



# ANALYSING DIGITAL FEMINISM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE INDIAN YOUTH

<sup>1</sup>Anupama Anil Kumar, <sup>2</sup>Farooq Ahmed Shariff M

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, <sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor

<sup>1</sup>Department of Media Studies,

<sup>1</sup>Jain (Deemed-to-be-University), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

**Abstract:** With the introduction and heavy consumption of the internet and social networking sites, “Digital Feminism” has gained popularity in the 21st century. The idea of online feminism exists as a space where people from around the globe can easily share their ideologies and shed light on feminist issues at a faster pace. The online realm of social media platforms is not just for posting personal updates and photos but also as an effective medium to share and listen to ideas, views, opinions, and even news. The #metoo movement would not have gained as much attention and support without the help of social media. The popularity of such online campaigns gave rise to the birth of many online forums, groups, blogs, pages, and profiles that support and propagate the ideologies of contemporary feminism. For instance, on Instagram, many public profiles are specifically creating and curating creative content based on real-life issues and incidents to promote feminist views to the users or followers of those profiles, mostly youth. Despite the slow process of change resulting from the creation and consumption of feminist content, a good amount of learning and unlearning is happening even among the youth of India. This study was conducted with a genuine approach to examine the impact created among Indian youth by the feminist content creators/influencers of Instagram and also to explore the motives or reasons for such content creators/influencers to create content related to feminism. The theoretical framework of this study is based on the Mass Self-Communication theory by Manuel Castells and Uses and Gratifications theory by Katz & Blumler. Two sets of survey questionnaires were prepared. Survey Questionnaire Set-1 was used to study and examine the impact created among the Indian youth by the feminist content creators/influencers of Instagram, and for this survey, 264 respondents between the age group of 15-35 years took part in the study. While Survey Questionnaire Set-2 was used to study and examine the motives or reasons for Instagram content creators/influencers to create content related to feminism, and for this survey, 11 Instagram content creators/influencers between the age group of 15-35 years took part in the study.

**IndexTerms – Feminism, Digital Feminism, Activism, Instagram**

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the introduction and heavy consumption of the internet and social networking sites, “Digital Feminism” has gained popularity in the 21st century. The idea of online feminism exists as a space where people from around the globe can easily share their ideologies and shed light on feminist issues at a faster pace. The online realm of social media platforms is not just for posting personal updates and photos but also as an effective medium to share and listen to ideas, views, opinions, and even news. The #metoo movement would not have gained as much attention and support without the help of social media.

The popularity of such online campaigns gave rise to the birth of many online forums, groups, blogs, pages, and profiles that support and propagate the ideologies of contemporary feminism. For instance, on Instagram, many public profiles are specifically creating and curating creative content based on real-life issues and incidents to promote feminist views to the users or followers of those profiles, mostly youth. Despite the slow process of change resulting from the creation and consumption of feminist content, a good amount of learning and unlearning is happening even among the youth of India.

According to Merriam Webster, feminism is “a belief in and advocacy of political, economic, and social equality of the sexes that is expressed particularly through organized activities on behalf of women's rights and interests”. However, in today's time, feminists preach and believe that “If you believe in equality, then you are a feminist”, making the word feminism synonymous with equality.

It would not do justice if we look into the feminist activism that is prevalent today in the 21st century without mentioning how it all began in the first place. Scholars believe that the women's movement in the United States occurred in “waves” that were spread across different periods.

The first wave of feminism began in the mid-1800s when women demanded the right to vote. A landmark event linked to the first wave occurred in 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention, where around 300 women and men established a “Declaration of Sentiments” and 12 resolutions. The Declaration of Sentiments emphasized the need for reform in marriage, divorce, property, and child custody laws. Between 1870 and 1928, the first wave of feminism was at its peak. During this period, there was intense activity toward achieving the right to vote for women and making educational and social reforms. (Schram & Tibbetts, 2013)

During the second wave of the feminist movement, in the 1960s and 1970s, the primary focus was on issues of gender equality and discrimination. This wave of feminists, which included all marginalized groups, argued that in order to achieve completely

liberate women, they needed equal access to economic opportunities, sexual and civil liberties. Several women advocated for a reformist, liberal agenda, while others advocated a more revolutionary, radical program of change. The liberal political perspective was influenced by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned racial discrimination as well as sex discrimination. The radical political perspective was influenced by both the civil rights and student movements of the 1960s.

