



Report on freedom of expression and the gender dimensions of disinformation

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Introduction:

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, essential for democratic societies and the pursuit of gender equality. However, the rise of disinformation in the digital age poses significant challenges to this right, particularly for women. This article explores the gender dimensions of disinformation, focusing on the challenges faced, potential solutions, underlying causes, and the far-reaching effects on individuals and societies.

I. Understanding the Gender Dimensions of Disinformation:

Definition and Characteristics:

Gendered disinformation refers to intentionally false or misleading information that targets individuals based on their gender, perpetuates stereotypes, and undermines women's rights and gender equality.

Gendered disinformation often seeks to silence women's voices, discredit their experiences, and reinforce discriminatory norms and biases.

Challenges to Freedom of Expression:

Women face specific challenges in exercising their right to freedom of expression due to gendered disinformation campaigns that undermine their credibility, legitimacy, and safety.

The digital space, while offering opportunities for women to express themselves, also exposes them to online harassment, threats, and intimidation, limiting their participation and self-censorship.

II. Challenges and Solutions:

Challenges:

a) Identifying and Defining Gendered Disinformation:

Defining gendered disinformation and distinguishing it from legitimate speech or other forms of disinformation presents a challenge for policymakers and content moderators.

The rapidly evolving nature of disinformation tactics and platforms makes it difficult to keep pace with emerging gendered disinformation strategies.

b) Balancing Freedom of Expression and Countering Gendered Disinformation:

Striking a balance between countering gendered disinformation and safeguarding freedom of expression requires nuanced approaches.

Overreaching measures, such as broad content moderation or legislation, risk inadvertently suppressing legitimate speech and stifling dissent.

c) Amplification and Virality:

Gendered disinformation can spread rapidly and achieve virality, amplifying its impact and making it challenging to counteract.

The algorithms and design choices of digital platforms may inadvertently contribute to the amplification of gendered disinformation.

Solutions:

a) Legal and Policy Frameworks:

Develop comprehensive legal frameworks that explicitly address gendered disinformation, providing clear guidelines to identify and address it while respecting freedom of expression.

Promote international cooperation to address cross-border challenges associated with gendered disinformation campaigns.

b) Empowering Digital Companies and Platforms:

Digital companies should adopt transparent content moderation policies and practices that account for the gender dimensions of disinformation.

Implement user-friendly reporting mechanisms to address gendered disinformation, while ensuring adequate support and protection for victims.

c) Media Literacy and Digital Literacy:

Promote media literacy programs that equip individuals, especially women and marginalized groups, with critical thinking skills to identify and challenge gendered disinformation.

Integrate digital literacy education into formal curricula to empower individuals to navigate the digital landscape responsibly and discern credible information from disinformation.

d) Collaboration and Research:

Foster collaboration among governments, digital companies, civil society, and academia to share best practices, data, and research on combating gendered disinformation.

Support interdisciplinary research to understand the prevalence, impact, and mechanisms of gendered disinformation, aiding in the development of evidence-based interventions.

III. Causes and Effects:

Causes of Gendered Disinformation:

a) Structural Inequalities and Gender Bias:

Deep-rooted gender inequalities and biases in societies contribute to the creation and spread of gendered disinformation.

Gendered power dynamics and stereotypes perpetuate the marginalization and silencing of women's voices, providing fertile ground for the proliferation of gendered disinformation.

b) Amplification by Digital Platforms:

Algorithms and social media platforms designed to maximize engagement and user attention can inadvertently amplify and prioritize gendered disinformation, perpetuating harmful narratives.

The viral nature of disinformation can be exploited to target and silence women, exacerbating existing gender inequalities.

Effects of Gendered Disinformation:

a) Silencing of Women's Voices:

Gendered disinformation reinforces societal norms that undermine women's credibility, leading to self-censorship and reduced participation in public discourse.

The fear of online harassment and intimidation stifles women's ability to express their opinions and engage in meaningful conversations, further marginalizing their voices.

b) Reinforcement of Gender Stereotypes:

Gendered disinformation perpetuates harmful stereotypes and biases, limiting societal progress towards gender equality.

Misinformation about women's capabilities, roles, and experiences can influence public perception and policy decisions, impeding efforts to challenge gender norms and achieve gender justice.

c) Threats to Gender Equality:

Gendered disinformation undermines efforts to achieve gender equality by impeding women's rights advocacy, discrediting feminist movements, and reinforcing discriminatory attitudes and practices.

Disinformation campaigns targeting women's rights issues can erode public support and hinder policy advancements, hindering progress towards gender equality.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, addressing the gender dimensions of disinformation is vital for protecting freedom of expression and advancing gender equality in the digital age. The challenges posed by gendered disinformation, such as identifying and defining it, striking a balance between countering it and safeguarding freedom of expression, and tackling amplification and virality, require multifaceted solutions.

To combat gendered disinformation effectively, comprehensive legal and policy frameworks should be developed, ensuring they explicitly address this issue and provide clear guidelines for identification and mitigation. International cooperation is crucial to address cross-border challenges associated with gendered disinformation campaigns.

Empowering digital companies and platforms is another key solution. By adopting transparent content moderation policies and practices that account for the gender dimensions of disinformation, digital companies can create a safer online environment. Implementing user-friendly reporting mechanisms, combined with adequate support and protection for victims, helps address instances of gendered disinformation promptly and effectively.

Promoting media literacy and digital literacy programs is essential in equipping individuals, particularly women and marginalized groups, with critical thinking skills. Such programs enable individuals to discern credible information from disinformation and challenge gendered narratives effectively. Integrating

digital literacy education into formal curricula empowers individuals to navigate the digital landscape responsibly and equips them with the tools needed to combat gendered disinformation.

Collaboration and research play a crucial role in addressing the gender dimensions of disinformation. Governments, digital companies, civil society, and academia must work together, sharing best practices, data, and research findings. This collaboration allows for the development of evidence-based interventions and a deeper understanding of the prevalence, impact, and mechanisms of gendered disinformation.

In conclusion, by recognizing and addressing the causes and effects of gendered disinformation, societies can foster an inclusive and equitable digital space that respects freedom of expression and promotes gender justice. Through comprehensive legal frameworks, empowerment of digital platforms, media and digital literacy programs, and collaborative research efforts, we can effectively combat gendered disinformation, protect women's voices, and move closer to achieving gender equality in the digital era.