

Impact of Social Media on Women's Life in India

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Research Article

Impact of Social Media on Women's Life in India

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Abstract

In present scenario, Social media plays a pivotal role in our society and almost everyone using various social networking platforms to express their views, concerns, ideas on that, social media is the easiest way to connect with friends and family members and also to connect with people in professional arena. There has been a drastic rise in the usage of social media for the last few decades in India. But the popularity of social media has also resulted in the escalation of the number of criminals who misuse these virtual platforms. When we talk about the impact of social media on women's life, then some common words also come in mind like: cyberbullying, stalking, trolling, bullying etc. With the tremendous growth in the usage of social media/social networking sites has provided an easy ground to cyber criminals to engage in illegal activities. There is no doubt that social media can be one of the most effective platforms which can back up the concept of women empowerment. However, the effectiveness can be achieved if it used appropriately and responsibly. To handle this kind of crimes, there are many organisations which are working towards the elimination of cyber violence against women and make them empowered.

Keywords: cyberbullying, social networking site, cyber violence, women empowerment

Introduction

In the 21st century, Social media plays an indispensable role in bringing about ground-breaking changes in our society. It is used to interact and connect with, family, friends and is extensively used in the professional arena. The impact of the Social media influence can be observed in the personal and professional approach, attitude and life style of its users across the world. The far-reaching development in the field of communication, has facilitated the free flow of information.

In the present scenario, there are many social networking sites which are in vogue. Interaction with family, friends, relatives, colleagues, live chat, status updates, image- as well as video calling are some of the major activities of these trending sites.

Some of the popular social media sites by GlobalWebIndex, Flagship Report - 2018 are as follows:

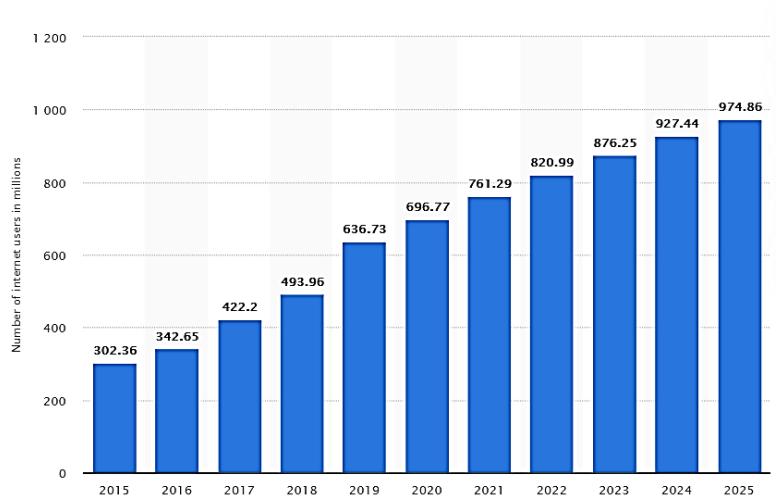
- Facebook
- Twitter
- WhatsApp
- Instagram
- YouTube
- LinkedIn

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- Snapchat

“Social Media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share and exchange information and ideas in virtual networks. It introduces extensive and persistent changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals” (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2010).

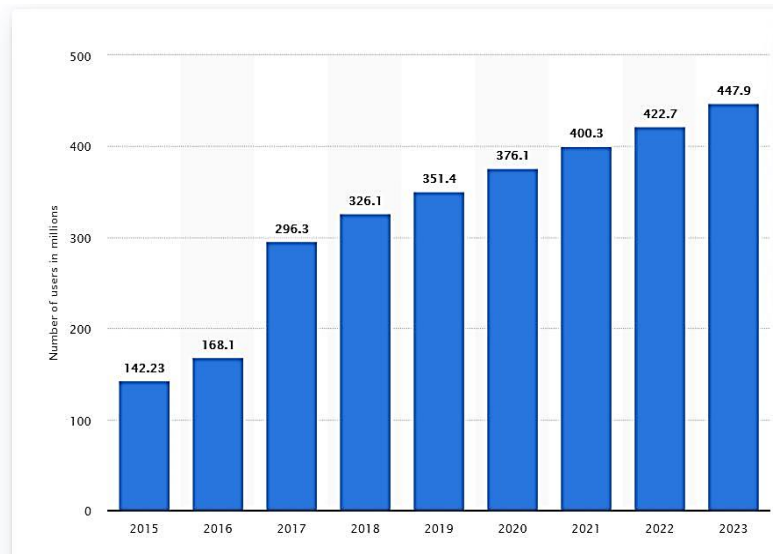
Figure - 1



Source: Statista, 2020

In 2020, India had nearly 700 million internet users across the country. The above figure, it showed that the expected internet users will grow and may reach to approx. 974 million users by 2025. The number of internet users was estimated to increase in both urban as well as rural regions, representing a dynamic progress in access to internet (Statista, 2020).

