

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Dr. Sucheta Gupta*

ABSTRACT

Over the past few years, social media has become an important tool for raising awareness and mobilizing campaigns on various issues. It allows any individual to share content and opinions to a global audience. It has proved to be an instrument for bringing women's issues in the forefront of a wider masses and compelling policy makers to step up for gender equality. Importance of social media has been acknowledged by Women's Rights Activists and it has demonstrated its potential for drawing attention to women's empowerment and women's issues. The paper is an attempt to study the role of social media in contributing to raising awareness about women's issues and women empowerment in a conservative and developing country like India based on secondary data. The paper likes to conclude that social media is contributing to women empowerment but still there is gender gap due to lack of infrastructure, illiteracy, cybercrime, cyber bullying, etc. and women are not able to fully utilize their legitimate space.

Keywords: Social Media, Gender Stereotype, Women Empowerment, Civic Participation, Cybercrime.

Introduction

New technological advancements have divided media into two parts- one is traditional media and other is contemporary media or social media. Media become social media when internet technology is combined with computers, tabs and smart phones. These two technologies have connected the whole world irrespective of time and space. Social media are a form of new information network and communication technology where interactive and interpersonal relationships are created and maintained.

Internet based all platforms are like 'online society' or we might call it 'cyber society' as it has all the features, functions and dysfunction similar to actual society. Internet provides alternative platforms for communication like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp etc, establishes online relations with known and with strangers. Sometimes it communicates actual feeling, sentiments and sometimes just time pass, exchange of knowledge, experience and ideas. Social media has become a catalyst for change.

It is changing the way information is communicated to and from people around the world. Its use is increasing day by day with high rate in all over the world. Social media has become an influential vehicle for mobilizing public attention and accountability to women's rights issues, and challenging discrimination and stereotypes against women.

Empowerment is a process of transition from the passive position in the society to a more active position of social control. This transition can explicit itself in an improvement in the actual ability to control. Since the sources of powerlessness are rooted in social processes it needs to be changed so that women can be empowered. Thus, the empowerment process aims to uplift the oppressed human resource and the social structure giving them their legitimate space in the society.

The woman who consist nearly half of the population is being denied of their basic rights and discriminated within the social reality in which she grows up and develops. The helplessness of one woman, which changes by means of her activism in collaboration with others, is a phenomenon that empowers the entire women community.

* Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Government College, Bibirani, Alwar, Rajasthan, India.

Over a time in India, the status of women has improved with respect to education, work, rights due to the efforts of social reformers and work of government. In the contemporary period, technology directly impacts women's development and has enabled their voice to reach out and be viewed globally. In a report by Google, it is stated that easy access of Internet is empowering Indian women to information and thus helping them to make more informed decisions. Furthermore, the smart phone affordability has further allowed women an easy access to Social Media.

Social Media Protest

Social media is as an important communication channel with the traditional mass media, which access up-to-date information on protests via social networks and disseminated it to mass audience through their own channels. The explosion of social media, Cyber feminism and increasing use of new technologies by women represents important opportunities to bring gender equality and women's rights issues to the attention of public, policy making and media. India is second largest user of Facebook and third largest of Twitter. These social media sites pave a way for communicating across the globe. They also play a major role in empowering women, encouraging their civic participation.

In the contemporary period, social media is the most popular among all other means of communication and information. 30 percent of World's population actively uses social media. While in India social media users are 15 percent. Usage of social media is on increase and it is estimated that such percentage will increase every year by 10 percent. For many users in India, access to the Internet is primarily for accessing internet and social media networks. Social Media has brought diverse people together for raising cause for women empowerment. Few of the cases are:

- **Delhi Rape Case**

Within days of the Delhi gang rape incident, Facebook groups like 'Delhi for Women's Safety', 'Protest', 'another girl gang raped in Delhi - Can we stop it?' were created. These groups on social media acted as an important channel for empowering women for justice and allow everyone, not only in India but also at a global level, to share their voice. This Incident got social media attention so much that Indian Government was compelled to take strict actions against the culprits and passing a more powerful law to prevent such incident in future.

- **Jaipur Rugs Foundation**

Jaipur Rugs Foundation is an organization supporting the prevalence of equality, justice and peace through social-economic development opportunities for all women. Internet and networking sites help such foundations to reach out at a global public. Earlier, such foundations often existed with a small number of the masses. Today, these are supported by people from all parts of the globe. Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, share such stories to a wider population and help garner maximum attention and help both monetary and non-monetary.

- **# ME TOO**

In October 2017, Alyssa Milano asked the women of Twitter to write '#MeToo' if they had ever been sexually harassed or assaulted. Within days, thousands of women had responded. Within weeks, it became one of the most powerful movements exposing various men from entertainment to industries and to politics.

Role of Social Media in Empowering Women

Social media acts as a strong channel to share and raise the voice of women. Whenever a voice is restricted it can be made loud through social media. Thousands of men joined hands, raise voice to help women in their protest. Social media is the latest technological tool for Empowerment of Women. Social media is empowering women with new freedom, independence and control and liberty. It helps them to try new and different things that were not possible in the actual scenario. The concept of entrepreneurship has helped women to get rid of the tag of being a burden on others economically. Social networking presents more opportunity to get to know diverse people and places.

