

Life of women in the social media era : A Review

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ABSTRACT

The impact of social media on Indian women is multifaceted, reflecting both positive and negative aspects. Social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for empowerment, providing Indian women with unprecedented access to information, opportunities for education, and platforms for self-expression and entrepreneurship. The visibility of successful female role models on social media has inspired many women to pursue their ambitions, breaking traditional barriers and challenging gender norms.

However, the influence of social media is not without its drawbacks. The pervasive nature of online harassment and cyberbullying disproportionately affects women, leading to mental health issues and reinforcing gender inequalities. The portrayal of unrealistic beauty standards and lifestyles can also contribute to body image issues and a sense of inadequacy among women.

The present study focuses on the impact of Social media on the different aspects of women. The study is based on secondary data taken from different studies done by varied scholars in the context of the impact social media has left on women. Social media is responsible for making women visualize themselves as someone more graceful, beautiful, glamorous, skinny, sexy, astonishing etc. The women are doing everything to make themselves adjustable to this visualization of social media as they consider it important to fit in the society. Not only in the sensual manner, but social media is also paying attention to those women who are doing some great work to bring the required changes in the society. They are highlighting the women who have set examples of women empowerment. The above stated study would reveal how social media has become a factor both for devastating women's life as well as enhancing alive feelings in the women's life. Social media is very important for keeping oneself updated, for having good knowledge of the all around happenings, for building some good change in the society but its use should be planned & thoughtful, so that it doesn't prove to be bad for the society and family.

Keywords: Social Media, Women empowerment, victimization, cyber crime, Glamour, Visualization, Identity formation.

INTRODUCTION :

Nowadays social media has been an important part of one's life from shopping to electronic mails, education and business tools. Social media plays a vital role in transforming people's lifestyle. Social media includes social networking sites and blogs where people can easily connect with each other. Since the emergence of these social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook as key tools for news, journalists and their organizations have performed a high-wire act. These sites have become a day to day routine for the people. Social media has been mainly defined to refer to "the many relatively inexpensive and widely accessible electronic tools that facilitate anyone to publish and access information, collaborate on a common effort, or build relationships".

Media plays a vital role in the dissemination of information. It is called the fourth pillar of democratic polity. The role of media is not only limited as information providers, but by gradually shaping public opinion, personal beliefs and even people's self-perception, media influences the process of socialization and shapes ideology and thinking also. Over the years and especially during the last decade, India has developed a fairly extensive communication infrastructure. The subject of portrayal of women in Indian media has drawn the attention of media critiques in the present times. Women have been portrayed as men who would like to see them beautiful creatures, submissive mothers of their children, efficient housekeepers etc. Women's image has gone through several unjust projections at the hands of the media.

The Indian television programmes on women are based on the lives and cultures of urban society. In quantity there have been very few, in quality very poor. No programme is concerned with the problems of women in rural areas. The main reason behind this is the commercial nature of Doordarshan or any other private channels. Commercial sponsors and advertisers do not prefer women issue programmes, which they think are not very popular and or not liked by the majority audience (Dhar, patnaik, 1996). Indian magazines contain primarily and predominantly volumes of advertisements and sexist writings. According to Guru (1996), the vast majority of Indian magazines are known for the portrayal of women as sex objects, consumers and slaves. In today's media women are looked upon as a tool that can help to sell a product. Women and sex are often a great combination when to get a product to come off the shelves. There are many different companies that stretch far and wide to include women and sex in their advertisements.

Women's health is the basis of any society. There can be development in any sphere, politics, economics, and science and so on., but nothing can be achieved when the core of the society, women's health is neglected. The health of the future generation depends on the health of present women. So this is not a feminine problem, it's a social problem. And the media should take the responsibility and real concern over women by looking into their health rather than their skin and beauty.