As a response to the shortcomings of the second wave, the third wave of feminism emerged during the late 1980s and 1990s. Most of the women who participated in the third wave were women who had previously had difficulty identifying with the previous perspectives, particularly women of color. Third-wave feminism addressed race and gender and emerged from the sex-positive discussions of the previous wave by emphasizing feminist values that were left out of earlier waves and recognizing oppression's intersectionality. It should also be noted that the third wave of feminism was largely concerned with gaining reproductive rights for women. Feminist groups argued that women should be able to make their own choices about their bodies and stated that abortion and birth control were fundamental rights. The third wave also distinguished itself from the first and second waves by spreading into pop culture and media as well as emphasizing the voices of young people.

But is there a fourth wave of feminism? When did it begin, what is its purpose, and how is it carried out? It is believed that the fourth wave of feminism began around 2012 and is characterized by empowering women through technologies like the Internet and making the movement intersectional (Fourth-wave feminism, 2021). By shedding light on issues like sexual harassment, body shaming, and rape culture, among others, the fourth wave highlights and addresses concerns related to gender norms and the marginalization of women. Most feminists of the fourth wave are known for using social media to propagate feminist views and ideologies to the rest of the world. Feminists of today try to address issues of gender norms and the marginalization of women due to the deep-rooted patriarchy by writing and creating social media posts based on daily and real-life incidents, in the form of memes, videos, writings, etc., with a hope to change the perspective of those who assume feminism as a form of activism that is violent and which implies women hating men.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

“Analysing Digital Feminism and Its Impact on the Indian Youth”

## III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is the impact created among the Indian youth by the feminist content creators on Instagram?

What are the motives or reasons for content creators on Instagram to create content related to feminism?

## IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

With the introduction and heavy consumption of the internet and social networking sites, “Digital Feminism” has gained popularity in the 21st century. The idea of online feminism exists as a space where people from around the globe can easily share their ideologies and shed light on feminist issues at a faster pace.

In the current context, this study is relevant as it attempts to explore the motives of feminist content creators on Instagram from India and subsequently analyze whether their efforts on social media have a positive or negative impact on the youth in India.

## V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is one of the most important steps in the research process. In research methodology, we use certain techniques and procedures to identify, select, process and analyze the data collected pertaining to the study. In this chapter, the accuracy and reliability of the research will be determined. The research methodology used for this particular study is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

### 5.1 Population and Sample

Survey Questionnaire- 1: For the mixed approach of quantitative and qualitative, an online survey was created with the help of Google Forms. The questionnaire had 19 questions comprising of 17 close-ended and 2 open-ended questions. A total of 264 responses were recorded as samples for the study. The sampling method used in the study is simple random sampling. The researcher has decided to select all the 264 responses that were recorded after exercising due diligence. The sample of respondents was between the age group of 15-35 years because as of July 2021, around 32 percent of global Instagram audiences were ages between 25 and 34 years and over two thirds of total Instagram audiences were ages 34 years and younger (Statista Research Department, 2021). Also as per the rules of Instagram, a minimum age of 13 is required to be able to use the application (Instagram, 2021). Hence, the age group of 15-35 years was chosen for this study.

