Video for Advocacy," in *Video for Change: A Guide for Advocacy and Activism*, ed. by Sam Gregory (London: Pluto Press in Association with Witness, 2005), 4.

12 Friesen, *Story Money Impact*, 139.

and bottom-up approaches to social change. Because women's groups have had to stand up against heteronormative gatekeepers, "feminists have long recognized the importance of self-managed, alternative media."¹³ Media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, for example, "have enabled a visibility of feminisms that have long struggled for a broader space and place in culture."¹⁴ Information sharing on these platforms can shed light on marginalized issues and bring attention to social injustices on a national level.

Although the use of social media allows for connections and transnational networks to be built, it also creates challenges, such as an increase in reactionary sexism, misogyny, and rape culture. Along with more women using the internet to connect and to promulgate their activism, there are also more anti-feminist campaigns being launched online. Additionally, some scholars have pointed out that social media activism can be a disadvantage to women's groups that are underresourced, lack access to digital technology, or are behind on up-to-date technologies.¹⁵ In her book on British women's activists, *Feminist Activism and Digital Networks*, Fotopoulou observes that feminist organizations heightened their digital engagement by utilizing transnational communication but that there "was also a lot of anxiety about catching up with technologies."¹⁶ She cites age, lack of resources, and media literacy as the three most prominent factors that hinder participation. Fotopoulou notes that these become new types of exclusions that limit "access to publicity and recognition."¹⁷ But she also argues that it is within these globally networked spaces that feminist groups are legitimized on the same level as other civil society actors.¹⁸ Fotopoulos' findings epitomize the setbacks that accompany dependency on technology, but though technology is not a perfect antidote, it is important to take note of its benefits. In lieu of the obstacles, the positives are still adding value to the work of CSOs.

13 Ricarda Drüeke and Elke Zob, eds., *Feminist Media: Participatory Spaces, Networks and Cultural Citizenship* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014), 12.

14 Banet-Weiser, *Empowered*, 9.

15 Fotopoulou, *Feminist Activism and Digital Networks*, 37.

16 *Ibid.*, 44.

17 *Ibid.*, 51.

18 *Ibid.*, 41.

Armenian Women and Activism in Digital Spaces

The case of Armenia demonstrates how digital spaces are changing women activists' way of organizing social activism. Past advocacy work by women's organizations included marching and protests. However, by employing new methods such as sharing stories and photos on social media platforms, Armenian women have revolutionized their voices in the public arena and found avenues for participating in social activism on a national and regional level. As such, digital spaces have created platforms for activism and visibility.

According to DataReportal, as of January 2021, the total population of Armenia is 2.9 million, with 63.4 percent of the population living in urban cities. There are 2.02 million (68.2 percent of the population) internet users and 1.80 million (60.7 percent of the population) active social media users. The number of internet users in Armenia increased by 107,000 (+5.6%) between 2020 and 2021. Additionally, there was a 20 percent increase in active social media users from January 2020 to January 2021, which amounted to over 300,000 new users. Of the 1.8 million social media users, 1.76 million are accessing content via mobile phones, representing 97.5 percent of all users. Mobile phones have made digital technology even more accessible since it is available in the palm of one's hand, overcoming obstacles of connection and limited access. These statistics make social media activism more relevant, because it is reaching beyond a handful of beneficiaries to a significant portion of the population.¹⁹ Using digital media for advocacy exposes large audiences ranging from people surfing online to people communicating with others in online groups. Digital platforms enable users to voice opinions about issues that matter to them, speaking to audiences who are intentionally or incidentally listening based on algorithm outputs. Activists and civil society groups use this resource for advocacy and to promulgate educational messages. The assembly and exchange of ideas create a space that is used as a public forum.

