

Social Media & Women: A Twist in the Tale

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ABSTRACT: One is born as a free human being but it is the society which discriminates between a boy and a girl. Women are treated as the second sex (inferior sex), which second to the first i.e. men. The paradox is that the patriarchal society has justified it in a way that even women have internalized that this gender discrimination is right & natural hence it should not be termed as ‘discrimination’. This is a global phenomena men's world stand united to assert their dominance over the half of the world’s population and has subjected them to objectification & dominance men. Net access of women is looked upon as inferior and it said that women indulge only in futile stuff such fashion, shopping, cross commenting remarked as typical women stuff; some schools of thought even say that the social media is further objectifying women by reinforcing the importance of beauty and pressure to be trendy and always seeking attention of others through social media. The positive outcome is that social media has given a platform for women to communicate without any gender discrimination and may also voice their own issues; without the same being filtered through any agent of patriarchal society whether male or female.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, equality, objectification, patriarchy, stereotyping, social media, ideology, culture, new media, valve, pent

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I. INTRODUCTION

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” - The Second Sex –Simone de Beauvoir (1949) One is born as a free human being but it is the society which discriminates between a boy and a girl. Right from the birth society start associating typical essential qualities, i.e. stereotypes with males & females. Blue for boy & pink for girls; kitchen set & dolls for girls & he-man & bat or football for boys; the gender politics set-off right from the innocence of infants & gets denser & denser with the age. Women are treated as the second sex (inferior sex), which second to the first i.e. men. The paradox is that the patriarchal society has justified it in a way that even women have internalized that this gender discrimination is right & natural hence it should not be termed as ‘discrimination’. This is a global phenomena men's world stand united to assert their dominance over the half of the world’s population and has subjected them to objectification & dominance men.

Ever since antiquity, there have been women fighting to free themselves from male oppression. Women always have been considered inferior and incapable of any serious thinking, all thanks to patriarchal societal norms. More or less the same perception and sex stereotyping is seen in all societies, from elite classes to the grass root level.

Women have been under the dominance of their equal (ironically always dominated hence always been unequal) counterparts men since ancient times. As Karl Marx observed that ever since human beings started living in the settlements they did chores and men got to go out to gather food & firewood. This division of labour was not based on any logical or biological attributes rather it was a mere random allocation of work on the basis of sharing of work load. This division of labor was gradually associated with biological attributes of men & women, hence got to be called natural. This gender discrimination intrigued and is practiced by every unit & institution of the society and media is no different.

A powerful tool to create and communicate gender democracy and gender culture of society are media-technologies which have become an integral part of people’s everyday lives and part of society. Mass media are able to legitimate gender ideas and notions shaped by gender politics and ideology, and to increase the probability of their reception by audiences. The efficacy of gender, culture, formation depends both on state, gender, politics and on gender strategies and ideology of mass media and the images presented by them.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Friedman (2005) conclude that gender researchers and feminist scholars have also become interested in new media as a development which has the potential to break down or flatten social hierarchies in more general terms.

Pedersen (2007) conclude that although blogging in the USA and the UK is just as popular amongst women as men, research shows that the most influential blogs tend to be by males and that women are noticeably absent from political blogging.

Harris (2008) argues that the mere act of 'going online' allows women to create identities that are a first step for women to identify themselves as a citizen.

Williamson (2009) suggests that digital media have already begun to challenge socio-cultural and political norms in Britain.

Keller (2011) argues that blogs are particularly important online spaces for young women to forge political identities and confront sexist cultures. She gives two examples of blogs the 'Seventeen Magazine Project' by an American high school student, which satirizes the 'beauty and lifestyle' tips of the teen magazine 'Seventeen' and 'the Fbomb' blog created by a 16 year old girl 'for teenage girls who care about their rights as women and want to be heard'. Both blogs attracted large international followings. These blogs are examples of how new media allows previously disengaged or marginalised groups to challenge power bases using styles of communication that will appeal to peers.

Fallon, et al. (2011) conclude that "overall, the evidence for online politics suggests that the more an activity involves self-promotion, expounding your views to others or the risks of conflict, then the more likely there is to be a male dominance."

Wei, Hindman (2011) the researchers concludes that the divide in uses of new media is especially detected between the young and the old, but also between men and women.

Haferkamp, et.al. (2012) conclude that women's online behaviour is 'more interpersonally oriented' while men are more task and information oriented.

Deeba Shahwar (2013) concludes that mostly the advertisers use females as the eye-catching object to capture the attention of the viewers. The portrayal of women in advertising is changing the concept of respects about the women among the mind of viewers and also indicate that a woman's physical beauty is likely to be an instrument for creating demands for products.