Survey Questionnaire- 2: For the mixed approach of quantitative and qualitative, an online survey was created with the help of Google Forms. The questionnaire had 18 questions comprising of 12 close-ended and 6 open-ended questions. A total of 11 participants were taken for the study. The selected respondents for the study are Indian feminist content creators who post frequently on issues related gender inequality, gender roles and creates awareness on feminism through their content. The sample of respondents was between the age group of 15-35 years because as of July 2021, around 32 percent of global Instagram audiences were ages between 25 and 34 years and over two thirds of total Instagram audiences were ages 34 years and younger (Statista Research Department, 2021). Also as per the rules of Instagram, a minimum age of 13 is required to be able to use the application (Instagram, 2021). Hence, the age group of 15-35 years was chosen for this study.

### 5.2 Data and Sources of Data

Primary data: The data that has been gathered from the questionnaire that was distributed as Google forms, the responses received and findings based on that will be considered as the primary data of this study.

Secondary data: Every other kind of data that has been collected to complete this research like the research papers and articles referred from online sources like Google Scholar, Academia, Research Gate etc., will be treated as secondary data of this study.

### 5.3 Theoretical framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory: This theory, developed by Katz & Blumler (1970), attempts to explain the relationship between audiences and how these audiences utilize media. The reasons individuals utilize media vary depending on their circumstances. The researchers identified five basic needs that drive people to seek gratification from media:

- a) Cognitive needs: Media has been used by people to acquire information to enhance their skills and knowledge.
- b) Affective needs: Media is used to awaken certain emotions or feelings within people.
- c) Personal integrative needs: Media is used to enhance a person's credibility or social status or to affirm their self-worth.
- d) Social integrative needs: Media allows people to connect with their family, friends, co-workers, etc.
- e) Tension release: Media is often used as a coping mechanism to alleviate stress or divert attention from real-life.

Mass self-communication: As defined by Manuel Castells, mass self-communication in a networked society is a new form of communication that is distinct both from interpersonal and mass communication, capable of reaching a worldwide audience, where "the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, [and] the retrieval of specific messages (or content) is self-selected", (Castells, 2009). "Mass self-communication is the use of digital media where users can create their content via chosen software or sites and to potentially reach a global audience. The cumulative effect of these actions by many communications creates an undirected, emergent phenomenon in which a society effectively communicates with itself through the collective actions of its many communicators", (Cooley, Aysha. Cooley, Skye. Kitsch, Sara & Hinck, Robert, 2021)

## VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Major findings from survey questionnaire set-1

- Most of the respondents (45.1%) were between the age group of 21-25 years, which was around 119 respondents.
- 54.5% of the respondents i.e., 144 of them were women.
- Out of the 264 respondents who took part in the survey 161 of them i.e., 61% of them were students.
- 54.2% of the respondents said that they always use social media and that around 49.2% of them also said that the time spend by them on social media on an average everyday was between 3-6 hours.
- 83.7% of the respondents chose Instagram as their most preferred social media application.
- 81.8% of the respondents said that they either see or read feminist content or posts everyday on the social media platform that they use the most and around 96.2 % of them also agreed that they do follow the profiles of content creators/ influencers who create and share feminist content on the social media application that they use the most.
- Around 48.5% of the respondents i.e., 128 of them admitted that they learned or heard about feminism for the first time through social media.
- When an open-ended question was asked to the respondents to share their idea and understanding of the term feminism, majority of them wrote that following feminism is way to attain gender equality and it is an ideology that aims to achieve social, political, economic and sexual liberation and equality of all people irrespective of the gender or sex they belong to. They said that anyone who follows the feminist ideologies is called a feminist. It has to be noted that most of them also said that feminism is a need of the hour for a progressive society and that it is a fight against the evils of a patriarchal society.
- Majority of the respondents (93.9%) have a general opinion that feminism is good but at the same time around 52.3% of them also says that feminism has both good and bad reputation among people.
- Around 78% of the respondents has a good opinion about the #metoo movement.
- 93.2% of the respondents think that social media is a good platform to create awareness about feminism and around 85.6% of them have a general opinion that feminism can bring a positive change to our society using social media as a channel for it.
- It was observed that around 51.9% of the respondents agrees that feminist content creators/ influencers on social media accurately shows the gender inequality that is seen an experienced in our daily lives through their contents related to feminism.
- 62.9% of the respondents strongly agrees that social media is an effective platform for feminists to highlight issues related to patriarchy.
- 59.1% of the respondents strongly agrees that social media is an effective platform for feminists to question the cultural and religious norms that creates gender inequality.
- Around 62.9% of the respondents strongly agrees that social media is an effective platform for feminists to highlight issues related to gender roles in our society.
- It was observed that only 37.5% of the respondents strongly disagrees that feminist content creators/ influencers on social media creates an impression that they either hate men or are against men.
- 36.7% of the respondents disagrees that feminists on social media focus only on issues relating to women while 37.1% of them also disagrees that feminists on social media fail to address the issues concerning men.
- From the data gathered it was seen that 55.7% of the respondents strongly disagrees to the statement that they often change their mind on feminism when some conflicts happen on social media.
- 58.3% of the respondents strongly agrees that they learned more about feminism since they started watching and reading relevant content/ posts on social media and around 51.9% of them also strongly agrees that feminist content creators/ influencers on social media have made them realise about the severity on issues related to gender inequality.