However, online activism reaching such large audiences comes with a cost. Several problems are caused by the use of social media as a platform to promote social activism. There is a risk of speaking to an audience that already agrees with what one is saying and creating an echo chamber. The purpose of social change education campaigns is to encourage people not

19 Simon Kemp, "Digital 2021: Armenia," *Data Reportal*, February 22, 2021, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-armenia>.

to insist on their predisposed opinions, but to the change minds of those that might be previously unaware of certain issues. Additionally, another obstacle that may arise in sharing ideas on digital media includes negative reactions from those with contrasting opinions. As Chamberlin mentioned, anti-feminist hate speech online also poses a threat to Armenian women doing advocacy work. In 2013, the Women's Resource Center in Armenia was harassed online for their support of domestic violence legislation and providing reproductive health information for women over 18.²⁰ In 2019, Lara Aharonian, co-director of Women's Resource Center in Armenia, received death threats, threats of rape and violence, and bullying from anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ hate groups on Facebook after posting about her organization's work on women's issues and human rights. These hate groups not only disliked her posts and left pejorative comments, but they also shared her picture on social media along with invocations for violence. Aharonian is not alone; human rights activists in Armenia, especially those working for marginalized groups such as women and LGBTIQ+ communities, face increasing pressure, smear campaigns, and perpetual abuse.²¹ These examples of harassment represent obstacles that emerge when women participate in social change on digital media platforms.

In spite of these risks, women's organizations in Armenia have been employing new digital methods to advance social change in the form of policy reform, social ideology shifts, and gender parity. One example of activism in digital spaces was the #SelfiewithDaughter Media Advocacy Campaign. The project was aimed at changing the perception that daughters are unwanted by their families by showing photos of families who take pride in their daughters. The goal was to break the cycle of sex preference by targeting parents, especially fathers, and their children. The long-term goal of the campaign was to shift the underlying assumptions society had towards having daughters. The overall aim of Sose's Women is to develop communities by supporting women and families. Their work focuses on addressing health, social, and women's issues in Goris and the surrounding region with agendas ranging from workforce training, health education, environmental awareness, and

20 Gohar Abrahamyan, "Women's Resource Centre becomes target of abuse even though it wasn't actually involved in drafting a gender equality law hated by conservatives," *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, September 20, 2013, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/armenian-womens-group-threatened>.

21 "Receives death threats for working with women's rights," Norwegian Helsinki Committee, March 22, 2019, accessed January 19, 2021, <https://www.nhc.no/en/receives-death-threats-for-working-with-womens-rights/>.

empowerment. The organization conducts extensive trainings on health, sex education, and the environment and incorporates digital media elements, such as animated infographics and documentary films, which are shared widely on social media platforms. Since 2013, they have completed two nationwide media advocacy campaigns: one on sex-selection abortion, *Bavakan (Enough)* Documentary and Education Outreach Campaign, and another one on gender-based violence, *Huys Ka (There is Hope)*.²²

Addressing the Problem: Sex-selection in Armenia

Sex preference before birth has resulted in the rise of selective abortions in Armenia. According to data from the National Statistical Service of Armenia, 3,000 more baby boys were born than girls in 2012, making the ratio 114 boys to 100 girls.²³ A 2013 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Armenia report sited that this unbalanced ratio has been consistent since 1993.²⁴ This unbalanced sex ratio has had severely negative consequences for the country's demographic future, with demographic imbalances, increased migration, trafficking, and sexual abuse.²⁵ In a 2012 United Nations report, 88.2 percent of women in Armenia said they were pressured to terminate pregnancies based on sex-selection by their husbands and mother-in-law.²⁶ The cause of sex-selective abortion in Armenia is due to the lack of reproductive health education, financial troubles, familial pressures, and a patriarchal society that deprives women's right of participating in the decision-making process

22 Bavakan (@bavakandoc), "Bavakan's Facebook Page," Facebook, February 5, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/bavakandoc>;

Huys Ka (There is Hope), "Անհաջողություն (Failure)," Vimeo video, 1:01, April 30, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/88217045>.