Richard M. Perloff (2014) conclude that the interactive format and content features of social media, such as the strong peer presence and exchange of a multitude of visual images, suggest that social media, working via negative social comparisons, transportation, and peer normative processes, can significantly influence body image concerns. Social media effects on male body image, intersections with ethnicity are also discussed.

III. OBSERVATIONS

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Until recently women's participation in the media was negligible there were very few women in top position in the media, but in the wake of feminism and the spread of education gender discrimination is decreasing both in practice and preaching. The importance of gender equality is well recognized and well accepted for development. Men and women can neither reach excellence with the cooperation of each other.

In the context of knowledge sphere, the issues of gender equality, equity and empowerment of women become even more significant as women have a strategic role in the incubation and transfer of critical knowledge, which often forms the blueprint for survival of communities in depth and minimize their risk in adverse circumstance

Thus, it is high time for us, the thinking tank of the society, to think of women's right to express and communicate. Men already have their space in every walk of the life including the media. It is time we gave space to women, but at the same time maintaining adequate space for men. Gender sensitive communication is the only way to cater women equally along with their male counterparts. This concept is amongst the recent trends in media and it emerged due to the momentum of the feminist movement in last two decades, interdisciplinary studies like media studies, women's studies and gender studies etc.

Empowering women aims to inspire them and persuade them to come out from different adverse conditions, be it societal or religious, that have traditionally kept them suppressed and unable to see their true strength, power and beauty. We are living in the modern era, even though; today in the rural areas women are suffering from various problems in different fields of life.

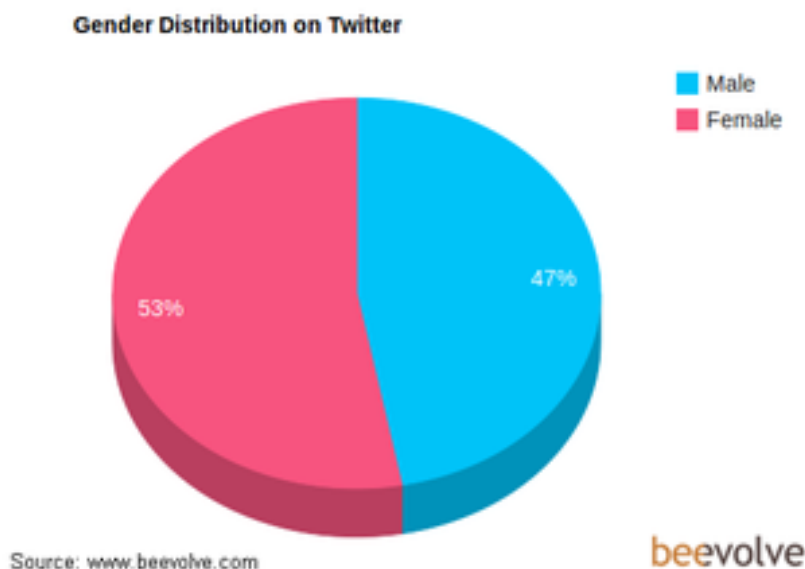
New Media plays an important and vital role in women's empowerment and its development. Media can create an awakening inspiration to achieve their potential as a prime source of change in the society, we live in. With the growing dominance of the Internet, blog, chat, Social sites, the use of New Media has already begun and consequently, communication is rapidly changing and becoming mobile, interactive, personalized and multi-channel. The internet has served as a vehicle or as a channel to convey information in a useful and easy to

understand manner. This extraordinary revolution is affecting the basic structure of societies, and is raising discussions and debates that are profoundly related to women: the rapid transformation of the boundaries between the public and the private spaces, the relationship between the new media and women's empowerment.

New Media is considered as an important source in helping the women empowered. It is helping as the important source and access to speak out against the oppression and marginalization of women at the grass root level. The media is considered as the most potent and influential mean this regard as it has the capacity of persuading and molding opinion. The relationship of the media and the women is important because whatever image women have in our country is influenced by media. The same trend is witnessed in the media and more so in social media, which all can access without any interference, bias or discrimination. We know that women are looking for information on various issues New media provides them with opportunities to bring information on every issues / topic to them at their doorstep, and reach everyone in new ways. In women, Internet user base is increasing rapidly.

All over the world, the impact of New media has been witnessed in recent years, with online platforms becoming increasingly powerful mechanisms for mobilising popular support. India is no exception, and the media coverage of this particularly horrific Delhi gang rape case and the online responses changed the mindsets of the youth and it seems that people are no longer willing to accept rape and sexual assault as "a simple fact of life." People in India demanded change, and they used the power of modern media to make their voices heard. In Delhi gang rape case Platforms such as the Facebook group 'Gang Rape in Delhi' and 'Justice for Raped Girl in Delhi' have united people in expressing their hopes for a future free from similar cases. People raised their voices through Twitter, Facebook and other new media, expressing their frustrations against the government and administration.

