

Impact of Social Media on Women Empowerment

Neeraj Kumar Rai

Assistant Professor

Govt.Girls Degree College, Dhindhui, Patti, Pratapgarh

ABSTRACT: Empowerment is a construct that links individual strengths, competencies, natural helping systems and proactive behavior to social policy and social change. Empowerment theory and research link individual well-being with the larger social and political environment. Empowerment suggests that individual with others to achieve goals, efforts to gain access to resources and some critical understanding of the sociopolitical environment as basic components of the construct. Empowering women is a central issue in contemporary society especially in society where society is controlled and governed by social media. This research paper is based on secondary sources.

KEY WORD: Social Media, Empowerment, Cyber feminism, E-Commerce

Social media through its ever updating apps and networking is an inevitable source of influence on mass. The media at large has been instrumental though not to the degree desired in supporting the movement for women emancipation by focusing on the neglect and marginalization of the position of the women in society. Communication is extremely important for women's development and mass media play significant role. It is to be distinguished that growth of women's education and their entry into this business through employment has contributed to the growth of media.

Women and their contribution to the society have always been overshadowed by the news of their hardships and atrocities inflicted upon them. It is indispensable that the print and electronic media present a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world. As media has huge influence on people, it should act with more responsibility before reporting and publishing any news. Portrayal of women which is derogatory to their image by media is an evidence of lack of gender sensitivity and has called for making them accountable for such representation of women. Such instances had led the National Commission for Women to recommend amendment in the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition Act), 1986. The government in a move to strengthen the legal machinery protecting the dignity of women, approved amendments to the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 in 2012. The aim was to include new technologies like MMS and the electronic media and some which were left outside the ambit of the Act like posters and TV serials which perpetuate stereotypes of women. Promoting a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media is very important to use it in a progressive way and avoiding the ill effects of any such medium of Media. Women's knowledge about media and access to and control over the various forms of conventional and modern media is still limited in most societies.

The increase in the participation and access of women to self-expression and decision-making through the media and new technologies of communication is in a way empowering women. The powerful and positive role that the media can play in the empowerment of women and gender equality should be supported and further explored. Over the past decade, the media landscape has dramatically changed with social media outlets such as blogs, online discussion forums, and online communities now supplementing traditional media outlets such as newspapers, magazines, and television programs. Social media are new information network and information technology using a form of communication utilizing interactive and user-produced content, and interpersonal relationships are created and maintained. Social media is becoming an agent of 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

proven potential for mobilizing attention and Accountability to women's rights, and challenging discrimination and stereotypes. It has proved to be a powerful vehicle for bringing women's rights issues to the attention of a wider public, galvanizing action on the streets of cities around the world and encouraging policy makers to step up commitments to gender equality. The explosion of social media, Cyber feminism and unprecedented use by women of new technologies represents important opportunities to bring gender equality and women's rights issues to the forefront of both policy making and media attention. India ranks second in usage of Facebook and third in Twitter. These social networking sites not only pave a way for communicating across the globe but they have played a major role in empowering women, encouraging the civic participation among women in Western, Middle East and Asian countries. In the contemporary period, social media is the most popular among all other means of communication and information. 30 percent of World's population is active social media users whereas in India the active social media users are 15 percent of the population which is a sizeable proportion. Usage of social media is on increase and it is estimated that such percentage will increase every year by 10 percent. Moreover, 60 percent of social media users are youth who are prone to cyber crimes and problems. For many connected users in India, access to the Internet is primarily for accessing social media networks. The most popular activities on social media include maintaining one's own virtual profile on the likes of Facebook and Twitter, posting and sharing an update as well as replying to something a friend has posted.

Connecting the individual and the collective in a way which is not organic-biological or systemic-mechanical is the great challenge of Sociology in recent years. An empowerment theory requires a convincing integration of the micro and macro levels in order to make clear the interrelations among individual, community, and professional empowerment. The concept social individuality makes the feminist dialectics explicit. The woman is an individual within the social reality in which she grows up and develops with the contradictions between her and society. The powerlessness of one woman, which changes by means of her activism in collaboration with others in her situation, is a process that empowers the entire community of women. In India, 1.2 billion people live today with around 50% of women population. The status of women has improved over a time with respect to education, work, rights due to the efforts of social reformers and work of government. Since independence, women in India have occupied high offices, including the positions of The President, Prime Minister, Speaker of Lok Sabha, Top Management Positions, etc. India as a nation is moving forward with great success, and can't afford to ignore women empowerment. In the contemporary period, technology directly impacts women's development and has enabled their voice to reach out and be viewed globally. In a recent report published by Google, it is clear that Internet is empowering Indian women with easy access to information and helping them to make more informed decisions in their day-to-day life. According to a report released in June 2013, titled "Women and Web Study", out of total 150 million Internet users in India, more than 60 million women use Internet to manage their day to day life. Furthermore, the smart phone affordability has further allowed women an easy access to Internet and Social Media. In sociological context, if we try to understand the social media, then what is important for a sociologist is edition of the 'social' term with media. New technological advancements have divided media into two parts; one is which now we call traditional /mass media and other is contemporary media that is social/ new media. Both types of media are present in contemporary society; both are social in nature as both are produced by the society, circulate information or knowledge about the society, to the people of society. Having said that, contemporary media or it can be said 'new media' is more social in nature than the traditional media. Simply it is because of monologues nature of traditional media and dialogues nature of social media.