Figure - 2

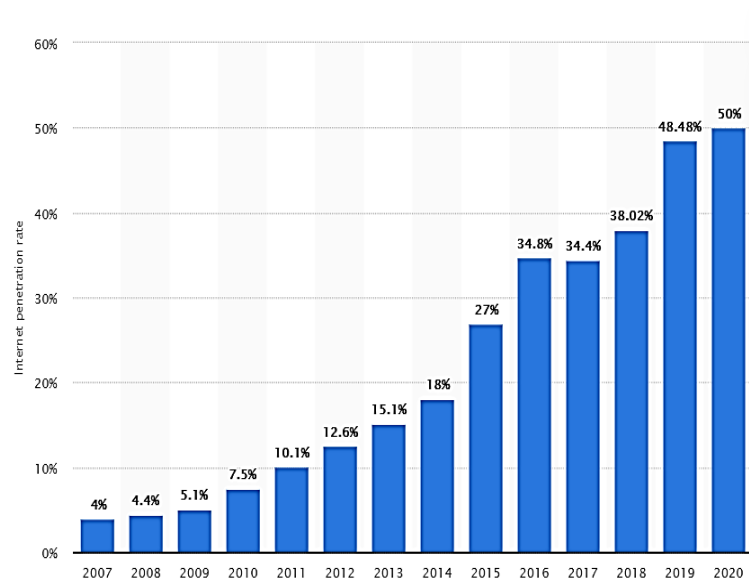


Source: Statista, 2020

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As per the Figure 2, with the comfort of internet access, the number of social media users in India was 326.1 million in 2018. It was expected that by 2023, the social network users in the country will be nearly 448 million (Statista, 2020).

Figure - 3



Source: Statista 2020

Internet infiltration frequency in India from just four percent in 2007 went up to about 50 percent in 2020. Although these figures appear relatively low, it intended that around half of the population of 1.37 billion people had access to internet that year. This also ranked the country second in the world in terms of active internet users (Statista, 2020).

Social media links people around the globe irrespective of variance and geographical setups. The compression of time and space due to the merging of new media and globalization has shortened the world into a smaller interactive arena (Chen and Zhang 2010).

Social media opens up many opportunities, monetary, creative, cultural etc. There are two types of people- some people who like to explore the positive possibilities and some who like to explore the negative possibilities. The popularity of Social media has also resulted in the escalation of the number of criminals who misuse these virtual platforms.

When we talk about cyber-crime, cyber bullying is a very common term which one can see in this context. Cyber bullying takes place using electronic technology and communication. It includes mean text messages or emails, rumours sent by email or posted on social networking sites, and embarrassing pictures, videos, websites or fake profiles (Cyber B.A.A.P.).

According to *Cyberbaap.org*, there are few types of Cyberbullying:

- **Harassment:** It is the act of posting or propagating disparaging messages/information about an individual or a group.
- **Flaming/Trolling:** It is a type of public bullying in which abusive/ obscene comments are used against individuals or groups, sometimes even morphed images are also used.
- **Stalking:** means digitally following someone and sending targeted messages with the intension of harming or intimidating a woman or a person.

- **Doxing:** It is the act of disclosing a person's private information, pictures, or posts to the public without the consent of the person.
- **Masquerading/Impersonation:** is a situation where an oppressor harasses or stalk someone anonymously by creating online fake identity. The bully can impersonate someone else to send malicious messages to the victim.

Impact of Social Media on Women's Life

In the past few years, social media has expanded the horizon of communication widely at all its manifolds. There has been a drastic rise in the usage of social media for the last few decades in India. Today, it's worth highlighting the fact that social media has become the most effective platform which is in the frontline resonating the voices of thousands of women across the world. It plays a remarkable role in propagating the concept of women empowerment across the world, which makes it a major facet of bringing about social revolution as women play a crucial role in the growth and development of the society and nation building.