The internet is one of the greatest inventions in the arena of communication. With the advent of the internet, the whole world has become a global village. It has created a virtual world with no boundaries, which gives people ample opportunities to ameliorate both personal and professional relationships across borders. The Internet has connected people around the globe. The desire to know what is unknown is indispensable to human nature. The desire to know about the people, who inhabit the earth, has aggravated the urge of discovering the untraded path. This has led to the unearthing of the cyber world. One of the benefits which the internet has provided to every section of the society is empowerment, including women (Halder & Jaishankar, 2009).

The social networking websites (SNWs) have developed a new arena for socializing. Irrespective of any distinction, women in the society are exulting with this liberation to the fullest. From online shopping to net banking, from e-ticketing to e-tax filing, it has made the life of Indian women easy (Halder & Jaishankar, 2009). It has enabled women to fight for equality even within the confines of their society. They can now share their experiences to the whole world, and this advantage of being able to share their success stories as well as their problems has given them a platform in the global world. In this context, Halder and Jaishankar (2009) have opined: "Most women users avail this new way of socialization as a stress-reliever. Cyber socializing through SNWs help women users to share with like minded friends, their emotional needs, personal problems..." (p. 6)

Along with providing them with a platform to voice their struggles and success in life, it inscribes new spaces of power, which is accompanied with knowledge. Ironically, on the one side, the internet is serving as a boon, but on the other side, it has made the life of women insecure due to rising cyber crime in the virtual world. Women of all ages and milieu are in jeopardy with the coming up of the internet (Halder & Jaishankar, 2009). While many women are victimized online, what makes Indian women unique? India is predominantly patriarchal and orthodox country and women who are victimized are mostly blamed and online victims are no exception (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011a).

There are instances where marriages of women victims were stopped due to their online victimization. Also, there is less legal protection to them compared to their western counterparts and the Indian women victims do not get adequate solutions for their victimization from the ISPs governed predominantly from a western cultural perspective (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011b).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the negative as well as positive impact of Social Media on Women's.
- To know how social media is influencing the life as well as the mindset of the women.
- To find the relationship among the various aspects of cyber crime.
- To know reasons for victimization.

METHODOLOGY

The study is purely based on the secondary data where the matter has been taken from the various research papers, journals, books, articles of the numerous authors who have earlier worked on the same topic. The findings of various authors have discussed the trends of social media usage by the women and the impact in both positive as well as negative sense on the life of the women.

A Conceptual Model of Reasons of Victimization

The Figure 1 represents a conceptual model of reasons for Indian women victimization, online. It could be concluded from the model that various drivers in the form of psychological, sociological, computer knowledge, and technological gap are triggering cyber crime through women victimization. It is interesting to find out that due to the following reasons, women are being victimized, and that is leading to cyber crime in many different ways. Another triggering factor which results in cyber crime is through miscreant's outlook. Thus, it could be traced out that various reasons are making women victimized, which in turn is leading to cyber crime. Similarly a vice versa relationship could be found between cyber crime and miscreants' outlook. The conceptual model is explained in detail below.

