

# Let's march, Belarusians!

*A case study on "March on, Babe!" movement against domestic violence in Belarus*

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## **Abstract**

5 October 2018, President Aliaksandr Lukashenka lashed out against a draft bill of the Law Against Domestic Violence. That very same day activists Svetlana Gatalskaya and Marysha Korzh created a Facebook page called “March On, Babe!” to push for the rejected bill. After 48 hours, about 1700 both female and male Belarusians joined it.

This thesis uses “March on, Babe!” movement as a case study to look into how social media contributes to the development of civil society in Belarus. The entry point is domestic violence and deconstruction of existing social norms. The aim of the research is to see how “March on, Babe!” engages Belarusians in the political and encourages them to exercise their civic agency via discussions around gender equality and violence against women.

The following research is using qualitative content analysis of the posts published in the movement’s group and on its official page between October 2018 and May 2019. The method is primarily based on the guidelines defined by Pat Bazeley (2013) and Klippendorff (2004).

The main findings have indicated that “March on, Babe!” movement represents an important social phenomenon. It goes beyond its feminist agenda and has the potential to become a catalyst of social change in the country.

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# 1. Introduction

According to the latest statistics (Global Database on Violence Against Women, 2019), every third woman in Belarus has been physically abused by an intimate partner. Every fourth woman suicide is caused by domestic violence. 80% domestic abuse cases would never go to trial (Karta Nasiliya, 2019). The current Belarusian law system doesn't have specific regulations against domestic violence. The law does not protect a victim nor does it recognise psychological, economic or sexual abuse.

The impunity for domestic abuse has prevailed in the country for decades. It is determined by the political system – Belarus is an authoritarian state where ruling class completely dominates political and social life. Political environment is quite hostile towards pluralism of opinions and considerably undermines the development of civil society in the country. Civil society organisations face significant challenges, including obstacles to register as legal entities or lack of funding (Freedom House, 2018). In addition, the regime suppresses independent broadcast and print media. Using its control over the media, it translates a very restrictive discourse that is rooted in the values and traditions of Soviet period, which had a patriarchal social order. For example, the leader of the state often refers to himself as the “father of the nation”. Public discourse is based around the notion of ‘traditional family values’. They are translated to be the core of the nations’ value system, which predetermines the role of men and women in the society. It also reinforces gender inequality that puts Belarusian women in a disadvantaged and vulnerable position.

Despite ranking high on the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2019), Belarusians hold quite conservative views when it comes to the role of women and men. There are a lot of gender stereotypes in society: women are perceived primarily as housekeepers and child care-takers. As a result, many women find it hard to seek employment, especially in rural areas. Gender stereotypes make violence easier to justify and can prevent women from reporting abuse. Cultural norms play a large role in the way women choose to respond to violence. Most women are economically dependent on their abusers or are reluctant to report the abuse being

afraid of public reprimand. Women who choose to report their abusers or leave them often find little support from their relatives, society or officials.

Annually, police receive up to 150 000 calls reporting domestic violence. Only 2 000 will be prosecuted (34mag.net, 2019). The remaining will stay unpunished or will result in a civil case. Usually an offender ends up with a fine, which only puts a financial burden to the entire family rather than prevents the crime. Acknowledging the scale of the problem, Ministry of Internal Affairs initiated the creation of a law against domestic violence in 2015. In December 2016, a working team was assembled including representatives from MIA, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Health and The Supreme Court to develop a draft bill. The idea was to include in a new law all aspects of abuse and to adjust it to the international norms and requirements (Istanbul Convention, 2019). The finished draft was presented on 3 January, 2018. It recognised psychological, physical, sexual and economic abuse as a criminal offense, introduced the term ‘harassment’, exacerbated punishment and expanded the definition of domestic abusers to ex-partners, cohabitants and grown-up children. The draft was opened to public debate in July 2018. It sparked heated debates in the society. Conservatives accused it of being “too radical” and “cutting a centuries-long thread of family traditions” (TUT.BY, 2019). Following criticism from pro-family groups, church and conservative initiatives, on 5 October 2018, President Aliaksandr Lukashenka lashed out against a draft bill of the Law Against Domestic Violence criticising it for being “too extreme” and “destructive to traditional Belarusian family values” (BelarusFeed, 2019). As a result, the initiative was reconsidered and the work on the bill was stopped. MIA said that they will adjust current laws but will not introduce a separate law against domestic violence.

The very same day activists Svetlana Gatalskaya and Marysha Korzh created a Facebook page called “March On, Baby” to push for the rejected bill. After 48 hours, about 1700 both female and male Belarusians joined it. The aim of the group is to oppose the current perception on domestic violence in the Belarusian society. Activists launched a campaign advocating people to sign a petition to push forward for the implementation of the law. In 48 hours, 1700 people joined the group. At the moment, more than 5000 people signed the petition<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The number reflects the most recent figures.

## 1.1 Aims and research question

This thesis will use “March on, Babe” group as a case to look at how social media contributes to the development of civil society in Belarus. The entry point will be domestic violence and deconstruction of existing social norms. I will analyse how the following group by giving visibility to the marginalised groups in the society challenges power structures and increases engagement of people in democracy. Domestic violence as any violence against women is part of existing power structures that I aim to reveal in my research. “March on Babe!” case gives us a unique opportunity to see how Belarusians are mobilizing around what can be perceived as a very niche issue. However, I would argue that the emergence of “March on Babe!” movement indicates a considerable shift in existing political structure in the country. Through engagement with “March on Babe!” initiative Belarusians are ultimately challenging the dominant discourse and questioning existing norms and values in the society.

In addition, my research brings to light how people employ social media to exercise their civil rights and fight against the injustice in the authoritarian political context. The fact that Belarus has authoritarian regime with strong censorship and quite weak civil society adds to the uniqueness of the case allowing us to observe how social media can be used to sustain democracy and increase participation of common people in the political. As Papacharissi notes personal often becomes an entry point for people to engage with political (2014). Discussions around domestic violence, which is a huge problem in Belarus and resonates with many people personally, can lead to a greater change with time as such initiative as “March on Babe!” do not only initiate discussions around gendered violence, but also gender equality and civil rights in the country. As people engage with social initiatives that slowly gain power in Belarus they explore their civic identities and learn to critically analyse information provided to them by the state. In order to study the contribution of “March on, Babe!” initiative to the development of civil society in Belarus, I will propose the following research questions:

- *How does the movement “March on, Babe!” engages Belarusians in the discussions around gender equality?*
- *In what ways does the Facebook initiative “March on, Babe” contribute to the development of civic cultures in Belarus?*



## **2. Literature Review**

This chapter will lay out how people engage with the political today through participation in social movements and protests that are often enabled by social media. Then it will look into the interconnection between passion and engagement. It will finally close up with the overview of how online feminist studies examine protests in the online spaces and the research done on domestic violence.

### **2.1 Social media and civic engagement**

It would hardly be an overstatement to say that much research has been done on the role of social media in the recent upheavals and social movements that swept all over the world. As the recent protests in the Middle East, North Africa and Southern Europe hit the headlines, scholars increasingly look into the potential of social networking platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, to become a tool of civil activism. Protests occurred in countries as diverse as Iceland and Tunisia yet they have a lot in common. The majority of movements sparked out of disillusionment and general distrust in authorities. The protests were often a natural reaction to the injustice of the ruling elites, to the growing dominance of neo-liberal agenda and to the decline of traditional politics (Gerbaudo and Treré, 2015; Castells, 2012; Juris, 2008; van de Donk, 2004). New social movements managed to unite people across classes and national backgrounds as the protesters often referred to themselves as “the people” (Gerbaudo, 2015). Let just remember the slogan of the Occupy Wall Street movement “We are 99%”. These protests might have contributed to the emergence of a new form of democracy - active democracy where citizens are able to directly interact with and impact on the existing political systems.

This new form of democracy is closely tied to the new media (e.g. Mason, 2013; Dahlgren, 2009; Castells, 2012; Juris, 2008). The studies done on the protests in Egypt, Tunisia and in South America note that social media usage was crucial to their development and growth. It allowed people to quickly mobilize and connect, especially in societies with authoritarian regimes where traditional media are fully controlled by the government. As Castells observes

new technologies have functionalities that enable collective deliberation of action and decision-making process (2012). They also allowed people to connect with their peers across borders finding hope and support (ibid).

Scholars also observe that Facebook and Twitter being initially commercial projects provided the alternative space for people to discuss, connect and voice their criticism (Castells, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Drawing on the concept of “public sphere” (Habermas in Lennox and Lennox, 1974) many studies suggest that social networks created an alternative virtual space for people to exercise their citizenship (Castells, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Peter Dahlgren (2009) claims that social media have enable people to communicate without any restrictions of a physical space, which is an important prerequisite for democracy. The scholar underlines that people need access to others in order to develop their civic consciousness (ibid). Bennett and Segerberg also noted that new communication technologies allowed people to reach certain level of “connectivity” (2012). This connectivity is often built around personalization of a collective action (ibid).

Various personal communication technologies that enable sharing these themes. Whether through texts, tweets, social network sharing, or posting YouTube mashups, the communication process itself often involves further personalization through the spreading of digital connections among friends or trusted others. (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012: 744).

They believe that this connectivity has enabled people to engage with the political and join social movements without necessarily committing to certain ideology or joining any organisation. The similar idea is expressed by Papacharissi (2014) who looks into how Twitter enables people to participate in political by stating personal views. The following observation is crucial to understanding of online protests as they are often premised in political that merges with everyday lives. In a way “March on, Babe!” movement is based around people’s personal response to domestic violence yet their participation in the movement bears political implications that will be explored in the analysis.

However, while some praise the Internet and social media believing that it has the potential to trigger and strengthen protests and social movements (e.g. Castells, 2012), others express

certain scepticism (e.g. Morozov, 2012) towards the role of media. He claims that accessibility of social media undermines democracy rather than sustains as it becomes too easy to join political movements. He states that it results in so-called 'slacktivism' as people often participate in online activism with zero political and social impact. He warns against people's loss of interest in traditional forms activism.

