

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKING GROUP WITH REFERENCE TO PULA (PUNE LADIES GROUP)

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ABSTRACT

Empowering women means giving women means to be financially and intellectually independent in their choices and believing that a women is also equal to everyone else and that they have equal rights to decide their path in life. Empowerment is a process through which those women who were earlier denied of making any choice for them acquire such an ability. To estimate the degree of empowerment of women, the most important criteria is status of women. It is generally accepted that a change in the economic status of a women is a good indicator of empowerment. Women play an important role in all fields of development, so it is important that they should be strong socially and economically. Empowering women is a solution to many problems in our society. The present research paper topic of study of women empowerment through social networking group PULA is based on the financial independence, productivity, efficiency and overall development of women in our society. PULA is a Facebook group exclusively for women who have Pune connection i.e. born or brought up or living or lived in Pune. PULA group is one such group which does not differentiate women on the basis of their economic background. The group celebrated its 7th anniversary on July 26th 2022 and has become the largest city specific women group. PULA is a big hit among women entrepreneurs and home business owners in Pune who have found a safe place to connect with customers. The group was formed in the year 2015 with merely 300 people in the friend list of Sonia Agarwal Konjeti. The founder and admin of the group Mrs. Sonia Agarwal Konjeti had set clear guidelines for the group and allotted Wednesdays and Sundays as #PulaBazaar. This group on social media is an example of how women can set up their own business and look after themselves and their families. PULA is a flourishing platform for women entrepreneurs in Pune and thus it contributes towards women empowerment.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Social Networking, Economic Status, PULA.

Introduction

Empowering women means giving them means to be financially and intellectually independent in their choices and believing that women are also equal to everyone else and that they have equal rights to decide their path in life. Empowerment is a process through which those women who were earlier denied of making any choice for them acquire such an ability. To estimate the degree of empowerment of women, the most important criteria is status of women. It is generally accepted that a change in the economic status of women is a good indicator of empowerment. Women play an important role in all fields of development, so it is important that they should be strong socially and economically. Empowering women is a solution to many problems in our society. Women

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Empowerment is important for the overall societal development. In a country like India, it was believed that one educated woman in a family can make an entire family educated. This phrase was used merely as a phrase because in the earlier days women would spend maximum time looking after the household activities. Women were looked down upon economically as well as socially. Women would always be dependent upon men for economic support and decision making. The life of women was limited to bearing and rearing children and doing activities like cooking and cleaning. Over these many years the Government of India has taken various measures to improve women's wellbeing and status in the society. The government has tried to look after the educational, financial, medical and political requirements of women. The process of Welfare and Development in India was divided into various 5 Year plans. The 9th five year plan that started in 1997 to 2002 had opened its doors for women empowerment. It was necessary that women should also contribute to Socio - Economic Development.

Objective

To study the Relationship between Women Empowerment and Social Networking.

Definition of Women Empowerment

The word empowerment has been defined by the world bank as the process of increasing the capacity of individuals and groups to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality "Women Empowerment is a process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the ability to make strategic choices."

Definition of empowerment Keller and Mbewe – "empowerment is a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own, self-reliance to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenges and criminalizing their own subordination."

P.K.B Nayar – empowerment is an aid to help women to achieve equality with men or at least to reduce gender gap considerably.

Components of Women Empowerment

- **Economic Independence:** According to UN Women "Women's Economic Empowerment or Independence includes women's ability to contribute towards household expenses and also to take decisions of disposal of her income." According to the European Institute of Gender Equality achieving economic independence by women is a prerequisite for women empowerment. Economic independence of women increases their capacity of choices about their life. Women's economic independence increases her social importance as well. According to a study undertaken by the Australian Government women feel more secure when they are independent financially.
- **Sense of Self Worth:** Self-worth is an internal feeling where one feels that they are good enough to be loved and appreciated by others. This is one of the important components of women empowerment. Empowerment is not merely financial independence or external feeling. It is an internal feeling where women love themselves and they feel empowered. The word Self Worth is often used as a synonym for self-esteem, but these two are very different from each other. The word self-esteem is an external feeling whereby one achieves success and achieves heights and people appreciation is achieved after it. Hence for women empowerment it is important that women should feel empowered from within.
- **Making Choices:** According to Harvard Business Review "More than half of managerial and professional positions in the United States are occupied by women. " Women are indeed good decision makers. Until recently making choices may be personal or professional was a barrier for women empowerment as women were hardly considered fit enough to choose their path. But India has undergone a tremendous change in this aspect. Now women are considered as an equal where it comes to decision making and even her choices, her decisions are agreed upon. This again is an important component of Women Empowerment. When women are heard and when they can speak up without any fear it increases confidence among women and they feel empowered.