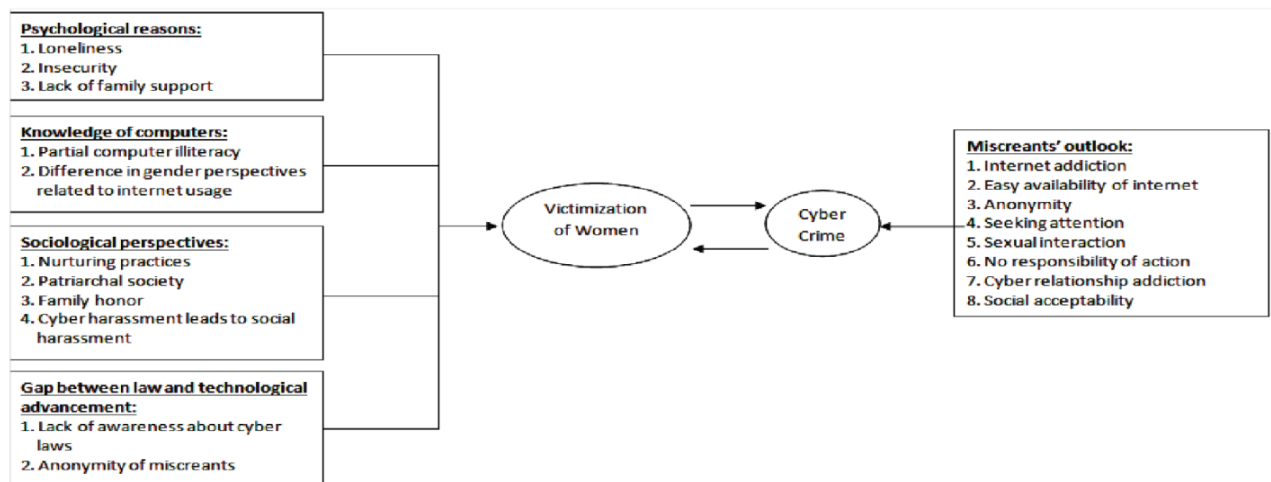


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Reasons of Victimization

With the rise of urbanization and globalization, the Indian family structure has changed. Traditionally, the joint family system existed in India. Joint families served as the basis of existence for Indian people. However, migration from village to city in search of a job has changed the whole scenario. This has led to the nuclear system of the family. With the coming up of the nuclear family, individual privacy became the prime focus of families. Family members are concerned for their own privacy and the practice of sharing and caring went into the background.

Hence, women often face existential crises. Unable to find answers to their own crisis of life they very often regress in their past, and as a result they encounter feelings of loneliness and depression. To overcome depression and loneliness women, especially home makers, tend to find support outside their family circle. It is because of this reason that they tend to rely on strangers and make them their confidante. With technology, they easily get the chance to interact with them through chat rooms, video chat, instant messages etc., while sitting at home (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011b). In order to come out of the loneliness, they indulge in chatting. Mostly conversation takes place among friends or family members, but sometimes unable to find any close friend, women indulge in chatting with strangers (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011b). Chatting with strangers becomes a source of catharsis.

Parkins (2012) in his study about gender and emotional expressiveness concluded that women are more emotionally expressive than men are. For this reason, it becomes easy for the culprit to win over the confidence of lonely women. In an emotional state, females tend to reveal a lot about their personal information. This is not only restricted to personal information; they even tend to reveal bank details, property details, details about family members, exchange photos, mobile numbers etc. After receiving this type of information, the miscreant can use this information against the woman for causing harm, and it is one of the prime reasons for causing some heinous cyber crimes. Sometimes it becomes so intense that it may lead to rape, murder, kidnapping etc (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011b). In majority of the cases, these crimes are intentional, but sometimes it may occur due to priming. Finn and Banach (2000) have referred to these kinds of risks in their study. These types of risks develop because of cyber socializing (Halder & Jaishankar, 2009), which sometimes leads to the development of emotional relationships between opposite genders, and women become easy victims of these relations because of their emotional weakness (Whitty, 2005). Partial computer illiteracy refers to the incomplete or fractional knowledge in handling or operating a computer system and its application. Computer literacy does not only include browsing the internet through Google or the use of social networking websites like Facebook, Twitter, or Orkut. Computer literacy should include privacy protection, protection from spyware, internet viruses like

Trojans, tracking cookies etc. Although there is an increase in the number of computer users, sadly a large segment of people are still unaware of the safe and secured usage of computers (Halder & Jaishankar, 2010).