Others observe that the existence of social media cannot single-handedly contribute to the increase in civic engagement or participation. As Bennet & Sederberg have noted social media are entangled in a complex matrix of socio-political, technological and cultural relations (2012). There are many different 'offline' elements that contribute to contemporary forms of activism. For example, face-to-face interaction in mobilization (Juris, 2012) as well as the presence of a physical space (e.g. Tahrir square) are still key to social movements.

Another point of criticism dwells on the increasingly advanced forms of digital state control and surveillance (Fuchs, 2012). While the Internet gives opportunities for people to freely communicate, it also has great potential for surveillance. Facebook and Twitter are both commercial platform that have their own information architectures, however, their major aim is to aggregate as much personal data as possible to be able to sell it to advertising companies. Still these data can be used by the government to catch and punish decedents as it is being done currently in China (Poell in Fuchs and Trottier). These and other speculations make the use of social media as a tool to advance democracy less straightforward. It rather implies that social media holds a strong potential as a new communicative means, yet should not be blindly relied on as it is driven by corporations that have their own agendas.

## **2.2 Passion and civic engagement**

Another aspect that is vital to civic engagement and ultimately social movements - emotional attachment of protesters. For a long time, emotions have been perceived as something disruptive that could only hindrance one's engagement in the political (Papacharissi, 2014). However, Peter Dahlgren argues that civic engagement resides in passion and that "[civic] identities develop and evolve through experience, and experience is emotionally based" (2009: 119). He

further states that there is a strong connection between engagement and emotional: “To be engaged in something signals not just cognitive attention and some normative stance, but also an affective investment” (2009: 83). Therefore, it is important to recognise emotional aspect of protests. Like Dahlgren, Castells observes the importance of emotional engagement in social activism. He argues that social movements are premised in the outrage and quest for hope that often triggers people to overcome their fear and mobilize to bring change (2012). He underlines that emotional attachment becomes an entry point for many people to engage with political. The important aspect that Papacharissi notes in regards to social media is that it makes personal political (2014). She argues that “The act of making a private thought public bears the potential of a political act” (ibid). She claims that people use social media to express what she defines as “affective statement” and that networked media create a sense of belonging that results in affective public (2014). Poell and van Dijk (2016) have also observed that political takes place in people’s everyday lives and that engagement often requires emotional attachment and reaction. They underline that emotional statements posted on social media create “emotional connectivity” (ibid). They point out that the process of sharing emotions is highly important: “It is through the mass sharing of emotions that (temporary) public spaces are constructed” (2016: 228). The aspect of emotional will be crucial to the analysis of “March on Babe!” initiative as it will help understand how the movement uses passion to engage people in its agenda.

### **2.3 Activism on social media and feminism**

Feminists have been increasingly using digital technologies and social media to discuss, support and organise against sexism, gender-related violence, rape culture and misogyny. Today feminist blogs and weblogs (such as Maedchenmannschaft.net), hashtags (for example #Metoo, #aufschreim, ##EverydaySexism, #UrgentAction4Women, #EndFGM.), feminist apps (such as hollaback), but also initiatives and events (such as the Slutwalk movements, the Women’s March in 2017, Polish Women Protests against the abortion ban or other street protests organised via social media platforms) gain international outreach.

In the light of increase in digital feminism, many media scholars diverted their attention to the relationship between social media platforms and current feminist movements. A lot of research has been done on the so-called hashtag feminism (see for example, Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2018; Rentschler, 2017), such movements as #Metoo, #solidarityisforwhitewomen, #aufschrei, #EverydaySexism gained international and nation media coverage making everyone talk about sexual harassment and gender related violence. Social media platforms give women an easier and often safer space to share their experiences, express solidarity and most importantly to expose sexism and misogyny in their own words without relying on the mainstream media framing (Menders at el., 2018; Kangere, Kemitare and Michau, 2017). This feature is especially valuable to women of colour and activists working outside of organised structures (Rapp et al., 2010; Williams, 2015; Rentschler, 2017). For example, Sherri Williams observes how Twitter can be used to stop brutality against women of colour (2015). She underlines that social media help give necessary visibility to gendered violence especially when television and print media ignore black women's concerns.

Indeed, social media have become also an important tool to challenge victim blaming and to respond to violence. Many studies explore the potential of social media to empower victims of gendered violence and to bring justice to the offenders. Researchers often focus on the impact of feminist social media campaigns and their potential to bring social change. One of the key areas of interest is the link between online feminism and collective action. How online outrage transmits into a collective protest and how online campaigns, blogs and groups impact feminist movement (Rentschler, 2017; Higgs, 2015; Williams, 2015). Rentschler observes that Twitter enable bystander intervention that could become a powerful tool to combat gendered violence (2017). “[...] with the help of media witness framework can be created that will help to fight against gendered violence” (ibid: 598). Maureen Kangere, Jean Keitare and Lori Michau have also observed that social media contributed to the diversity within feminism (2017). They claim that social media enable women to express themselves in their own words: “The campaigns are providing space for African women to explain and engage others on feminism in their own words, allowing the ideas to be articulated and contextualized within African women's experience” (ibid: 886).

Many scholars observe how online activism enable the interplay between individual experiences and collective. Hashtag activism proved to be the most effective in merging the two spheres and demonstrating structural inequalities. There is quite a lot of debate currently about the experiences of activists who participated in the movements (Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2018). Some scholars noted the lower threshold that social media offer into activism and the possibility to empower through sharing and connecting (Jeong and Lee, 2018). The scholars observed that social media have become a powerful source of empowerment, especially for women living in more conservative societies such South Korea (ibid). On the other hand, others warn against increasing misogyny, trolling and abuse against women who dared to share their stories online. Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016) explain popular misogyny as a reaction to popular feminism that promotes the self-confidence and empowerment of women and their public presence in previously male-dominated spaces. As a result, the growing visibility of popular feminism coexists with the proliferation of online misogyny (Banet-Weiser and Miltner 2016).

In relation to popular feminism, many researchers have observed that the current prevalence of neoliberal philosophy has a negative effect on the feminist movement. Rosalind Gill (2016) has raised a question about the current popularity of feminist agendas and its exploitation for the neoliberal cause. They pointed out that prevailing discourses about empowerment, self-esteem and personal responsibility have significantly undermined the work done by the previous generations of women diverting the focus from the structural injustice.

Another limitation increasingly addressed by the scholarship concerns the limitations of online feminism and its potential risks. Transnational nature of online feminism can be both seen as a huge advantage and as a curse. On one hand, it allows women throughout the world to connect, support and share their stories. Many activists use the web not only as a battlefield but as a source of inspiration and empowerment. As Eagle (2015) notes, “The effect of reading so many similar stories in such sheer numbers [...] serves as powerful evidence for the pervasiveness of violence against women” (352).

On the other hand, online feminist activities often generalize personal experiences and oversimplify cultural and race differences especially if feminist movements “happen outside

Europe and are then brought back to the attention of the West” (Higgs, 2015: 344). Many researchers address the necessity to highlight the voices of marginalized and silenced groups within international feminist movements drawing attention to the social tensions and race injustice that continues within online communities. The existing gap in the research done on the feminist activism outside Europe or by women of colour adds to the existing misrepresentation within international feminism.

## **2.4 Talking about domestic violence**

As my thesis specifically looks into domestic violence as a form of masculine dominance over women, I did a thorough investigation of the scholarship done on domestic violence within media studies. What emerged during my research is that domestic violence despite its global prevalence is still highly understudied and misrepresented. Violence by an intimate partner is often a part of a broader research on gender-based violence and femicide, and is rarely addressed autonomously. The entry point for the research is often through pop culture and traditional media as the current scholarship tackles how domestic violence is discussed and perceived in society (Thaller and Messing, 2013; Kitzinger, 2004). Kitzinger in her research investigates how pop culture, TV series in particular, formed our perception of domestic violence (2004). She underlines that mass media has generally raised people’s awareness of the problem and helped many victims to put label to their trauma (ibid). Much research is done on media coverage of domestic violence (e.g. Berns, 2016; Lindsay-Brisbin, DePrince and Welton-Mitchell, 2014). Scholars often observe that victims are often blamed for their poor choice of men or their choice to stay in the relationship (Berns, 2016). Nancy Berns who has studied media framing of domestic violence compels how social and political movements against gendered violence have focused exclusively on victims. She observes how victims are often held responsible for the violence while social and cultural forces that contribute to it are ignored. Similar observations were made by the scholars J. Lindsay-Brisbin, A. DePrince and C. Welton-Mitchell (2014) who note that the majority of articles covering cases of domestic abuse miss the opportunity to explore the issue as a structural problem.

However, it has been proven that women are more active on social media than men and are more prone to share their experiences there (Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, 2017). Hashtag activism, in particular such movements as #WhyIStayed and #MeToo, have unveiled the seriousness of the problem and its pervasiveness. In addition, media scholars praise social media especially in regards to its potential to enhance feminist discourse, and store shared experience by victims of domestic violence (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Eagle, 2015; Clark, 2016). Rosemary Clark observes that social media contributes to the diversity of voices within feminist movements and points out that “While the tweeted narratives depicted a wide range of personal circumstances, they collectively shifted the burden of blame for domestic violence away from the abused and onto the shoulders of abusers” (2016, 797).

At the same time, an emerging body of scholarship also warns against the increasing online harassment by domestic violence perpetrators who use digital technologies “to abuse and humiliate a partner or ex-partner” (Dragiewicz et al.: 2018, 613). Dragiewicz looked into technology-facilitated coercive control underlining that it is often not taken seriously yet it poses serious threat and is interwoven within the patterns of domestic abuse (2018).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Discussions around the potential of social media to enhance democracy have never been as relevant as today. The scholars agree that social media hold high potential for people’s engagement due its functionalities and ability to turn personal into political (Papacharissi, 2014). As many scholars observe personal and emotional attachment that social media are able to evoke and most importantly transmit enables people’s participation in activism. This new way to engage people in democracy represents an important phenomenon that is happening right now in the world that has a potential to shift traditional power balance. Yet, within the media studies there is still limited scholarship done on the use of social media in more closed societies where freedom of speech is undermined and civil society initiatives are under pressure.