23 United Nations Population Fund, Armenia, *Prevalence of and Reasons for Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia*, 2012, https://armenia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Sex-selective_abortions_report_Eng_0.pdf.

24 Christophe Z. Guilmoto, *Sex Imbalances at Birth in Armenia: Demographic Evidence and Analysis* (Yerevan, Armenia: United Nations Population Fund, 2013), https://armenia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Sex_Imbalance_report_Eng_final-with%20cover-final.pdf, 27.

25 International Center for Human Development, *Monitoring Public Policy and Programmes to Prevent Gender-Biased Sex-selection and Sex-Selective Abortions in the Republic of Armenia: Combating Gender-Biased Sex-selection in Armenia*, Yerevan, 2016, <https://ichd.org/?!aid=1&com=module&module=menu&id=8,7>.

26 United Nations Population Fund, Armenia, *Prevalence of and Reasons for Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia*, 27.

in abortion. In addition, lack of access to adequate reproductive education and information has made abortion the primary form of contraception in Armenia since its legalization in 1955 during the Soviet Union period. Rather than leading to increased birth rates, unreliable contraceptive methods, such as the rhythm or withdrawal methods, have resulted in roughly 50 percent of pregnancies ending in abortion, many of which have gone unreported.

Son preference is widespread in Armenia because of its deep patriarchal culture. The 2013 UNFPA Armenia report stated the top four reasons for son preference are: 1) sons continue family lineage, 2) sons are inheritors of property, 3) sons are guarantors of material well-being, and 4) boys are defender of the homeland. All these reflect the widespread traditional norm where families prefer boys to continue the family name, as well as to ensure that their child is more valued in the society.²⁷ The son-preference culture represents an antiquated cultural paradigm that is having a detrimental effect on the country's population and future birthrates. By 2016, Armenia's rate of sex-selection was ranked 3rd highest in the world per capita.²⁸

#SelfiewithDaughter in Armenia

Every aspect of the #SelfiewithDaughter viral photo sharing campaign, from sharing photos to broadcasting a public service announcement on television, was aimed at creating audience amplification. In Armenia, it was feasible to use both online and traditional media platforms because close to 60 percent of the Armenian population was online in 2016, and over 90 percent of the Armenian population watched TV regularly.²⁹ Therefore, media and television outlets collaborated in support of the campaign. To encourage #SelfiewithDaughter posts, the campaign launched with 20-second advertisements on social media and terrestrial television showing celebrity fathers with their daughters. The campaign also evolved into an online flash mob to raise awareness on sex-selective abortions in Armenia on a public and legislative level. The use of social media allowed the campaign to reach the largest audience possible, and as a result, the campaign maximized the

27 Andrew Jack, "'Our community loves boys more.' Armenia's missing girls," *Financial Times*, October 10, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/a4ecb4a2-713f-11e7-93ff-99f383b09ff9>.

28 International Center for Human Development, *Monitoring Public Policy*, 6.

29 "Armenia, Country Profile," *The World Fact Book*, accessed on May 27, 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/am.html>.

potential of creating a shift in the value families in Armenia place on daughters.

The hashtag #SelfiewithDaughter in Armenia went viral on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Odnoklassniki (“Classmates,” the Russian social media platform) because it combined a pressing issue with the use of a timely trend. The online visibility of the campaign was boosted with paid sponsored ads on Facebook, reaching 3,000,000 impressions by users in the target group connected to “Armenia” and “Armenian.”³⁰ Sose’s Women Facebook page alone surpassed 85,105 active post engagements (likes, shares, and comments) between February 2 and February 8, with the largest audience being women between the ages of 25 and 34. In addition to the social media campaign, the 20-second advertisement was aired on primetime television continuously on the top ten major broadcasting stations across Armenia garnering over 2,700,000 total number of impressions by viewers.³¹ *Designing for Spreadability*, when a community’s collective attitude towards an issue is heightened at a specific point in time, this phenomenon encourages the spread of content.³² Because sex-selection abortion had reached epidemic proportions in Armenian society, it captured the “sentiment of the moment.”³³ Sharing photos became an easy way to participate in the movement and show support to end sex-selection abortion.