Social media is emerging as an alternative media as a platform to share and raise the voice of women when their voice is restricted. People are joining Cyber hands to help women and share their voices in each and every protest. The subject of empowering women is now being linked to social media as it is emerging as a powerful tool for awareness and action. Empowerment of women is necessary for a bright future of the women, family, society and country so as to make them take their own decisions for personal growth. For a long time voice of women is restricted and it can be made loud by way of social media. Social media is the latest technological tool for Economic Empowerment of Women. The concept of entrepreneurship has helped women to get rid of the tag of being a burden on others economically. Online presence in social media is providing women with new freedom, independence and control, liberty, and

empowerment like never before. It helps them to try things that were impossible in the real scenario. Social networking offers more of an opportunity to network and get to know people and places. Women can no more be lost. Nor does she have to depend on others to carry out her requirements. 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 more women use social media, the more she will benefit from it as well. Social media helps women to master with friends, followers and 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.

Social media is comparatively less expensive and easy for training, recruitment, and organization than traditional methods. Various studies have shown 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 them with friends, to see how many others share their perspective and to coordinate activity and get the word out about protests, social issues. After the infamous 16th December Delhi gang rape incident, within two days Facebook group “Delhi for Women’s Safety’ was created which received 1.75 lakh likes and many other such groups were created. Such groups on social media attracted public attention and created platform both for women justice and women empowerment at global level. Social Media has become so powerful today that in the face of such incidents social media becomes the voice of people. Everyone starts sharing, tweeting, #hashtaging their views, rage and demand for justice on social media; in order to do so they often even change their profile pictures with campaign picture to show their absolute support, as in the Delhi Gang Rape case, a simple black dot with a white background was seen as a profile picture throughout social media and also on Whatsapp. This Incident got so much social media attention, that Government of India was forced to take strict actions against the culprits, passing a more powerful law to prevent such incident in future. Social media has proven potential for mobilizing attention and accountability to women’s rights, and challenging discrimination and stereotypes. Social media has proved to be a powerful vehicle for bringing women’s rights issues to the attention of a wider public, galvanizing action on the streets of cities around the world and encouraging policy makers to step up commitments to gender equality. The explosion of social media and unprecedented use by women of new technologies represents important opportunities to bring gender equality and women’s rights issues to the forefront of both policy making and media attention. Celestine Lugaye Ukpere and Andre D. Slabbert found that Social Media has taken over the dwindling circulation of traditional media such as television, radio, newspapers and magazines. The practice of surfing the web 2.0 to obtain real time information instantly, has led to the rise of an ever more connected infrastructure atmosphere globally. E commerce is flourishing with the help of digital marketing. The study of Social Media Platforms and their impact in unlocking the financial success of the women entrepreneurs globally has been widely observed and quite vital to the new generation of gender based ventures that are digitally driven through the use of technology. This is leading to a new revolution of women job seekers becoming job creators and curators. Uma Rani and Sripriya (2013) stated that Entrepreneurship has changed the way of commerce by adding creativity. Social Media plays the significant role in creating such opportunities. The study of women entrepreneurs in Kancheepuram District showed that the growth of female owned businesses is growing along with increase in their standard of living, motivation, attitude and self-confidence, and ensures independence - a liberty of new form. Social media is becoming a women’s info guide and empowering tool. Internet along with Social Media has come up as a new form of media which has expanded dramatically over the past decade in India. There are websites that focus on women empowerment, covering diverse spheres such as health, knowledge, lifestyle, education and more. With such power of Social Media, today it is easily possible to find any information related to women empowerment. When any incident happens, social media becomes a faster media that helps people from round the world to participate and show their concern and sympathy towards such incidents. Governments across the world had to take action against such incidents when everywhere people condemned such happenings. Awareness and outburst such as this could only occur with the existence of both Internet and Social Media. Women are now also getting more knowledge about their rights and powers that every woman in a society holds, with equal rights as men in every respect. All these positive changes are now triggered to only increase their pace with time due to Internet and Social Media. However, cybercrime is creating hurdles in women empowerment and they are not able to fully utilize the benefits of IT revolution.

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 alternative media groups and members and connect with people. There is no doubt that the developmental facts of women have always been the prime focus of planning since independence and a clear vision is needed to remove the obstacles on the path of women emancipation from the government and women themselves. The various challenges posed by the new era have forced us to provide a concrete and developmental aspects alternatives in lieu of empowerment of women through the possible available media. 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 a must need of the society. Various studies of popular media throw light on empowering and debilitating influence of media. Generation of alternate media for women's empowerment and protest against derogatory and indecent portrayal of women in media must go on simultaneously.

Committed and gender sensitive men and women can implement gender sensitive strategies within the system and effective use of the media by activists outside the system can generate awareness and non scientist masses for social transformation favourable to empowerment of women. Likewise, alternative 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.

Conclusion: Social media is contributing to women empowerment but there is virtual gender gap due to lack of literacy, cybercrime, cyberbullying, etc. and women are not able to fully utilize the new space. The paper recommends that there is need to train women to make greater use of information technology for communication and the media and ensuring equal access to and use of new technologies is critical for maximizing social media's advocacy role for women empowerment. Gender sensitization has always remain a vital issue in India, where patriarchal society still exists. Women are always subject to risks whenever they want to move out in society freely.

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