The literature on online feminist activism reflects general tendencies brought up by the researchers of online activism. Feminist scholars focus on what emerging online activism tell us about contemporary feminism and how it can be used to challenge gender politics. Yet, they



do not explore how online feminist movements can be vehicle of social change on the bigger scale. While focusing on what social media have done to feminist agenda across the globe, not much research ties down feminist activism to democracy and what impact such type of activism can have, particularly in traditionalist and closed societies.

Therefore, the research on “March on, Babe!” movement provides a unique perspective on how democracy can be sustained in the countries with authoritarian regime through the emergence of online feminist activism there. It also aims to demonstrate how people’s engagement with “March on, Babe!” can increase their participation in democracy.

### **3. Theoretic Framework**

The following research will use the concepts of networked social movement of outrage and hope, civic engagement and standpoint theory in order to provide a framework to understand the concrete case of the “March on, Babe!” initiative as well as participation of Belarusians in the discussions around gender equality and their engagement in democracy.

“March on, Babe!” initiative started as a response to the indifference of those in power. Frustrated and enraged with President’s decision, Belarusians came together in the online space to protest against the current situation hoping to change things for the better. “March on, Babe!” movement has a lot in common with other social movements that swept all over the world and fits the framework that Manuel Castells has proposed. As the scholar noted many social movements start out of despair and outrage that makes people come together. He reasons that when deprived of dignity people rise against their leaders, as they have nothing to lose and anger becomes their driving force: “[...] it was primarily the humiliation provoked by the cynicism and arrogance of those in power, be it financial, political or cultural, that brought together those who turned fear into outrage (2012: 3)”.

Yet, anger is not the only driving force of the networked social movements. As Castells notes all social movements are rooted in “internal quest for hope” as people are coming together to

bring change and make things better (2012: 45). He also observes the importance of social media to the ‘success’ of new social movements and their key role in their development. He uses examples of social revolution in Egypt, protests in Iceland and Occupy Wall Street movement to highlight the role of social media in these cases. The scholar notes that social media have provided an alternative space free from the influence of political regimes and corporations where people can connect, disseminate news and images and mobilize. These spaces of autonomy have allowed people to communicate with each other without borders. They have also made social movements viral and “offer the possibility for largely unfettered deliberation and coordination of action” (2012: 5). He also observes that the role of social media was especially critical for the development of the protests in such countries as Tunisia and Egypt where traditional media are often controlled and censored by the state. As Belarus is a country with an authoritarian regime where all traditional channels of communication are under strict surveillance of the state, social media have become a focal point for Belarusians to communicate and mobilize. As seen from above, “March on, Babe!” movement shares certain similarities with other social protests that are sweeping across the world, which I will look into further in my analysis.

As “March on, Babe!” is a social movement with a clear-cut agenda, I will look into its potential to increase people’s participation in democracy. As Peter Dahlgren argues “[c]yberspace is altering how we live providing us with very efficacious tools for social agency” (2009: 149). It means that our everyday online practices influence the way we engage with politics and participate in the society. “March on, Babe!” initiative didn’t go to the streets to express their anger, instead they took it to online spaces to mobilise and organise a better response. It can be explained by the political situation in the country as any unapproved gatherings, protests and meetings are forbidden (Freedomhouse.org, 2019). Yet, it is also easier today with the prevalence of mobile devices and the Internet to reach out to people online and form a group or movement within a few seconds. I will use Peter Dahlgren’s concept of civic cultures to analyse the data and argue that the following online initiative can lead to higher level of civic agency in Belarus.

As Peter Dahlgren notes civic agency is “premised on people being able to see themselves as participants [...]” (2009: 102). He underlines that agency does not appear out of thin air but is

rather part of a larger cultural environment that he identifies as ‘civic cultures’. Civic cultures comprise of a number of conditions that are necessary for civic engagement to flourish. They consist of “patterns of communication, practices, and meaning: they provide taken-for-granted orientations - factual and normative - as well as other resources for collective life” (2009: 103). In other words, for a functioning democracy to exist there are certain conditions that need to be experienced by real people as part of their everyday lives. These conditions lay the foundation for the distribution of power in the society and the way citizens operate within the system as they can both empower people and control them. Such notions as identity, knowledge, space, practices, values construct the society people are living in. For example, access to knowledge and most importantly to learning processes directly impacts critical thinking and the way people are able to develop their own opinions. As Belarus has been under the rule of the same authoritarian regime for the last twenty years (Freedomhouse.org, 2019), the conditions that form democratic society have been modified by the regime. What I am trying to establish in my analysis is how such social movements as “March on, Babe!” can reinforce ‘civic culture’ and what can that entail for the development of democracy in Belarus. I will specifically look into the notions of *communicative space*, *knowledge*, *practices* and *identity* to analyse the data and understand how the following initiative engages people in the political.

However, “March on, Babe!” is not just purely a social movement that aims to sustain democracy in the country. Rather it’s a feminist movement that first and foremost strives to stop gendered violence against women. The initial aim of the initiative is to gain enough support from Belarusians in order to force the authorities to oblige with their plead. On the bigger scale what activists of “March on, Babe!” movement are trying to achieve is to challenge existing power structures in the country by providing an alternative perspective. The fact that the movement is initiated by women and the majority of the members of the group are women, allows the initiative to gain a standpoint perspective on the issue (Harding, 1993). According to feminist standpoint theory, standpoint is an achieved collective identity (Harding, 1993). However, feminist theorists (Sandra Harding, 2008) do not see standpoint as something acquired for simply being a woman. Rather it is something that comes through constant struggle and deliberation:

Only through such struggles can we begin to see beneath the appearances created by an unjust social order to the reality of how this social order is in fact constructed and maintained. This need for struggle emphasizes the fact that a feminist standpoint is not something that anyone can have simply by claiming it. It is an achievement (2008: 127).

These struggles are vital for Belarusian society as they offer people, in particular women another perspective on their own lives and position. As Sandra Harding points out our class, race, gender, social status, ethnicity and even physical capacities determine what we know and are capable of knowing (2008). Belarusian women grew up in the post-Soviet society where such words as gender equality and feminism have never been part of bigger discourse so women have rarely questioned the authority of men or injustice of the existing social order. It is important for Belarusian women today to acquire standpoint in order to understand that they have been mistreated all the way.

Yet, feminist standpoint theorists such as Sandra Harding (2008) do not view always standpoint as a limitation but rather as a privilege available to those in the margins. As the scholars point out the perspective that marginalised groups offer gives us unprecedented insight into the structure of the society we live in. They allow us to not only understand what marginalised groups see and experience, but also what privileged groups cannot see. Standpoint makes visible aspects of reality that are unavailable to those in power, which allows us to better understand the reality of things. "Starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order." (Harding, 2008: 56).

The "March on, Babe!" movement might be not initially about men, yet it will eventually decipher Belarusian society as a whole. Victims of domestic abuse and just simple Belarusian women who have to face sexism daily could better detect what is wrong with the society at the moment and what can be done to improve the situation. I will use Sandra Harding and feminist standpoint theory to analyse what "March on, Babe!" is doing in terms of challenging current power structures. I will also look into how it empowers women to seek their own voice. As Sandra Harding point outs "it took women movements for women to recognize their shared interests and transform themselves into the groups "for women" [...] and to acquire group

consciousness.” (Harding, 2008: 64). In my analysis I will try to prove that the existence of “March on, Babe!” is vital for Belarusian women to fight for their rights and be more vocal about their position. With standpoint comes feminist consciousness that “allows them [women] to understand sexual violence as a structural rather than personal problem” (Mendes, 2018, 238). In other words, through participation in the “March on, Babe!” initiative Belarusian women and men are able to revisit their current roles in the society.

The combination of these three theories will equip me with a tool necessary to understand the processes behind the case. As has been already mentioned, “March on, Babe!” is not simply a social movement, it is a grassroots initiative with feminist agenda that has a potential to sustain the development of democracy and civil society in Belarus, which justifies the use of all three theories as they explore different aspects of the following case.

## **4. Method and Methodology**

### **4.1 Why qualitative content analysis**

My choice of research design is premised on the nature of my research. Before crafting the design, both methodology as a general vision and its actual tools in the form of methods were considered (Bazeley, 2013:8). The nature of the research is embedded in understanding humans, social contexts and their meanings, which made the case-study approach viable due to its contextual sensitivity (Flyvberg, 2001). The following approach takes into consideration the context of a particular case, and allows the researcher to explore how it influences people’s behaviour. By applying this approach, a researcher is able to develop a nuanced view of reality with all its complexity (Flyvberg, 2001). “For a comprehensive understanding of the practical organization and meaning of social actions, one needs methodically and rigorously examine the myriad ways that context is actively incorporated into interpretive practice. Most importantly one needs to examine how context is brought to bear on the experiences of everyday life (Holstein J. & Gubrium J. in Seale, 2007: 269). The understanding of the context in the “March

on, Babe!” case is highly important as it creates prerequisites for the existence of the movement and its future development. Political situation in the country and the prevalence of post-Soviet mentality predetermines how social order is constructed and the way people view themselves within it. Acknowledgement of these nuances is vital for the understanding of how power is distributed in the country. As Flyvberg notes a case-study approach allows us to understand “who gains and who loses” in the situation (2001). As we are aiming to understand how social initiatives such as “March on, Babe!” can challenge existing power structures by empowering women, the case-study approach seems to answer ideally to our initial claims and intentions.