Because sex-selection is not solely a women’s issue, but an issue of national concern, the campaign even caught the attention of the Armenian government and resulted in legislative change. Alongside the participation of Armenian celebrities, the Minister of Education and other Members of Parliament also posted photos in support of their daughter. The new law stipulates that, “a woman seeking an abortion must attend a counselling session with her doctor and then wait for three days for the procedure.”³⁴ Though this provision is very difficult to regulate, and women’s rights organizations have criticized this approach because it may encourage anti-abortion measures, the new legislation is a sign that the government is attempting to address this

30 Google and Facebook analytics.

31 Analytics from report.

32 Henry Jenkins, et al., *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 215.

33 Jenkins, et al., *Spreadable Media*, 215.

34 Florence Low, “Law to cut sex-selective abortions in Armenia ‘putting lives at risk,’” *The Guardian*, October 21, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/21/law-to-cut-sex-selective-abortions-in-armenia-putting-lives-at-risk>.

issue. There is still, however, a lot of work that needs to be done to eliminate son preference in Armenia. According to the head of UNFPA Armenia, Garik Hayrapetyan, “We (Armenia) need more work in overcoming the inequality between the values [placed on] girl and boy children. This would be key to defeating this bitter practice.”³⁵ By 2016, the sex ratio in Armenia dropped to 112 boys per 100 girls, and the latest data provided by Armenia’s National Statistical Services from 2017 showed ongoing progress, with 110 boys per 100 girls. Though the sex ratio at birth in Armenia is still high, the gradual decrease seen over the past few years signifies that raising awareness on sex-selection and the promotion of gender equality is resulting in positive changes.³⁶

As demonstrated in this section, #SelfiewithDaughter in Armenia is an example of successful activism in the digital age. The campaign used digital activism to raise awareness on sex-selective abortion and mobilize groups through different channels including social media, media coverage, television broadcast, and group discussions. The campaign was successful in mobilizing diverse segments of Armenia’s population to speak up against sex-selection on a national level. In doing so, the campaign boosted larger audience numbers than had the project focused solely on educational workshops or community outreach.

Conclusion

This paper sought to demonstrate that digital activism is an effective tool to create awareness about social issues by embracing online spaces to amplify their voices, mobilize group resources, and influence social change. It explored the example of women’s groups in Armenia incorporating more contemporary methods of social activism, which include the use of digital media tools, such as online platforms, social media networks, hashtag activism, and digital content. With social media campaigns like #SelfiewithDaughter, it has become common practice for civil society organizations in Armenia to use

35 Nina Teggarty, “How Armenia Is Trying to Stop Sex-Selective Abortions,” *Huffington Post*, April 17, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/how-armenia-is-trying-to-stop-sex-selective-abortions_us_58f4d45ae4b0b9e9848d2731.

36 International Centre for Human Development, *Monitoring Report: of the State Policy and Programs Aimed at Preventing Gender-Biased Sex-selection in the Republic of Armenia*, 2018,

https://armenia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Monitoring%20report_English.pdf.

digital platforms to spread awareness on and advocate for social issues. As seen in the example used in this paper, social media has the potential to drive social changes. New technologies are empowering marginalized women who have long been missing from the public eye. Networked spaces and virtual platforms have become spaces for issue-driven networks and the sites of civil society politics, specifically for women in Armenia. Digital components are making women's work visible, for example, the women were successful in influencing change at different levels of society, along with policy reform that should spur a decrease in sex selection abortions. Looking forward, there is further need to eliminate barriers to women's participation in decision-making processes. Until then, digital spaces have allowed women to put a spotlight on their visibility and their voices.