- 65.2% of the respondents strongly agrees that they would like to see and read posts/ content related to feminism on social media.
- When an open-ended question was asked to respondents to share the impact or change created in their lives because of feminism many of them responded by saying that feminism made them realise their rights and the severity on issues relating to gender inequality, gender roles and the issues raised by feminism. They also said that by knowing more about feminism it made them realise their mistakes and unlearn and learn a lot of regressive thoughts and habits which was passed onto them because of patriarchy. In short, it was observed that feminism had a positive impact on the respondents.

### 6.2 Major findings from survey questionnaire set-2

- As part of the study that was conducted using the survey questionnaire set-2, eleven feminist Instagram content creators/ influencers took part in the research process and their age distribution were the following; 6 of them between the age group of 21-25 years, 4 from 26-30 years and 1 between the age group of 15-20 years.
- Out of the 11 respondents, 7 are men, 3 of them are women and 1 preferred not to disclose their gender and their current status is the following; 6 of them are employees, 4 of them students and 1 is either a freelancer or self-employed.
- It was observed that Instagram is the preferred social media application of 5 feminist Instagram content creators/ influencers while 4 of them preferred WhatsApp and 2 of them Twitter.
- From the data collected it was observed that five of the respondents spend mostly on an average everyday 3-6 hours on social media whereas four of them spends around 1-3 hours and 2 of them 6-9 hours.
- When a check box question was asked to the respondents to choose and mention the various social media applications that they use to publicly post the content created by them other than on Instagram. It was found that out of the 11 content creators/ influencers 5 of them had YouTube channels of their own, 4 and 2 of them post and share their content on Facebook and Twitter respectively, and 2 of them mentioned that they do not publicly post their content on any other social media platforms.
- It was found that 10 of the respondents first learned or heard about feminism through social media and 1 stated that they got to know of it first from college.
- When an open-ended question was asked to the content creators/ influencers to share their idea and understanding of the term feminism, their responses were that feminism is the only way to achieve gender equality in our society and an ideology that aims for uplifting women and other socially oppressed communities.
- It was observed that 5 out of 11 feminist Instagram content creators/ influencers said that their audience often misunderstands the idea of feminism when they create and share posts relating to it.
- It was seen from the data collected that 6 out of 11 respondents said that they often get positive responses from their audience for the contents they post that are either directly or indirectly related to feminism. However, 6 of them also said that they often get negative responses as well from their audience for the contents they post that are either directly or indirectly related to feminism.
- 9 of the feminist Instagram content creators/ influencers said yes to the statement that there is a positive change happening among the youth because of the awareness created on social media about feminism and the issues raised by feminism.