“March on, Babe!” movement is Facebook-based. Its communication, mobilization and engagement happens in the online group or via their official page. As case-study approach often entails the use of qualitative methods (Bazeley, 2013), I would do qualitative content analysis of the posts published both in the “March on, Babe!” group and on their page. As has been mentioned earlier, the aim of the following research is to examine the complexity of human behaviour so the use of qualitative method rather than quantitative seems justifiable. In addition, it gives agency to cases (Bazeley, 2013) as they become more nuanced and human-oriented. As Bazeley notes: “Researchers engaging in a qualitative study focus on observing, describing, interpreting, and analysing the way that people experience, act on, or think about themselves and the world around them (2013: 4). While quantitative analysis operates facts and figures, qualitative analysis is grounded in interpretation. Klippendorff defined content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (2004: 18). It entails that a researcher is expected not only to describe what they see but also theorise about it and draw more general conclusions that contribute to the field of study. The case-study approach allows a researcher to arrive to such generalisations as “a case is embedded in a broader context, investigation of the case will inevitably lead you into that broader context” (Bazeley, 2013: 5). However, in order to conduct a credible qualitative content analysis a researcher requires to carefully follow all the steps of the process always self-reflecting to avoid bias. I have followed the strategies described by P. Bazeley (2013) and K. Klippendorff (2004) in my qualitative data analysis. According to the following approaches, it is important to work more closely with the data: careful analysis and interpretation of data allows qualitative researcher to avoid the vicious circle of subjectivity and bias (Bazeley, 2013). As both scholars underline it is important to carefully study your data

before moving to theorizing and conceptualisation. However, I have adapted their approaches to the nature of my material. Considering that I had to work with Facebook posts that have various agendas I considered every post as one ‘meaningful unit’ that bears one category or ‘theme’ within it.

## 4.2 Gathering and working with data

“March on, Babe!” Facebook group was created on 5 October, right after the infamous speech of the President of Belarus, and consists of 145 posts<sup>2</sup>. Apart from the group there is also an official page that was launched later, on 28 December, and has 82<sup>3</sup> posts. In my analysis, I have included data from both sources as I see them complementary to each other and serving various purposes that the activists pursue. As the scope of the data is predetermined by the research question, (Krippendorff, 2004), it has been decided to analyse all available data created by the initiative. It allowed to trace how the movement has communicated its agendas to the public over a period of time. It corresponds to the theoretical framework as we claim that the “March on, Babe!” is a social movement that evolves over the course of time adapting to the socio-political context and responding to the changes in the society.

Both text and images were analysed. However, it was decided not to do visual analysis of the images as they were complementary to the texts and shouldn’t be viewed separately. All the materials were originally in Russian and sometimes Belarusian. The data were analysed in the original languages. However, the parts that were included in the analytical part were later translated word by word into English. In the cases when the post had more than 10 comments, they were analysed as well and included in the data collection. In total there were more than 350 data entries.

Once the scope was mapped, I moved to store the data to have a better overview of the materials. All data entries were put in the Excel sheet. It allowed easily find the necessary information

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<sup>2</sup> The number corresponds the date (15 April) when the sampling was finished.

<sup>3</sup> The number corresponds the date (15 April) when the sampling was finished.

and trace occurring themes that appeared in the data. Once all the data was stored in one place, I proceeded to its exploration. As Pat Bazeley underlines it's important to acquire a full picture of the data to be able to see it as a whole (2013). First, I went through all the texts to get an overview. Then returned back to the data to "read more actively" and paying attention to details (Bazeley, 2013: 102). On that stage, I have already started making notes trying to identify the message behind each Facebook post. Though it was not yet analysis, it did help me map the possible concepts that can be used during the analysis.

### **4.3 Finding themes in the data**

The next stage after the data has been collected, stored and reviewed is to look for themes that can be later conceptualised during the analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). According to Bazeley, at this stage is important to return back to the aims of the research, the research questions and the theoretical framework to better define what a researcher is hoping to find in the material and to acquire some sense of direction (2001). By revisiting my research questions, I was able to identify the main threads that I was looking for in my material, such as expressions of civic engagement and activism, promotion of gender equality and feminism, expression of emotions. This does not mean that my work with data was more restrained but rather than it was more focused.

Keeping in mind these possible themes, I have returned to my data this time to analyse each post in detail. Qualitative data analysis is believed to be an iterative process (Hasse-Biber and Leavy, 2011: 123) so I read and re-read the material multiple times. In each post I highlighted "exemplar quotes" or sometimes "keywords" that helped me derive general meaning of a post (ibid: 124): what this post was about and what was its purpose. Based on its meaning, each post was assigned a category. In total, I mapped 26 categories (List of categories). At that stage, I could already trace certain patterns arising from the material. After that I piled up together posts that had correlating categories. As Bazeley suggested I gave each pile a name to generate a theme (2013). When defining themes, I used the theoretical framework as a guidance to make a connection between theory and data.



Then I returned to my pre-existing list of possible themes to make sure my analysis did not deteriorate too much from the aim of the research as it was easy to get lost in the material (Bazeley, 2013). In the end, I identified 6 major themes: *using online to engage people offline; giving voice to the victims and women; expressing and fuelling anger; giving hope and encouragement; building a supportive community; raising awareness; building the knowledge about feminism.*

Once the themes were established and finalised, it became clear that there was a need to revisit one of my initial research questions that first said: *How does the movement “March on, Babe!” engages Belarusians in the discussions around domestic violence?* by changing ‘domestic violence’ to ‘gender equality’. The following change was dictated by the themes. They clearly indicate that though the movement has been triggered by the prevalence of domestic violence in the country, the discussions in the group are more often targeting women's rights and gender roles rather than gendered violence.

#### **4.4 Reflexive considerations**

A vital part of qualitative research is self-reflexion (Bazeley, 2013). I am originally from Belarus and have long been an advocate for gender equality and for criminalization of violence against women in the country. I am a member of the group and have followed them since the very beginning. I am sympathetic to their cause as I believe it to be very urgent and necessary. However, I believe this aspect doesn't entail that I am biased but adds validity to my research as it is grounded in striving to carry out an objective and valuable project.

## **5. Analysis**

### **5.1 Anger as an entry point**

As has already been mentioned in the introduction, “March on, Babe!” initiative started as a response to the arrogance and indifference of those in power. Frustrated and enraged with President’s decision, Belarusians came together in the online space to protest against the current situation hoping to change things for the better. The infamous speech of President Lukashenko became a trigger or what Castells calls “meaningful event” that sparked emotion strong enough for people to start a protest (2012: 219). However, as Castells highlights not every emotion is strong enough to spark a protest - anger is one as it helps people overcome fear (2012). It provokes them to take action despite the circumstances. What my analysis of the data has indicated is that anger is at the very core of “March on Babe” movement. It is even reflected both in the name and the visual identity of the initiative - the official logo depicts a woman with fire on the background.

We chose such a bold name with a strong call to action and implication to target public space where domestic violence is invisible to flag our determination to act (Introduction text).

The members of the group expressed their anger and dissatisfaction with the current situation by sharing with each other stories and accounts of abuse that they have witnessed, read about or have experienced. They used Facebook to do that. Facebook became the space where they were able to speak up and express their dissatisfaction - something they wouldn’t be able to do otherwise as any open protests, manifestations or riots are forbidden in Belarus<sup>4</sup>. Social media enable people’s mobilization and communication regardless of the restrictions, which makes them a vital organisational aspect in current networked social movements (Castells, 2012). The functionalities of Facebook and its ‘independence’ from the state makes it an ideal platform for deliberation of a political action in Belarus. Indeed, “March on, Babe!” were able to gather so many followers in such a short period of time mainly due to the functionalities of the platform. Easy access and the prevalence of social media made the emergence of the “March on, Babe!” group a matter of a few hours rather than days or months would it be an actual urban protest. The main advantage of social media that made them so vital to emerging social movements are their liberation from restrictions of physical space (Castells, 2012). In the case of “March on,

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<sup>4</sup> According to Belarusian Law any public gathering need authorization from the authorities.

Babe!” urban spaces would not be safe or even accessible to people so Belarusians turned to online space to demand justice.

In addition, Facebook has become an important platform for members of the group to express their outrage without any restriction or censorship, and most importantly to share it with others. The posts that circulate in the group are often emotionally charged and come with a short explanation where users express their exasperation with the situation:

News are full of tragic accounts. Here is one more, and even the previous criminal record hasn't stopped the abuser [...] (post on 15 January 2019)

Another victim. This time a friend of a friend (post on 12 December 2018).

On another instance a user shared a newspaper article in the group about a woman whose husband nearly tangled her to death, saying: “This story doesn't mean that everyone in the country lives through such a nightmare. Yet, we cannot deny it doesn't exist. We shouldn't ignore what we disapprove of but what hasn't happened to us” (post from 14 June 2019). These posts always evoke strong emotions from the members who either comment or give them a ‘dislike’ to express their disgust.

Yet, it is not just frustration with the current state of things that drives people to start a protest. When people feel that they are deprived of dignity and disempowered, that's when they are able to overcome fear and revolt against political elites (Castells, 2012). “March on, Babe!” members have come together because they could not take it any longer. They have revolted against dominant discourse that puts women's interest inferior to men. For example, on 18 March, one of the users shared a screenshot from a video game that she came across. The screenshot depicts a young sexualized girl with visible signs of abuse who begs to let her go, while a player is offered two options: either “to forgive” or “to slap her on the face” (Appendix: Image bank: Image 1). The user commented under the post: “Just shocking that it's an ad of an Instagram video game” (post on 18 March 2019). On another instance, admins of the group published an “anti-nomination” post calling out Igor Marzalyk - Belarusian MP and a strong opponent of the concept of the law against domestic violence - for saying that:

[t]here are no legal groundings in [Belarus] for a law that will regulate relationships within a family and between spouses. [...] Honestly, I am one of these people who does not support the suggested concept [the concept of the law against domestic violence] as I see it as anti-constitutional and going against Belarusian legislation (TUT.by, 2018).