Long time ago, computers and Internet were the men's thing. Right now, it doesn't matter why it used to be so – what's more important is that it's a thing of the past. Social media is changing. Twitter may have started as a male-dominate platform, but a recent study by Beevolve.com found that women now outnumber men on Twitter by 6 percent. In addition, women users are more active, tweeting on average more often than men. Women use social media more frequently and in a more varied way. What's especially interesting is that they use smartphones and tablets more often than men. The subjects they are interested in are different too; family and fashion are more important to women, whereas sports, technology and entrepreneurship are more referenced by men.



Recent research from Pew Research Center found that the percentage of female Internet users who use social networking sites well exceeds that of men (75% vs. 63%, respectively) and women are also more active in their use of these sites. Women are the "low-hanging fruit" of social media today and even marketers are targeting them. The research agency Pew Research Center had come out with the following data:

Social Networking Sites

% of internet users who use social networking sites

		Use Social Networking Sites
All internet users (n=1,802)		67%
a	Men (n=846)	62
b	Women (n=956)	71 ^a
Race/ethnicity		
a	White, Non-Hispanic (n=1,332)	65
b	Black, Non-Hispanic (n=178)	68
c	Hispanic (n=154)	72
Age		
a	18-29 (n=318)	83 ^{bcd}
b	30-49 (n=532)	77 ^{cd}
c	50-64 (n=551)	52 ^d
d	65+ (n=368)	32
Education attainment		
a	Less than high school/high school grad (n=549)	66
b	Some College (n=519)	69
c	College + (n=721)	65
Household income		
a	Less than \$30,000/yr (n=409)	72
b	\$30,000-\$49,999 (n=330)	65
c	\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=283)	66
d	\$75,000+ (n=504)	66
Urbanity		
a	Urban (n=561)	70 ^c
b	Suburban (n=905)	67
c	Rural (n=336)	61

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November 14 – December 09, 2012. N=1,802 internet users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. Margin of error is +/- 2.6 percentage points for results based on internet users.

Note: Percentages marked with a superscript letter (e.g., ^a) indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter, among categories of each demographic characteristic (e.g. age).

Twitter

% of internet users who use Twitter

		Use Twitter
All internet users (n=1,802)		16%
a	Men (n=846)	17
b	Women (n=956)	15
Race/ethnicity		
a	White, Non-Hispanic (n=1,332)	14
b	Black, Non-Hispanic (n=178)	26 ^a
c	Hispanic (n=154)	19
Age		
a	18-29 (n=318)	27 ^{bcd}
b	30-49 (n=532)	16 ^{cd}
c	50-64 (n=551)	10 ^d
d	65+ (n=368)	2
Education attainment		
a	Less than high school/high school grad (n=549)	15
b	Some College (n=519)	17
c	College + (n=721)	15
Household income		
a	Less than \$30,000/yr (n=409)	16
b	\$30,000-\$49,999 (n=330)	16
c	\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=283)	14
d	\$75,000+ (n=504)	17
Urbanity		
a	Urban (n=561)	20 ^{bc}
b	Suburban (n=905)	14
c	Rural (n=336)	12

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November 14 – December 09, 2012. N=1,802 internet users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. Margin of error is +/- 2.6 percentage points for results based on internet users.

Note: Percentages marked with a superscript letter (e.g., ^a) indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter, among categories of each demographic characteristic (e.g. age).

IV. THE TWIST IN THE TALE

The above data depicts the twist in the tale i.e. women are not only using the social media more rather they are dominating it more than their male counterparts. Women engage more with brands on social media than men, consume more news from social sources. (*source: [INFOGRAPHIC]; http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/women-dominate-social-media_b55511*). The latest studies on social media demographics show that women dominate social media use. But hidden between the lines are significant areas that reveal how women dominate men in this niche. We are not just talking about the total number of social media users—more women use the top social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Pinterest than men—but how women use these sites in various ways.

Consolidating data from the studies by Pew, Nielsen, and Burst Media, an infographic published by FinancesOnline compared how men and women are changing the social media landscape.

However, while new media, overall, is identified as an agent for (generally positive) social change, its effects are not gender neutral. The trend or rather the social media is being marked as ‘valve’ for the women, to communicate and assert themselves and provide an outlet for their pent up emotions which otherwise are always trying to come out. Gender researchers and feminist scholars have also become interested in new media as a development which has the potential to break down or flatten social hierarchies (Friedman, 2005) in more general terms. New media differs from traditional ‘old’ media in that its structures of ownership and participation are new and directly challenge the monopoly on mass communication possessed by traditional media producers: ‘The internet has fragmented and decentralized the context in which communication occurs’.