- **Ability to Influence:** Ability to influence others is not something one can get by birth. It is an ability to make others affected by your opinions and views. It needs the ability to develop strong emotional connections with yourself and with others. The people who can influence others are often those who get well connected with others' emotions and are skilled enough to make everyone understand actions and thoughts. Women in any stream are blessed with this ability due to their motherly instinct. When women are able to influence others, it gives her a feeling of empowerment.
- **Direction of Social Change:** Social Change comes when the human ideologies change, and the change also makes an impact on relations and society in general. Women today are considered as one who gives direction or paves a path for social change. There are many women who now speak up their mind and thoughts in public and act as influencers for young minds. One such influencer is Mrs. Sudha Murthy, who by her opinions and views is having a social impact. When in a society women feel equal to men and when given equal opportunities to speak it generally makes women feel empowered.

This main barrier for women empowerment was resolved due to the emergence of social networking platforms. The world now has become a huge global market, where anyone anywhere can do business sitting right at home. Social networking platforms have become one place where people come together to raise their own business and interact with people virtually where the thought exchange process has become easier. Social Networking Platforms are virtual communities where people create their own profiles and interact with many people. Social networking platforms act as one of the most important marketing tools. Women have thus found a new space for themselves on virtual platforms. Social media is not just used for financial activities but also has become a place for raising voice against any misdeed. India is a country with a population of almost 1.2 billion people and half of it belongs to women. Due to the joint efforts of the Government the status of women has improved in the society. Technology is one such boon that has affected women in their lives in a positive way. Where women can now start business virtually and reach a global customer. Social Networking is a two way sword with its benefits and challenges both coming at the same time. Indian women now have started utilizing social networking as an important marketing strategy of their business. Many young entrepreneurs have their profiles on instagram or twitter or youtube where they regularly share information about the new products or services. These entrepreneurs also happen to receive orders for their products online. In this race of Social Networking Platforms facebook has also taken active participation. Facebook has a feature of creating groups where buyers and sellers are a part of the same group. Sellers post advertisements of their products and buyers after looking at those can later on place purchase orders. There is also a huge increase in the number of female bloggers who act as influencers and have set a path for social change. Social media thus is used with due care acts as a mode for women empowerment.

According to Erik Qualman "We don't have a choice on whether we do social media, the question is how well we do it"-

Case Study

The present research topic of study of women empowerment through social networking group PULA is based on the financial independence and overall development of women in our society. Pune Municipal Corporation can be divided into various economic zones:

- Financially rich and powerful people
- IT sector employees
- Higher middle class
- Middle class
- Lower middle class
- Above and Below Poverty line

PULA is a Facebook group exclusively for women who have Pune connection i.e. born or brought up or living or lived in Pune. PULA group is one such group which does not differentiate women on the basis of their economic background. The group celebrated its 7th anniversary on July 26th 2022 and has become the largest city specific women group. PULA is a big hit among women entrepreneurs and home business owners in Pune who have found a safe place to connect with customers. The group was formed in the year 2015 with merely 300 people in the friend list of Sonia Agarwal Konjeti and now has more than 2,40,000 members as on date. The founder and admin of

the group Mrs. Sonia Agarwal Konjeti had set clear guidelines for the group and allotted Wednesdays and Sundays as #PulaBazaar. This group on social media is an example of how women can set up their own business and look after themselves and their families. PULA is a flourishing platform for women entrepreneurs in Pune. Women who own small businesses, or operate from home have found PULA immensely helpful in networking in Pune and finding new clients. Business worth crores takes place every month. Not just small items or old household things, PULA is being used to sell apartments or cars.