As can be seen from the examples above, anger became an entry point for many Belarusians to exercise their civic agency. It has encouraged them to engage with “March on, Babe!” either by joining the group, signing the petition or taking part in the events organised by the initiative. It became their motivation to actively participate in democracy. What is more important the constant input of accounts of abuse only fuels their anger. As Peter Dahlgren notes civic engagement “involves some kind of passion” (2009: 83). Motivation for Belarusians to engage with the movement would be hard to maintain if they were not emotionally involved. As they feel passionate about the topic, they cannot stay indifferent or ignore the situation. For example, one of the members of the group shared a photo of herself (Appendix: Image Bank: Image 2) with the makeup that made her look physically abused, saying:

This is how I could look if I were less lucky with my family or my marriage. Do you think this is normal, #misterpresident, representatives of religious organisations and even less respected opponents of the law concept against domestic violence? [...]

Personally, I am scared to live in the society, where make-up can become real any minute because it is accepted and even approved by the majority. No one is safe and protected against violence. And we need to do something about it! (post from 10 October 2018).

What this example illustrates is that members of the group perceive their engagement with the initiative as meaningful. They clearly believe that the topic matters, which encourages them to be stay engaged. “The concept of civic agency is premised on people being able to see themselves as participants, that they find engagement meaningful, and that they experience motivation via the interplay of reason and passion” (Dahlgren, 2009: 102). Members of “March on Babe!” do not only feel like they can but that they have to interfere in order to get justice. Belarusians do not trust institutions to address their needs so they search for a new social contract. Driven by passion, they decide to take matters in their own hands and to challenge the

Belarusian state from below, which reflects general tendency in the world as people feel more inclined to act (Castells, 2012).

## **5.2 Coming together to act collectively in online spaces**

The Internet has become pervasive; it has become an inexorable and commonplace feature of how societies, organizations, and individuals operate in the modern world (Dahlgren, 2009: 150).

The emergence of “March on, Babe!” indicates that networked technologies have become an important part of our daily activities. They have enormously influenced the way people communicate, collaborate and protest. Social media and the Internet provide means for people to connect with each other without borders or time constraints, while accessibility of social media and its prevalence defines the way human relations evolve (Dahlgren, 2009). According to Mendes networked technologies are also crucial to activism nowadays (2015). She argues that social media make participation in democracy more accessible to people and less “restraining and elitist” as “it is where people have well-established connections and communities” (2015: 35). The fact that social media are so deeply embedded in our daily communication explains why people use it not only to connect but also to protest. “March on, Babe!” have premised their entire protest on Facebook employing its functionalities for the benefit of democracy. As Lim indicates social media are not initially designed to promote and advance democracy yet in the right conditions “social and cultural participation in social media spheres may translate into civic or political engagement” (2013: 34).

The analysis of “March on, Babe!” movement has revealed that Facebook has been particularly important for the movement and its development. Being unable to take their anger to streets, Belarusians used social media to connect with each other and create a close community of like-minded people. Networked technologies provide an alternative communicative space autonomous from the influence of the institutional power and physical restraints where people can freely express their anger, mobilize and deliberate (Castells, 2012). Indeed, it would be hard for 2000 members of “March on, Babe!” to gather unnoticed otherwise and might have led to

arrests, which would have definitely thwarted their efforts and have crushed their determination. Facebook has substituted physical space and allowed 2000 people to come together in a virtual one to act collectively and talk. I will return later in my discussion to the notion of talk and space as these are important aspects of democracy and contributing factors to its existence.

The community that “March on, Babe!” members have created allows them to support each other, coordinate their collective actions and make sense of the world around them. Members use the platform to share news, to update regarding current situation in the country and most importantly support each other. For example, members use the group to ask for help and advice:

Hi everyone! We urgently need your help at ‘Radislava’ shelter. Maybe someone could look after three kids ( two, two and a half and six years old) today and the next three days while their mother is taken to hospital? [...] (post from 10 November 2018).

I have thought that this group is an excellent platform to seek support from like-minded so I wanted to ask for your opinion on the following matter: how do you talk about violence with your relatives of the older generation. I am especially interested in the experience of those who were abused by their parents. What still haunts me is the idea that all my relatives not only got away with it, but also deny the very fact that I was abused [...] Maybe, someone here has been in similar situation? How have you addressed it? (post from 15 November 2018).

The last example got more than forty replies with people not only sharing their experiences but also suggesting what can be done and how the author can approach the matter. It demonstrates that “March on, Babe!” serves as a platform that allows people to encounter each other. When living in the society where discrimination of oppressed groups is embedded in the culture, it is often hard to find affirmation of your own ideas. “March on, Babe!” creates the feeling of togetherness and unity as members seek out help and support from each other. They view each other not as strangers but rather as peers who can be trusted and relied on. As Manuel Castells observes, togetherness helps people overcome fear and is a source of empowerment (2012). Together members of ‘March on, Babe!’ group feel more reassured to strive for hope and

political change. Just like before the crowd is stronger than an individual, no matter if it is gathered in a virtual space.

The sense of empowerment that the members acquire also comes from the flat structure of the movement. “March on Babe!” is free from hierarchy as everyone is able to contribute and everyone’s voice matters. As both Castells and Juris argue new social movements are decentralized and have become a collective actor that self-organises and is self-reflective. They often lack identifiable leaders and operate on consensual decision-making (2012, 2008). “March on, Babe!” has been initiated by a group of activists who, however, have never positioned themselves as leaders of the movement. The decisions are taken collectively and usually through democratic means available to the members. For example, at the very start one of the original organisers held a public discussion which was live streamed. During the discussion future activities were mapped and debated, which resulted first in a list of activities published online and later in a poll on Facebook where people could join multiple working groups:

So future working areas have been defined: they are divided into subcategories in the document (find the link below). You can have a look and join the group(s) that seem interesting via the poll [...]” (post from 20 October 2018).

We support pluralism of opinions but are against aggressive and forceful voicing of such opinions. Please, be kind to each, try to listen and understand what the other person is saying [...] (Introduction text of the group).

The affordances of the Internet lower the threshold for people’s participation in democracy. By liking, sharing and commenting, members of “March on, Babe!” are supporting an alternative thinking and ultimately the development of what Peter Dahlgren defines as ‘civic culture’ in the country (2009). Communicating and networking through social media has become a practice vital to the growth of democracy. As Peter Dahlgren (2009: 117) argues talk “has a prominent position” and has been associated with “opinion formation” from the start. People make sense of the world through communication and talking to each other. “March on Babe!” members use social media as an opportunity to discuss things they care about or find

contradictory, unclear or hard to understand. For instance, one of the participants shared an image of an ad campaign done by a well-known local food blog Koko.by (Appendix: Image Bank: Image #3). The image shows supposedly a man's hand with a meat mallet over a piece of steak saying "A normal man only beats<sup>5</sup> his steak". In the left corner, there is a well-known Russian saying "If a man beats you, it means he loves you". At the bottom to the right, there is a phrase: "A hobby is better than domestic violence" (post from 6 January 2019). The following post has been heatedly discussed by the members of "March on Babe!" group as they argue about its message and effectiveness. Some members were quite critical of the advertisement pointing out its sexist undertone: "It is nice that they decided to talk about the problem. Yet, these banners are examples of ill-thought design and triggering advertising"; "I believe that sexism lies in disrespect towards women. Beating is not allowed, but insulting is fine?! Right now it seems to be what are you saying. That's why I am asking, I want to understand what you mean."<sup>6</sup> Others found it still helpful to the cause:

Off with stereotypes - one can be a sexist but still against domestic violence. [...] I am not saying it is a good thing. I am just saying that we are here because first and foremost we are against domestic violence. It may seem that the world is black and white: we are progressive and the rest are barbarians. [...] Yet, the world is way more complex: one can be against domestic violence, but still be homophobic/ sexist/ racist. This image is the clash of two approaches [approaches to activism]: I think it's important to find allies on specific topic (the fact that Koko.by has published this post is excellent, even if we do not see eye to eye with them on everything [...]) (comment under the post on 6 January).

The following discussion demonstrates how conversations that people have on social media help them make sense of the society they are currently living in, its values and their own roles within it. Another example that supports the following argument is the post shared by the admin of the group with a diagram that depicts the percentage of women who have experienced violence from an intimate partner at some point of their life in Europe. The following post triggered discussions in the group around the figures:

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<sup>5</sup> It's a pan in Russian as the expression 'to beat meat' stands for 'to pound meat'. The word 'beat' can be used both when talking about people and food.

<sup>6</sup> The following comment is addressed to the author of the post.



I don't find these data very convincing... I don't believe that it's only 21% in Russia, when it's even 28% in Sweden. I suspect that women in Russia won't define many things as abuse: who cares if he hit, pushed or ignored 'no'.

Such research and even 'unreliable' data are needed as they reveal how differently nations approach the issue of gender abuse. Plus, it will be interesting to compare them in the future (comments under the post on 4 November 2018).

As seen from the examples above, talk and communication process become vital for critical thinking as people through exchange of information form their own opinions and meanings. Drawing on Castells (2012), the process of socialized communication is vital for meaning construction, which is interconnected with the distribution of power in society:

[...] as the construction of meaning in people's minds is a more decisive and more stable source of power. The way people think determines the fate of the institutions, norms and values on which societies are organized.

"March on Babe!" allows people to have access to each other and provides autonomous space where they are able to connect and, most importantly, exchange information and expand each others' views, which helps them build alternative meanings to the dominant discourse in Belarusian society. Information that members of "March on, Babe!" group share with each other contribute to their collective intelligence and creates 'knowledge' - the notion that I will return to further in my analysis.