Social Media is posing questions and answering questions that could raise and suggests solutions for every search of hers. It can really turnout to be a friend indeed that gives her both intellectual and emotional company without having to lose her identity. The use of social media will benefit women for communicating her various problems and issues and help in finding a solution for them. Social media helps women to interact with friends, followers and build connections all over the country or even the world. She may start to like, tweet, share, follow be linked to a new sort of technological empowerment and dynamism.

The study of Social Media Platform and its effect in revealing the financial success of the women entrepreneurs has been widely studied. The study of women entrepreneurs in Kancheepuram District showed that the growth of female entrepreneurs is expanding with increase in their standard of living, motivation, attitude and self confidence. It also ensures independence.

Social media has proven a strong catalyst for mobilizing public attention to women's rights, and challenging discrimination and stereotypes against women. Social media is an important source for bringing women's rights issues to the forefront of a wider public, mobilizing action on the streets of cities and encouraging policy makers to take steps for gender equality and empowerment. The blast of social media and increasing use by women of new technologies represents important opportunities to bring gender equality and women's rights issues.

Social media is becoming a women's information guide helping them in connecting others and empowering tool. Internet along with Social Media has come up as a new form of media which has expanded dramatically over the past few years in India. Number of websites focuses on women empowerment, covering different issues such as health, knowledge, lifestyle, education etc. With such important power of social media, it is possible to find any information related to women rights.

When any incident happens, social media becomes a quick platform that helps people around the world to raise their voice, show concern and sympathy. Governments are forced to take action against such incidents. Such awareness and outburst can only occur due to presence of both Internet and Social Media. Women are now getting more knowledge about their rights and powers.

Importance of Social Media

Social media is less expensive for training, recruitment, and organization than traditional methods (Papic & Noonan, 2011). Studies have revealed that people who are active online are likely to be active in group activities such as creating an online group for any cause, sharing their voices. It enables individuals to share their views with friends, to see that even others share their viewpoint, and to mobilize protests on social issues.

According to a report by the OECD Development Centre, hashtag activism has helped to bring in limelight women's issues to the political leaders. Through increased use of successful hashtags such as #Bring Back Our Girls and #He For She has brought large audiences online, it also received the attention of decision makers.

Social Media helps grass-roots movements to call for women equality and rights. Social Media is an important tool that tackles the possibility of raising awareness about women rights issues such as violence and harassment against women. There are large number of women out here with ailment from family, society fighting for life, rights and living. Each and every woman doesn't always get solutions easily. At least social media could put some light on their problems which can lead to the solutions.

Conclusion

The use of social media by women brings along great opportunities for gender equality and rights. However, it is a big question that up to which extent social media can actually move forward these issues in terms of influencing policies and decision-making processes.

Women who are being deprived of basic human rights and life chances are becoming empowered due to social media. They can reach various helpline through the initiative of social media groups and members and connect with people. We need more action oriented programmed and policies which inculcate in understanding the various technicalities and prospects of media keeping into consideration women's empowerment. Various studies of popular media throw light on empowering and debilitating influence of media.

Social media helps for women's empowerment and protest against discrimination, harassment, derogatory and indecent portrayal of women. Men and women can implement gender sensitive strategies within the system and effective use of the social media by activists outside the system can generate awareness for social transformation favorable to empowerment of women. Likewise, social media and other positive approaches need to harness to bridge the age old gender divide issues in India to achieve the rightful share of women and their empowerments in most optimal way.

The paper conclude that though social media is causative to women empowerment but there is gender gap due to lack of awareness, illiteracy, cybercrime, cyber bullying etc. and women are not able to have their legitimate space in the society. Many women do not have access to these information technologies due to social, economical and political reasons.

So, there is need to train women to make greater use of information technology for communication and the media and ensuring equal access to use of new technologies is critical for maximizing social media's advocacy role for women empowerment. The same will be necessary for Social Media to be an effective instrument in decision-making it has to be combined with education and outreach to women in rural areas as well, raising their issues, making the voices heard and lending them a real space to promote empowerment.

References

- Amar DM, Balasaheb NT, Pratapsingh PB. (2010). Gender Sensitization: The Bias and Women Victimization in India. Earth Exploration.
- Baruah, Trisha Dowerah. (2012). 'Effectiveness of Social Media as a tool of communication and its potential for technology enabled connections: A micro-level study'. "International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications". Vol.2 (5). pp: 1-9
- Hoffamn, Auren (2008), 'Women and Social Media'. "Business week online". p 2
- Jacka, T.Mike., and Scott, R.Peter. (2011). 'Auditing social media: A Governance and Risk Guide'. : New Jersey ,John Wiley and Sons', Inc. Hoboken
- Joseph, Ammu and Sharma, Kalpana (2006), 'Whose news? The media and women's issues', New Delhi, Sage publications
- Joshi, SC (2004) 'Women empowerment: Myth and Reality' (2004), New Delhi, Akansha publishing House
- Langman, L. (2005). From virtual public spheres to global justice: A critical theory of interworked social movements. *Sociological Theory*, 23(1), 42–74.
- Livingstone, Sonia and Brake, David R. (2010) On the rapid rise of social networking sites: new findings and policy implications. *Children & society*, pp. 75-83.
- Online information from the website: <https://eprawisdom.com/hits?id=176>
- Online information from the website: <https://eprawisdom.com/hits?id=1761>.
- Online information from the website: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/role-social-media-womens-empowerment-julia-tatai>
- Online information from the website: <https://www.redalkemi.com/>
- Victory J (2011) The New Media and The Global Women's Empowerment Movement. World Pulse.