The founder of the Group Mrs. Sonia Agarwal Konjeti has developed the group in such a way that now it does not just look after the financial aspect of empowerment but also after the intellect aspect of it. The founder and admin team constantly works towards guiding the group in the correct path and to achieve this feat they have dedicated days for every activity.

Mondays in every week have three sections which are writers club, matrimony and Parenting. On Monday the group members who are bloggers or who like to write literature post their thoughts on the group. The group after introducing the matrimony section have received many membership proposals from young girls and their mothers. The parenting section gives guidelines and suggestions to new mothers as to how parenting can be done in an appropriate way.

Tuesdays in every week celebrate the art and creativity of women. Where women can share the art work either performed by them or drawn by them. There are members who share their dance videos, songs, rangolis and other forms of art work and the rest of the members would appreciate the art and creativity of all the artists. This indeed increases the confidence among women and they feel empowered.

Wednesdays are dedicated as Bazaar days where all sellers or entrepreneurs can advertise their products and receive orders for their products or services. The day is also dedicatedly used for second hand product selling under the hashtag Garage Sale.

Thursdays have a very different vibe to it is used for passing on knowledge by the members of the group who have knowledge about any specific topic. For example, a doctor in the group might share their knowledge about a specific vaccine or medicine or importance of hygiene in one's life. Thursday is also an inspiring day as members can share some inspiring thoughts or stories on Thursday. The social change component of women empowerment is truly practiced on this particular day.

Fridays are the review days where the customers after using the products purchased on the groups or services received from other group members can review those products and services. The customers can post both positive and negative reviews hence the sellers are more cautious about the product and service quality.

Saturdays are dedicated for non-promotional activities or swag days. The travelers in the group share their traveling experience and plans. The group has various cyclists and solo travelers. Some members are travel blog writers.

Sundays again have the same sound of Bazaar Days.

All these guidelines are given by an entire team of admins. The group also uses a hashtag help whereby members who need help in any specific area or for any reason can ask for it. It was observed that those asking help do get it from the group. In 2017 there was an uproar when many women were cheated by a fake seller who took their money and vanished. That incident was the first and last. A solution was immediately found where verification of sellers was being done. The concept of verified sellers further gained trust of members. The group founder and admin have worked a lot towards solving all the problems that the group has come across. The group founder has now introduced a PULA application as well as a website.

The founder of the group has also received various recognition awards like #MadeByHer Women Achiever Award in the year 2017. Facebook has recently adjudged the founder Mrs. Sonia Agarwal Konjeti as a Certified Community Manager. In the Year 2021 she has also received the Savitribai Phule Sanman for women empowerment through a social networking group. The group is moving towards women empowerment and instilling confidence in thousands of women who now are balancing their household activities along with their entrepreneurial feat.

Research Methodology

The study will be based on secondary data. Secondary Data consists of Books, Research Papers, Journals and Articles published earlier by various authors.

Suggestions

Women empowerment is a continuous process which should focus on all the women not depending upon their caste, religion, education or income. There are still many women who have not become a part of the group due to lack of knowledge in information technology and education. The group should now focus on the less privileged section of the society and instill confidence in them. The founder and admin team must look for the NGO's and support them so that they can publicize the activities of the group at the grassroots level.

Conclusion

Women today have started recognising their importance and are also aware of their rights and duties. It is through social media that many women despite their busy schedules can meet virtually and discuss the problems or lacunas in the society. Virtual discussions as an output have given various women a voice to raise and have boosted their confidence. The combination of social media and women empowerment is indeed new but will surely grab attention in the longer run as it gives women equal opportunities. There are many societal changes that are taking place all thanks to the social networking platforms where one can put forth their thoughts easily and have a presence of mass listeners.

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