Yet, this exchange won't be possible if it didn't happen in the online spaces that social media create. If in Ancient Greece people needed a forum - a square - in the city to gather together to discuss and take decisions on things that mattered most to them, today people don't even need to be in the same country to communicate, let alone to protest. As mentioned before, social media allow people to communicate freely and independently without censorship and fear to be punished for what they say. As Peter Dahlgren argues existence of spaces where people can interact is vital for democracy as people need to "access each other to develop their collective

political efforts, and contexts in which they can act collectively” (2009: 114). However, social movements cannot exist entirely in the online spaces. During my analysis, I observed that there was an interplay between physical and online spaces within “March on, Babe!” movement. Members of the group often posted invitations to lectures and workshops in the group encouraging others to meet up in the actual space. For example, members of the group often invite each other for events taking place in actual venues throughout the country:

On 9 March we invite you all to the festival “Instead of flowers!”<sup>7</sup> to have fun, get inspired, find friends and support and talk to each other about important things. We will talk about representation, safe communication, equal working conditions and celebrate our achievements in 2018! We are looking forward to meeting you all! (post on 25 February 2019)

“Hello! There will be a party for girls at Ok16<sup>8</sup> tomorrow. All money will be transferred to ‘Radislava’ shelter. Come to dance and do good! (post on 14 March).

As seen from the example, interaction in actual physical space is still vital for members of “March on, Babe!” While online spaces are important for interaction without any hindrance, physical spaces provide a stronger sense of togetherness and empowerment. They also have a stronger presence that allows the movement to become more visible to others. Occupying public spaces is more powerful than communication entirely online as it adds to its visibility. Like other movements that make use of both physical and online spaces (Castells, 2012), “March on, Babe!” has also recognised the potential the former. Yet, the movements do not use public spaces for open protests but rather as a meeting point. For example, the initiative has encouraged its members to participate in a peaceful flash mob to join ‘One Billion Rising’<sup>9</sup> initiative. They have constantly posted updates on the preparations for the event and on the venue. The event hasn’t taken place eventually due to administrative challenges<sup>10</sup>, yet the fact that it has been such an important part of the movement’s outreach campaign proves that physical spaces are

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<sup>7</sup> The name of the festival refers to the tradition in post-Soviet countries to give women flowers on 8 March as a symbol of their femininity that is associated with beauty and fragility.

<sup>8</sup> OK16 is a local cultural venue opened in the renowned industrial area.

<sup>9</sup> International feminist solidarity initiative: <https://www.onebillionrising.org/>

<sup>10</sup> The flash mob hasn’t received the official permission from the authorities.

still significant for the development of social movements. As Peter Dahlgren notes, “territorial parameters simply do not vanish [...]” (2009: 116) as social life and politics are still premised on physical places. In other words, online spaces do not entirely replace physical ones but rather compensate them allowing people build stronger ties and connections.

The peculiarity of “March on, Babe!” movement is that it has become what Sandra Harding describes as a group “for itself” not just “in itself” as it allows its members see the world from their own perspectives (2008). Members of the movements share with each other relevant events, news and updates. They also share their personal stories and often ask for support and affirmation. Together they create a new matrix and a new discourse and serve to represent the interests of the oppressed. As Sandra Harding observes the importance of grassroots initiatives is that they create “group consciousness” that allows them to oppose the dominant discourse (2008). For example, “March on, Babe!” members discuss feminism, body rights, gender equality, gendered violence, which help them identify their own needs and realise their own potential.

### **5.3 From raising awareness to creating knowledge in the online spaces**

One hundred thousand voices reverberating in the streets would surely be powerful, but, in the age of social media, they would be no less powerful if they were to rumble through the Twittersphere. (Clark, 2016: 788)

Members of “March on, Babe!” initiative used online space to collect and store accounts of abuse. The stories that they shared with each other did not only serve to spark anger, but also to raise awareness about the problem. The Internet gave them an opportunity to quickly diffuse images and messages and gather them in one space. For example, members often share single articles about domestic abuse that they come across in media:

A man from Vitebsk area put his wife on fire out of jealousy. He got a fine of 735 Belarusian rubles... [305 Euro] (post from 1 March).

The man from Vitebsk murdered his wife in front of her mother. The old lady died of a heart attack (post from 11 March).

Individual stories that from time to time emerged on Belarusian media landscape have rarely drawn enough attention to the problem. The stories that members of the group disseminate became a collective evidence of the pervasiveness of the problem. For example, admins have shared an interactive map that contains accounts of domestic abuse across the country (Karta Nasiliya, 2019). The map allows anyone who is or has been a victim of such abuse to share their story and to put them on the map. On another instance, “March on, Babe!” page has shared a report done by the United Nations Development Program in Belarus which has revealed that “Almost every second woman in Belarus is a victim of psychological abuse from an intimate partner. Every third has been verbally insulted by an intimate partner” (post from March 14).

The collective efforts of “March on, Babe!” members give the problem more visibility. According to Silverstone, various phenomena become visible in the lives of most people through mediated narratives and images (2011). He claims that today we do not necessarily need to be involved physically to experience events and connect with others. Stories and accounts of abuse shared in the group or posted on “March on, Babe!” Facebook page bring closer the problems of those on the periphery: “[t]he emergence of interactive and network media can be seen as a way to provide visibility to otherwise marginalized groups [...]” (Silverstone, 2011: 42). Personal stories that “March on, Babe!” have stored help us understand what victims of abuse are going through:

I didn't have my own money. My husband insulted and beat me. He raped me (post on 1 December).

My mother beat and shouted at me and my sister every day when she came back from work. No one ever stopped her, even though you can hear everything through these walls [...] I couldn't bear staying at my parents' house any more. They abused my children as well, that's why we are now in the shelter 'Radislava'" (post from 1 December).

“March on, Babe!” has become a space where people can share their personal stories and these stories contribute to the formation of collective consciousness (Mendes, 2015). It has provided autonomous space for individual voices of victims to be heard and magnified by others. It is harder to ignore a chorus of voices echoing throughout social media. It is even more difficult to silence that chorus as the “autonomous” character of “March on, Babe!” has allowed common people to construct their own narratives that might have not been present otherwise (Castells, 2012). Enraged with the indifference of the authorities and their arrogance, “March on Babe!” members use social media to draw public attention to the issue and to show the situation from their own perspective. For example, “March on, Babe!” group has shared a series of video testimonials where 17 victims of domestic abuse and workers from the shelter ‘Radislava’<sup>11</sup> share their experiences and dispel the myths around domestic violence. One of the narrators talked about sexual abuse by her husband:

It is domesticated prostitution. If he went to work and brought money home, you have to sleep with him when he wants you? Why? I’d better work on the street then. At least, I would have a choice there when and with whom [...]. (post on 29 December).

The ability to tell the story from the perspective of those on periphery provided by social media gave an opportunity for Belarusians to revisit current power structures in the country. As Sandra Harding argues those at the top often miss the whole picture and are detached from social reality (2008). They are often unaware of the conditions that other people are living in and of real human relations. As Harding indicates invisibility is also exercised as a tool of oppression. Belarusian authorities claim that domestic violence doesn’t exist or is only a problem of disadvantaged classes of the society. They employ media to reinforce this opinion. As we are heavily relying on media representation and mediated appearances (Silverstone: 2011) our opinions can be easily manipulated by those in power. As a result, the majority of Belarusians tend to believe that domestic violence is nothing but deviation rather than a structural problem arising from gender inequality in the country. Yet, collective efforts of “March on, Babe!” initiative challenge the dominant discourse that puts women’s interests inferior to men’s. The stories that the initiative publish in their group and on their Facebook page offer alternative

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<sup>11</sup> “Radislava” is a shelter for victims of domestic abuse.

perspective on the situation. For example, they have recently launched a series of posts under hashtag #numberoftheday where they provide recent data on domestic violence in Belarus and other information related to the topic:

It is well known that children are the most vulnerable part of the society. Their rights are limited, and the society is often prone to see them as parents' *property*.

That is why it is so important to talk about domestic violence. Today's #numberoftheday from *Woman Made for Family Life* points out that more than **80%** of Belarusians approve of physical punishment of children. And only **17%** think that it's unacceptable under any circumstances (post on 18 November 2018. Numbers are not highlighted in the source).

The information that "March on, Babe!" collects and diffuses is vital for knowledge creation. Drawing on Sandra Harding and Peter Dahlgren, knowledge is an important element of civic engagement. As Peter Dahlgren states some degree of knowledge is required to make sense of relevant developments (2009). While Sandra Harding notes that "[p]olitics and knowledge prove in principle no less than in practice impossible to separate since the very production of knowledge requires political action and has political effects." (2008: 121) To be able to participate in democracy citizens need to understand what is happening and why. They need to be able to analyse social reality and form their own opinions. The problem with knowledge is that it is intertwined with power relations. As Castells notes power is executed through the construction of meaning: "[t]he way people think determines the fate of the institutions, norms and values on which society is organised" (2012: 5).

In order for "March on, Babe!" to challenge the existing power structures, they need to construct new meanings and suggest alternative ideas. Posts and ideas that they share in the group create knowledge that aims to educate people about gender, feminism and domestic violence. They often publish articles, promote public lectures and gatherings that offer alternative take on the subject. For example, in March they have shared a video interview with the founders of the "March on, Babe!" group who addressed most common stereotypes around feminism saying: "How come feminists have children, and what armpit hair has to do with it? "March on Babe" activists answer most common questions about feminism" (post on 4 March 2019). In addition,

they have started a series of posts *#marchonbabereplies* to address wide-spread misconceptions about domestic violence and the law against it:

Third statement: “Haven’t bought a new coat - became an abuser?”

Reply: Of course not! Economic abuse is when one member of the family limits access to the shared budget for another. In other words, takes away their means or limits their right to use them as freely as they want [...] (post on 11 December 2018).

On Women’s Day they have posted a series of ‘alternative’ postcards that aim to dissolve most common stereotypes around this public holiday:

What you shouldn’t wish a woman on 8 March - To be beautiful

Woman doesn’t have to please someone or meet beauty standards. She should look as she wants. You can wish her instead to start loving herself and never feel ashamed of her looks (post on 7 March 2019).