Call its height of male chauvinism or the flip side the communication and net access of women is looked upon as inferior and it said that women indulge only in futile stuff such fashion, shopping, cross commenting remarked as typical women stuff; some schools of thought even say that the social media is further objectifying women by reinforcing the importance of beauty and pressure to be trendy and always seeking attention of others through social media. A study on how people use social networking websites such as Facebook confirms what many of us suspected. Women who post loads of photos of themselves on their sites are conveying some strong personal characteristics, according to new research. These women are more likely to base their self-worth on appearance and use social networking to compete for attention. The study involved 311 men and women with an average age of 23. In order to better understand aspects of social networking behavior, the researchers looked at the amount of time subjects spent managing profiles, the number of photos they shared, the size of their online networks and how promiscuous they were in terms of “friending” behavior. Thus, social media is rather intensifying or trying to reinforce the gender discrimination. In another study of different uses by gender,

Thus, critics of the view that new media is a new source of power argue that these claims are unsubstantiated due to variation in online behavior by gender, age and other demographic variables. Overall, however, the research on the political impact of new media is too underdeveloped to predict its impact. However, a number of studies were identified which point to the potential positive effect of online technologies for women and girls based on studies of its actual use (e.g. Harris, 2008, Keller, 2012).

Whatever may be the case, the positive outcome is that social media has given a platform for women to communicate without any gender discrimination and may also voice their own issues; without the same being filtered through any agent of patriarchal society whether male or female.

Empowerment of women is a long and difficult process which is to be promoted with full public support and this could be successful only when those women who have been suppressed by the male dominated society taking undue advantage of their lack of education and poverty can fight to claim their true place in the society; social or new media can be the tool of this transformation. It is thus vital, to utilize the social media for the improving the status of women and divulging their role in national development. This is even claimed in many studies, like in study of young women’s use of the internet, the simple ability to create a public self provides ‘young women with a capacity to play with gender and to resist feminine stereotypes’ (Harris, 2008). This ability will help young women to build confidence as political actors. The limited research available suggests that women tend to use new media in relation to politics for networking whereas men are more likely to use it for promoting their own views. A study of the 2010 UK general election found that only 10% of posts on the ‘Lib Dem Voice’ blog were by women, with 79% of blog posts made by men (Fallon et al.,2011). Women’s interest in the election was more visible through their role as fans of the Liberal Democrat Facebook page, but even here they were less visible than men with only 37% of the ‘fans’ being women. Studies in the USA show similar trends with women internet users being more likely (79%) to use social networking sites than men (63%) and no gender differences in use of Twitter (Pew Research Center, 2012).

A deeper understanding of the ways in which women use new media to participate in political issues not only has the potential to increase the opportunities for women to transform their political interest into action.

The apparent risk in using the social media is the safety of women, but this risk can be equally threatening for anybody regardless of his/her gender. However, such an advantage was felt to be lost for women

if and once they are involved, one 'has to be more guarded'. The major advantage of new and social media is its ability to link with diverse and dispersed women, thus providing an opportunity to hear what women have to say in a direct and prompt way. This means of communication could be further used, including by political parties, and not just individual as a way of hearing women's views. New media is useful for sharing information and linking, it has serious limitations in terms of action. If a woman is ready to face social barriers that may 'hold her back' from political engagement, online tools are able to help instantly. New media works best when there is personal need or attempts to connect directly with individuals through humour and honesty even crossing the geographical barriers. This is not obviously compatible with maintaining a high degree of control as may be necessary in spite of having cyber laws.

V. CONCLUSION

Barriers to engendering knowledge networking process with the inception of ICT and convergence technologies, it is possible to bring up a significant fraction of women's communities in a more symbiotic digital network which focuses on localized information and customized solution's, and works on the theme of Global Technologies for local use. Women at the grass root level, however, are still very much in a minority among the beneficiaries of knowledge networking because they do not have access to the internet and are suffering due to the digital divide. There is a substantial literature on the 'digital divide' which claims and explores differences in access to new media not just in terms of material access, but also a divide between individuals' understanding and use of online culture and applications. These divides have been called the first and second level digital divides. The divide in uses of new media is especially detected between the young and the old, but also between men and women. Women still face huge imbalance in the ownership, control and regulation of these new Information technologies, similar to those faced in other areas. (New York Times, 2000). It's still miles to go before we retire to rest in gender equal social media, media and society. Social media no doubt can be the agent of the change or transformation. The positive outcome is that social media has given a platform for women to communicate without any gender discrimination and may also voice their own issues; without the same being filtered through any agent of patriarchal society whether male or female. We are positive about it and pinning our hopes on social media to bring the transformation.

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