Indian society is predominantly patriarchal in nature, and this is a major reason for women becoming victims of cyber crime (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011b). The cause behind it is that men attach respectability of a family on the honor of the women members, which makes women vulnerable. In India, gender differences cast a tremendous effect on nurturing practices. Where a male child is taught to be tough and robust, a female child is expected to be shy and submissive. Females are taught to shun their voice for the fear of being stigmatized. Because of this type of nurturing practice, they become accustomed to ignoring imperative matters, by saying nothing had happened. Society decides the role of men and women. Men have to be serious, dignified, responsible, rational, unemotional, bold and dynamic, whereas women must be coy, understanding, patient, compassionate, emotional, and must accept sacrifice for her family (Geetha, 2002).

The Centre for Cyber Victim Counseling (CCVC), an NGO, has presented a report on Cyber Victimization in India, in which the center has taken 73 respondents of which 60 were females and the rest 13 males (Halder & Jaishankar, 2010). These respondents are from different parts of India, who have some knowledge about computers, are techno savvy, and even use social networking sites for hanging out in the virtual world. They have faced different types of victimization such as receiving abusive emails with sexual images, getting threatening mails, profiles being hacked etc. However, even among the 60 female respondents not everybody has reported. From the survey, it has been found that only 35% of the women have reported about their victimization, 46.7% has not reported and 18.3% has been unaware of the fact that they have been victimized. This report proves that women prefer not to report about their victimization owing to social issues (Halder & Jaishankar, 2010). The internet being a virtual world, sexual harassment is prevalent to a large extent. There are several ways in which online harassment takes place. Sometimes it is verbal and sometimes it is also graphical but in both ways (Halder, 2013), it can be an active or passive form of online deliverance. The active verbal form of sexual harassment prevailing in the cyberspace is primarily based on erotic messages sent via e-mail, chat rooms etc. These disgusting messages include mortifying remarks related to gender and sexuality, which are focused in the direction of the victim by the harasser. The comments associated with gender and sexuality are considered offensive only when these remarks are not provoked or approved by the addressee.

Other than the verbal form, the graphical form of sexual harassment can also be both active and passive. The former includes sending pornographic pictures, videos etc. to a particular individual while the latter comprises online pornography sites where such kinds of videos, pictures or movies are published. These forms of harassment can be illustrated to be the basic ways in which individuals are victimized in the virtual world of cyberspace (Barak, 2005).

Society puts the blame mainly on women, which makes her life more awful. For this reason, a woman abstains from complaining even if she is victimized because once the crime is reported it is flashed through media or internet, and then it becomes more difficult for the woman to live in the society (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011a). She is considered a social stigma by the people (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011b), who inhabit the society.

One of the main reasons behind the increase of cyber crimes against women in India is the less legal protection (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011b). Halder and Jaishankar, in their book "Cyber Crime and the Victimization of Women: Laws, Rights and Regulations", have said that, "The issues of women's rights in cyber space could be contributed largely to the sluggish modes of the governments in executing the gender equality and gender justice promises made by the States in the form of fundamental rights" (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011b, p. 56). They have also reported in India cyber gender harassment is often seen as "less important sexual harassment" (p.10). According to Foucault (1980), technologies use the power in a sophisticated and institutionalized way. It allows us to take a full grip of the knowledge of victimization of women. Foucault has pointed out how the power of technology has influenced relationships on the ground of gender and has also led to the persecution of women. Such abuse of the power of technology and other reasons behind online victimization of women has been delineated in this article. In order to find the relationship among the various aspects of cyber crime a conceptual model has been proposed. Future work could be carried out by empirically testing and validating the model.

Social Media in the present atmosphere has proved to be the most trending thing. From a small kid to a mature person, is trapped in the web of social media. We do have the understanding about its negative counterpart but still can't keep ourselves aloof from it. Although, it is a well known fact that Social Media being somehow negative has helped us lead our life in a better manner. It's just that we need to have the consciousness developed in ourselves regarding its usage and addiction.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON WOMEN

Social media made women lose their self-confidence. Women are always competing with some random women on the basis of her looks. They have started having an emotion of being unhappy on the way they have taken birth or the body in which they have taken birth. They have evolved a different viewpoint regarding skin color.