The following examples illustrate how “March on, Babe!” members build new meanings that challenge dominant discourse. They bring new perspectives to the existing knowledge structure suggesting that things are not the way we have always perceived them. As Castells noted social change can only happen when social agents start questioning existing institutions and their authority (2012). What “March on, Babe!” initiative is doing is to provide people with knowledge that they could use to oppose the current regime. They are educating their audience about such things as gender and feminism in order to give them necessary information to analyse the situation and have the tools to act upon:

On 6 January, between 15.00-18.00, we are inviting everyone to an open discussion “Who has a right to my body?” to talk about how norms around our bodies are formed at schools, universities and work; to find new ways to resist and defend our boundaries; to meet like-minded people and make new friends [...] (post on 2 January 2019).

As Harding point outs, women are not entitled to have a feminist standpoint as it is not an ascription, but rather an achievement (2008). Members of “March on Babe!” self-educate each

other by sharing information and their personal accounts. Education is highly important for the development of civic society in Belarus as “[it] always play a key role in nurturing democracy” (Dahlgren, 2009: 117). Members of the group share articles and resources, sometimes even translate them into Russian to give others access to ‘the collective knowledge’. For example, one member shared a Wiki Gaps<sup>12</sup> page asking if someone would like to help fill in the gaps around gender that there are on Wikipedia. Another posted a simplified version of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence to inform others about the international practice in regards to gender violence. This alternative knowledge equips people with the tools necessary for them to oppose the regime. Education is also interconnected with skills. We do not just learn how to write and read in school, but rather how to critically think and analyse. Education builds values and identities and that is why it is such an important instrument of domination. In Belarus all education is state-driven and is under control of the regime. The alternative approaches that social initiatives in Belarus provide, including “March on, Babe!”, help strengthen civil society in the country. Education gives people power so-called ‘soft’ power (Corner, 2011) as they are able to critically analyse information and data given to them by the state and media.

In other words, the knowledge collected by “March on, Babe!” members awakens collective consciousness of Belarusian women and ultimately men allowing them to revisit their perception of gender and feminism. As Kitzinger observes TV shows and pop culture in general help women to revisit their experiences and to put label to what has happened to them (2004). And as Peter Dahlgren notes making information personal transmits it into knowledge that people can use to make sense of the events and social reality (2009). Once, they can put a word to their experience and put it into perspective, they are able to critically analyse the reality they live in. As members of “March on, Babe!” gather knowledge themselves autonomously from the influence of institutions, it allows them to build their own meanings and develop critical thinking. As Castells denotes the networked social movements aim to give power to the people and giving them access to knowledge creation is truly empowering (2012). The emergence of “March on, Babe!” is the display of civic engagement in Belarusian context as members of the group actively participate in shaping the society, its norms and values.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.wikiloveswomen.org/about-the-project/mind-the-gap/>



## 5.4 Striving for hope

When people come out to the streets to protest, they are not doing it only because they are angry but also because they hope to bring changes. All recent social movements have one thing in common - they are premised in the feeling of hope - hope for a better future (Castells, 2012). People occupy urban spaces and use social media to build networks in order to claim their own fate and to challenge those in power who treated them unjustly. Not only anger help thousands to overcome fear but also hope. People need to have purpose and what is more importantly to have the feeling that they might 'win' this time.

Hope has a strong presence in "March on Babe" movement. In their official manifesto, the initiative states the following: "Only together we can make life in Belarus safer" (Introduction text from Facebook page). Members of "March on, Babe!" have joined the group in hope that their collective actions will change the current situation in the country and will help them stop injustice and violence against women. The activists have constantly been updating their official page about the progress in regards to the petition: "2700 signatures. Our voice is important. YOUR voice is important."; "The petition has been signed by 3000 people. To celebrate our small anniversary, we would like to tell you three facts about domestic violence [...]"; "35000 signature online, and 1000 offline. Together we can!" (post on 15 April 2019). They also post about conferences and meetings that the representatives of the movement attend:

Today one of the coordinators Marisha Korzh has met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Makeev to discuss the importance of the law against domestic violence in Belarus.

The meeting was very pleasant. We get to know each other, had espresso and agreed that the current legislation does not protect all groups in the society [...].

Minister has listened to our suggestions; we have proposed to stay in touch to further develop the discussion. (post on 8 April 2019).

The following example demonstrates how members of the initiative nourish hopes of their followers. They demonstrate that there are supporters of the law even among the authorities and that through peaceful and constructive dialogue they are able to make more and more politicians side with them. As Manuel Castells observes the most relevant emotions to political behaviour are anger and enthusiasm (2012). And though anger is present in the movement it cannot be the only driving force - people need to know that their efforts make a difference. Drawing on Dahlgren, civic engagement is premised in passion (2009), yet passion can dwindle away if it is not constantly maintained. The activists of “March on, Babe!” share on their page and in the group their progress and success stories:

Today activists of the initiative took part in the international conference “Equal rights and opportunities for women and men: realities, problems and perspectives”. Swedish Ambassador, Ambassador of the UK, Head of Delegation of the European Union in Belarus, [...] took part in the conference.

The discussion about the law against domestic violence in Belarus was heated and intense. We observed interest to the issue, common problems, and most importantly a common understanding that the discussions around the law should continue (post on 14 may 2019).

The support and positive changes that the activists of the initiative underline in their campaign help them keep people engaged. They sustain hope by emphasising the possibility for change and also referring to positive examples happening in Belarus. In March, the initiative has shared a post about the advertising campaign against domestic violence and standby-culture created by a group of Belarusian designers that participated in Young Cannes Lions<sup>13</sup>. The campaign has a slogan: “No Poker Face When You See the Violence” and depicts a group of people sitting on a metro train (Appendix: Image Bank: Image #4). Their faces are replaced with images from cards with one of the female faces having traces of physical abuse. Another post that the members have shared on their page was about a one-day internship for girls who would like to work in leading positions in the future:

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<sup>13</sup> Cannes Lions is International Festival of Creativity

Ambassadors, business-leaders and heads of international organisations in Belarus have agreed to celebrate Women's Day by inviting girls, who see themselves in leading positions in the future, for a short internship (post on 6 March 2019).

The post had also an image of a woman flying through the sky resembling Superman in his iconic pose (Appendix: Image Bank: Image #5). Members also use local public figures and celebrities to promote their cause and to demonstrate that it matters to many.

Using positive examples and activists of "March on, Babe!" are reassuring Belarusians that much has already been achieved and things are getting better both in regards to gender equality and democracy. They often emphasise the role of common people and civil initiatives in the ongoing change, encouraging people to take a more active stance. Drawing on Dahlgren, enthusiasm is crucial for civil engagement and political action as it supplies people with motivation (2009). The use of inspiring stories allows activists to further engage people in their agenda. For example, "March on, Babe!" has shared on their page a list of social initiatives where members of the group can possibly volunteer saying:

Volunteering is an excellent opportunity to exercise your civic agency and help a good cause! There are many positions and needs for many great projects so everyone can easily find something that will suit them! (post on 28 March 2019).

However, the stories that "March on, Babe!" share do not always come from Belarus, activists often draw on international experience: members have shared an article titled "Solidarity against sexual violence" about Peace Nobel Prize Winners of 2018, Nadia Murad and Denis Mukwege Mukengere; another time they published an article about an activist from Kyrgyzstan who is making feminist videos challenging traditions and gendered violence; they have shared news about the protests against gendered violence in Peru and Turkey. "March on, Babe!" members also inform their members about the success of their members and other post-Soviet countries: they have shared the news that Georgia has significantly toughen legislation against gendered violence and that decriminalisation of domestic violence in Russia has been heavily criticised both by politicians and public. All these rumbles help people stay engaged in the movement as they can see that people are able to gain justice in other parts of the world:

“[s]eeing and listening to protests somewhere else, even in distant contexts and different cultures, inspires mobilization because it triggers hope of the possibility of change” (Castells, 2012: 252).

Engagement created by “March on, Babe!” activists is premised in people’s strive for hope. All positive stories, successes and improvements are used to encourage people to push even harder and to mobilize against the authorities who have let them down. “March on, Babe!” initiative is trying to encourage people to embrace their identity as citizens who are able to participate in the political. Through accounts of their achievements and personal success stories that members share in the group, Belarusians are able to get inspired and motivated to get engaged. As Peter Dahlgren suggests for people to identify themselves as political actors they need to have experiences that are embedded in emotion (2009). Hope that they are feeling and nurturing as the initiative gains support gives them courage to struggle further.

## **6 Final Thoughts**

“March on, Babe!” movement represents an important phenomenon today. The initiative emerged out of frustration and outrage that Belarusians experienced in relation to the injustice happening in the country. It started with a clear agenda – to force the authorities to listen to people’s pleas. Yet, with time the initiative has expanded its original claims and turned into catalyst for civic engagement for the people in Belarus. The significant difference of “March on, Babe!” from such social movements as ‘Occupy Wall Street’ in the USA or ‘Indignados’ in Spain is that it is not openly political, which again can be contributed to the Belarusian context. Any open criticism of the ruling party or President would have resulted in arrests or severe punishment, yet as the analysis has revealed the movement carries strong implications for social change in the country.

### **6.1 Personal rather than political**

Domestic violence serves as an entry point as it is the topic that many people can relate to. It evokes personal response but at the same time does not necessarily entail commitment to any political agendas or ideologies that political engagement might require. Instead, the initiative is premised on emotional involvement: “March on, Babe!” movement employs anger and hope as tools to encourage people’s engagement. Belarusians joining the movement clearly share similar views and beliefs but what is more important they are emotionally connected. As my analysis has revealed, passion (Dahlgren, 2009) is a necessary trigger for people to join the group. Social media have become a space where people are able to emotionally connect (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) and share their emotions with others. This moment of connectivity is an important aspect of their further engagement with “March on, Babe!” initiative. The community that they have created online sustains participants’ initial enthusiasm as they feel supported, heard and understood. The feeling of ‘togetherness’ (Castells, 2012) enables them to overcome their reluctance and, possibly, fear to engage in political and to speak up against the system. Signing of the petition is a big step for many and even a bigger step for civil society in Belarus as it indicates significant changes taking place in the country.