### 6.3 Discussion

It was interesting to find from the study that most of the respondents (from both sets of the survey) learned or heard about feminism for the first time from social media platforms. A possible reason for this could be that lately a lot of people use social media to express their views and opinions on issues like gender inequality and the problems of gender roles. Some women even share their experiences of abuse or rape by calling out their abusers on public platforms. While others also share the discrimination they face for being a woman and the unfair advantage and freedom that men have simply because we still live in a male-dominated or male-centric society. Whenever such issues are addressed on social media platforms for instance Instagram, it is always linked to feminism, thereby creating a form of awareness on the issues that feminism aims to talk about and fight for.

Due to the large amount of feminist content that is being shared on social media platforms every day in the form of videos, written posts and memes, the youth of India who are most active on Instagram (since the study is limited to the youth of India active on Instagram) have their definitions and understanding of the term feminism (according to the responses received from the surveys). Although they have their definitions for feminism a similarity among the responses was that all of them believe that feminism is a way to achieve gender equality and being a feminist means to respect every individual irrespective of their sexual orientation and gender identity. However, it has to be noted that many respondents also admitted that though social media has been successful in creating awareness about feminism, in general, a group of people do have a negative impression about the whole idea of feminism and how feminists address various issues on social media platforms. The group of people who are against the feminist ideology assume that being a feminist implies only those women who are always angry and hate men. A possible reason for this misunderstanding could be because of those people who share biased or wrong ideas or views and opinions on social media platforms about feminism.

Along with trying to understand the impact created among the Indian youth by the feminist content creators/influencers of Instagram, this paper also tried to examine the motives or reasons for Instagram content creators/influencers to create content related to feminism using the Uses and Gratifications theory, developed by Katz & Blumler in 1970. A major reason for all the eleven content creators/influencers who took part in the study to create feminist content or on issues like gender inequality, gender roles, etc., was because of the injustice and unfair treatment women and other minorities see and experience daily due to the deep-rooted patriarchy.

It was sad to know that nine out of eleven Instagram content creators/influencers experienced cyberbullying because of the content they post and share that is related to feminism. But they also say that they often get a positive response as well from their audience for the content they post that is either directly or indirectly related to feminism.

So we can conclude from the findings that though social media platforms like Instagram are creating a positive impact among the youth of India in making them aware of feminism, a group of people will continue to show their resistance towards accepting the feminist ideology because of the beliefs and values that have been instilled in them since childhood by family members and society. Maybe with time, more people will be on-board with the concept of feminism but even then there would still be people who will be against this ideology because of the bias that has been created in their minds due to the values and beliefs that were instilled in them while they were growing up.

## VII. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In honor of all those who have contributed to the presentation of this research I want to express my sincere thanks. I am grateful to Dr Bhargavi D. Hemmige, Head of the Department, and all the professors at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Jain University-Center for Management Studies, Bangalore. Lastly, I would like to thank my research guide Prof. Farooq Ahmed Shariff M and my research subject mentor Dr. Yadunandan S R, without whose guidance this study would not have been possible.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Schram, Pamela J. & Tibbetts, Stephen G. (2013) "Chapter 11: Feminist Theories of Crime." Introduction to Criminology, 3rd edition, pp 285-287.
- [2] Burkett, E. & Brunell, Laura. (2021). feminism. Encyclopedia Britannica.  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism>
- [3] Fourth-wave feminism (2021)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth-wave\\_feminism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth-wave_feminism)
- [4] Boling, Kelli S. (2019) "#ShePersisted, Mitch: A Memetic Critical Discourse Analysis on an Attempted Instagram Feminist Revolution"  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1620821>
- [5] Heijden, Vander Jip. (2020) "Period Warriors on Instagram"  
<http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/398032>
- [6] Brimacombe, Tait. Kant, Romitesh. Finau, Glenn. Tarai, Jope., & Titifanue, Jason. (2018) "A New Frontier in Digital Activism: An Exploration of Digital Feminism in Fiji"  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.253>