Depression has trapped them as they remain over thinking regarding their body issues. The depression has resulted in causing problems in their personal relationships which can ultimately lead to some bad habits in their life. Although social media is having a numerous negative influence on the women today, it won't be wrong to say that social media has even helped the present day women to lead their life with dignity and honor. The mishappenings done to the women haven't stopped to full extent but their awareness has been spread to far flung people. The laws which our government has regarding the various harassments as well as the exploitation done to women are being made known to those women who are uneducated and who are sitting somewhere at the village. Social media extends a helping hand to the people who are in actual need of it by increasing the followers to whom the message needs to be passed. Social media acts as an alternative media, a platform to share, raise the voice of women when their voice is restricted. Thousands of men joined Cyber-hands to help women, sharing their voices in each and every protest (Anusuah R., 2015). It has shed light on women issues that were not previously discussed and enhances conversations around topics not covered by mainstream media (www.rappler.com). Some of the hashtags that are most frequently used with #Lean In on Twitter were #WomenInLeadership, #FemaleEmpowerment, #Fearless, #TheFutureIsFemale, #MeToo (www.medium.com). Not only in giving the women a voice, the social media platform has even helped the women section to become entrepreneurs, set their own business, start their own start-ups which would enhance their earning efficiency and ultimately would lead to some respect in the family as well as the society. Female entrepreneurs can do marketing through social media which is very cost effective and can be easily channelized (Kumari M., 2020). This will strengthen their ability to combat negative portrayals of women internationally and to challenge instances of abuse of the power of an increasingly important industry (Ananta N & Ahamad T., 2016). The women have now become the social media influencers, bloggers, content writers which has enhanced their skill of presenting themselves as bold, courageous, active people as compared to being submissive as well as destitute in the earlier period. Social media has given a major contribution in the women empowerment perspective as well. Media intervention can lead to an impactful change in the society by representing women participation in leadership and decision making roles and urging the society to intensify their efforts against the discrimination and violence women face (Dutta H., 2020). Social media is the reality of the present day world and it has encouraged each and every section of our society to come forward and express themselves without any kind of fear in their minds.

POSITIVE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON WOMEN

Social media can help a woman have an earning for herself by helping her with the start-ups. Social media can become a voice for millions of women to speak their minds. It can act as the information building set up which keeps the women updated with the all around happenings of the world. It can help the women be aware of the laws through which they can get justice, if being exploited. It can help women learn new skills even if they are a homemaker. A Self-Expression Platform and Women's Impact Freedom of speech gives one the opportunity to express their thoughts and beliefs without restriction, which symbolizes the freedom to be who they are (Thanapathi. C & Devaraj .A., 2022). The platform of social media can enable ✖ women with freedom of self-expression, communicating the ideas, thoughts, opinions, creativity skills with the people all around the globe. 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-scientific masses for social transformation favorable to empowerment of women (Kumar N., 2021). The challenges which are posed by the new era, have received their solutions provided by the media contexting various of the alternatives which will help the women in empowering themselves.

Conclusion:

There are both positive and negative outcomes of using social media but we should educate women how to use these so that they would not be vulnerable for victimization. There is nothing like social media usage education but we can help women in our own houses. A husband can teach her and their child if old enough how to use and handle social media platforms for the benefits of themselves. We should make them understand that nowadays it's not secure enough to post or update our personal information on social media.

Moreover, the digital divide remains a significant challenge, with many rural and economically disadvantaged women lacking access to social media and the internet. This disparity underscores the need for inclusive digital policies and initiatives to ensure that the benefits of social media are accessible to all women in India.

While social media has the potential to be a catalyst for positive change and empowerment for Indian women, it also poses significant risks and challenges. A balanced approach that maximizes the benefits of social media while addressing its adverse effects is crucial. Policymakers, educators, and technology companies must work collaboratively to create a safer and more equitable online environment, ensuring that social media can be a tool for empowerment and progress for all Indian women.

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