## **6.2 What makes it different**

Clearly inspired by other social movements taking place in the world today, “March on, Babe!” finds its own unique way to sustain democracy in the country. What the analysis has signaled is that “March on, Babe!” does not just there to demand justice – it has evolved with time into a platform that educates Belarusians about gender equality. Knowledge is key to civic agency (Dahlgren, 2009) as it enables people to understand the logic of the system they are living in. By raising Belarusians’ awareness about domestic violence, “March on, Babe!” offers them an opportunity to reflect upon the social order in the country. Why does domestic violence happen and why is the government so reluctant to stop it?

Social media have provided a platform ‘autonomous’ (Castells, 2012) from the censorship of the state where accounts of victims can be heard and stored. Together they construct a new knowledge architecture alternative to the one enforced upon them by the state. By publishing

articles, international reports and statistics, “March on, Babe!” activists reinforcing people’s ability to think critically as they challenge existing discourse. While talking about gender equality and domestic violence, the initiative is inevitably speculating about the distribution of power in the country. As a result, access to the alternative point of view becomes a powerful tool in the hands of “March on, Babe!” activists as they are not simply raising awareness about the problem of domestic violence, they are equipping their members with information that enables them to challenge the existing social order: “Because if we think differently about some critical dimensions of our personal and social lives, the institutions will have to yield at some point” (Castells, 2012: 315).

“March on, Babe!” also gives people an opportunity to talk by providing them space where they can have access to each other. Talk is a vital element of democracy (Dahlgren, 2009) as it enhances people’s critical thinking. In closed society such as Belarus freedom of speech is limited – people are not able to discuss things openly with each other in public places. “March on, Babe!” overcomes this obstacle by taking communication to online spaces, which once again indicates the significance of digital media for the development of the movement. Social movement require

### **6.3 A beacon of hope?**

And so, from the depth of despair, everywhere, a dream and a project have surged: to reinvent democracy, to find ways for humans to manage collectively their lives according to principles that are largely shared in their minds and usually disregarded in their everyday experience (Castells, 2012: 316).

With the current political climate where democracy is under threat in many countries around the world, the emergence of new political force driven by ‘common people’ is on the rise (Castells, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2015). People disillusioned and frustrated with the authorities more and more often organise into “collective action formations in which digital media become integral organizational parts” (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012: 761). “March on, Babe!” being part of this global phenomenon represents, however, a new tendency in social movements. It

indicates that they are not exclusive to open societies where people can freely express themselves or claim public spaces. Indeed, this new form of democracy might be a vehicle of change for states with authoritarian and dictatorial regime.

“March on, Babe!” represent a new way of social movement – more subtle, less explicitly political and almost entirely premised online, which reflects the political context it was born in. It is embedded in personal engagement and emotional response to its topic that helps engage people. Yet, it is a proper piece of democracy happening within a very restricted society. What is even more important is that emergence of these small outbursts of civic agency have a great impact on society and democracy, not only in Belarus but also beyond. The fact that “March on, Babe!” movement is very active and has already collected more than 5000 signatures and organises many events in Minsk and in the regions indicates that they are making a difference. Indeed, in the light of the current fiasco in Russia with decriminalisation of domestic violence (Spring, 2018), “March on, Babe!” might be catching its very needed momentum to finally change the public opinion and force authorities to yield to their demands. And who know after this victory, there might be another, which might eventually inspire people to fight for a greater social and political changes in the country.

Of course, it is hard to predict how the world will look like in the future. However, it feels urgent in the current light of events to understand how democratic values can be nurtured and sustained. That is why it is important to study such movements as “March on, Babe!” as they reveal how civic agency can blossom even in the most restrictive circumstances.

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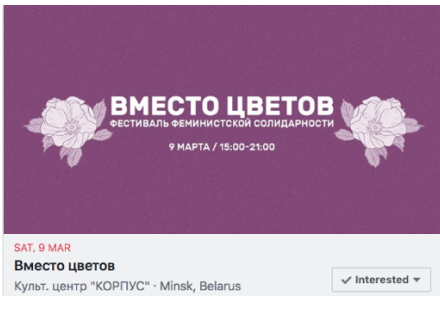
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## Appendix

### Sample of qualitative data analysis

The posts have been analysed in the original language. They are translated here to illustrate the method that have been applied to them.

Russian	English	Gen description	Category	Theme
<p>25 февраля</p> <p>9 марта <b>зовем отдыхать, знакомиться, вдохновляться, поддерживать друг друга</b> и говорить о важном на фестивале “Вместо цветов” на фестивале будем обсуждать репрезентацию. безопасное общение. справедливый труд и праздновать успехи 2018! очень всех ждём!</p> 	<p>25 February</p> <p><b>We invite everyone</b> on 9 March <b>to have fun, meet, get inspired, support each other</b> and talk about about important stuff at the festival “Instead of flowers”. we will discuss representation, healthy relationships, equal payment and will celebrate the success of 2018! You are very welcome here!</p>	<p>Invitation to join an event. Call to action</p> <p>Community, togetherness</p>		
<p>26 июня</p> <p><b>С 2016 по 2018 годы по части 1 статьи 105 УК («Убийство») были осуждены около двух с половиной тысяч россиянок.</b> В большинстве случаев жертвами стали их партнеры или близкие родственники. Правозащитники часто говорят, что осужденные за убийство женщины, как правило, <b>подвергались насилию и защищали свою жизнь.</b></p> <p>Команда «Медиазоны» исследовала все эти дела, чтобы выяснить, насколько правдива эта информация.</p>	<p>26 June</p> <p><b>Between 2016 and 2018 more than 2 000 Russian women have been sentenced for murder.</b> In the majority they killed their partners or relatives. Human rights activists claim that these women were <b>usually victims of abuse and tried to protect themselves.</b></p> <p>The team MediaZone looked into all these cases to see how true are these claims.</p>	<p>Giving information, data and facts related to domestic violences and how victims are treated.</p> <p>Underlining the injustice</p>		<p><u>Raising awareness</u></p> <p><u>Evoking anger</u></p>

<p>7 Марта</p> <p>Чего не стоит желать на 8 марта? Листайте карусель и помните, что 8 марта - это не день весны, красоты и женственности.</p> <p>Это день борьбы за права женщин, день, в который нам стоит возвращаться к женской повестке, это в первую очередь инструмент эмансипации и популяризации уважения к женщинам.</p>	<p>7 March</p> <p>Things that you shouldn't wish on 8 March?</p> <p>Scroll the postcards and remember 8 March is not the day of spring, beauty and feminity.</p> <p>It is about women fighting for their rights, about women agenda and first and foremost it's a tool of emancipation and popularization of respect towards women.</p>	<p>Educating about 8 March and the true meaning behind the day.</p>		<p><u>Knowledge creation</u></p>
<p>1 Марта</p>	<p>1 March</p> <p>On the picture: A man from Vitebskout of jealousy put his wife fire. He got a fine in the size of 735 BYN</p>	<p>Tragic news, injustice.</p> <p>Red colour as an indicator!!!!</p>		<p><u>Evoking anger</u></p>

## **List of categories**

Here is the list of the categories that have been identified during data analysis.

### **1. Using online to engage people offline**

- Promoting events that are related to the topic
- Organising meet-up and hangouts
- Organising events in public spaces – flashmobs, lectures, parties, etc.
- Encouraging to sign a petition
- Encouraging to help out other initiatives

### **2. Raising awareness**

- Sharing stories of abuse personal and from other sources
- Sharing the most recent statistics regarding the violence against women in Belarus
- Publishing facts about domestic violence in Belarus.

### **3. Expressing and fuelling anger**

- Posting sexist and inappropriate comments
- Posting accounts of injustice or sharing personal stories
- Publishing shocking statistics
- 

### **4. Giving voice to the victims and women**

- Sharing interviews with victims of abuse
- Sharing personal stories and traumas
- Stories of bystanders

### **5. Building the knowledge about feminism**

- Sharing articles, videos, reports about feminism and gender equality
- Inviting for lectures, events, performances, film screening, public discussions, etc. that can educate about gender equality

- Asking for opinion

## **6. Giving hope and encouragement**

- Sharing stories of success of similar movements or in regards to domestic violence in other countries
- Receiving recognition and endorsement as a movement
- Sharing inspirational stories about famous feminists or ideas
- Constant updates on the growth of signatures

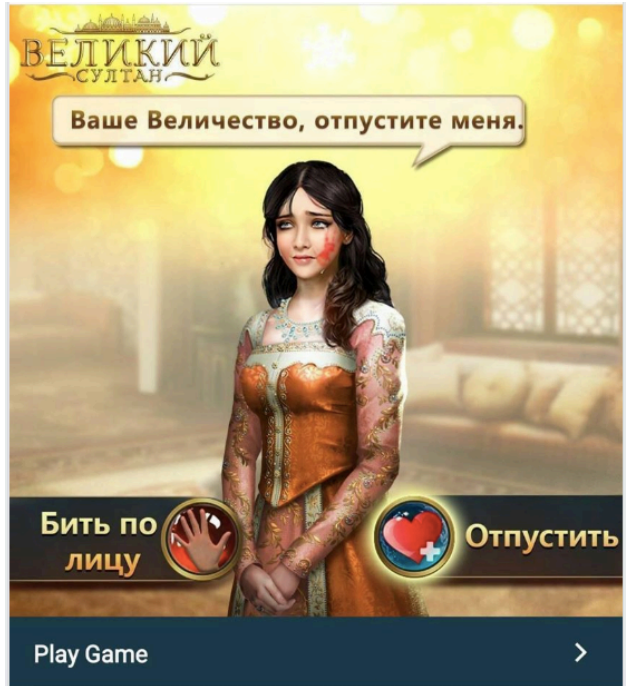
## **7. Building a supportive community**

- Asking for advice, support, understanding
- Sharing bad and good news
- Looking for help with ideas, initiatives or projects
- Suggesting hangouts and meetups
- Starting collaborations

## Image Bank

Here are the images mentioned in the analysis:

### Image #1



### Image #2





Image #3



Image #



Image # 5