Several social media tools and applications such as Facebook, twitter, Instagram etc are giving women a space to place their thoughts, talents, concerns and suggestions. It gives a platform to express themselves as well as gives them exposure which in turn helps a lot in shaping their identity. They find it easy and comfortable to place themselves in the virtual space. Many women are now using these social media platforms for earning money also, as YouTube and Facebook offer monetary privileges based on certain terms and conditions, like the number views, subscribers etc.

Social media has transformed the landscape of how information is shared globally and the relationship between citizens and governments (Shirky, 2011). It has proved to be a powerful vehicle for bringing women's rights issues to the attention of a wider public and encouraging policy makers to step up commitments to gender equality. Social media has become a massive tool for women empowerment.

On the other hand, when we talk about the impact of social media on women's life, then some common words also come in mind like: cybercrime, stalking, trolling, bullying etc. The increased usage of internet facility and easy access to smartphones has made social networking one of the most popular online activities. At the same time, with the tremendous growth in the usage of social media/social networking platforms has provided an easy ground to cyber criminals to engage in illegal activities.

So, when girls/women are using these social media platforms, they should use it very carefully and should know the danger related to it and they should be aware of all the sensitive issues attached to the usage of social media. Women are more vulnerable to face these cybercrimes in forms of cyber stalking, objectification, hate speech and porn etc. there is an increase in the cases of objectification also. Many a times, such incidents are not even noticed as they are considered quite normal or common, which in fact is not so normal.

With the growing usage of social media, one can hear about *FOMO* (Fear of Missing Out) a lot these days, Infact, the word was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013. It is a real sensation that is becoming increasingly common and can cause substantial mental stress in one's life. The fear of missing out refers to the feeling that others are having more fun, better lives, or experiencing top things than you are. It involves a deep sense of bitterness and affects self-worth. It is often amplified by social media sites like Facebook and Instagram.

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Many young girls and women generally follow celebrities via their social media accounts and mostly end up by comparing themselves with them and wants to look beautiful like them, thin like them and try to follow the strict diet, strict schedule without proper supervision and many times they go into depression and gets fear of body shaming online. There is a close relationship between body dissatisfaction and social media. Especially young girls who very much rely on the amount of likes they receive on a picture in order to determine the self-worth and position in society and it has resulted in quite severe mental health issues.

Posting of pictures/videos are very normal these days on social media platforms and many times young girls due to lack of awareness gets trapped in the web of cyber-crime. Cyber-crime of all kind is a real problem in today's society. Studies have constantly shown that the threat and attacks against women in virtual space are noticeably unlike from men.

In spite of the fact that virtual space acts as a feasible platform for the women to explore and express their thoughts and emotions, it also shoots out many bows against them which hinders their progress. They have to deal with abuses, bullying, stalking and even defaming campaigns for speaking out their thoughts. It is very much evident that the discrimination on the basis of gender is prevalent on the virtual space also as it targets their sexuality, treat them as sexual objects and support gender stereotypes. Even now a huge lot of population believes that women are supposed to submit to the views expressed by men and they consider it their responsibility to abuse or stop women who have their own perspectives and opinions regarding things and who refuse to conform to senseless opinions.

Cases of cyber stalking of women have been increased 36% from 542 in 2017 to 739 in 2018. Yet the reported cases of threatening or blackmail fell 28.3% from 311 to 223 during the same period, which experts said is largely due to underreporting (NCRB, 2018).

Online violence to a greater extent has resulted in ceasing many women from projecting out their thoughts and opinions and their horrible experiences. Many of them self-censor their opinions out of the fear of being cyber attacked. Cyber violence is a major obstacle which block women from exploring the possibilities of the virtual space

If we see to earlier incidents, many of the female journalists got trolled and even received death threats on social media platforms like *Twitter*, although all these happened when still the safety guidelines of these platform says that '*serious threats of harm to public and personal safety aren't allowed*'.

Recently, in a pile of cases, many women journalists have confronted threats on online platforms. NDTV's Nidhi Razdan took to Twitter recently to say she received a death threat. Later on, she got a reply from Facebook that the account of the culprit has been suspended and the details have been given to the police for further course of action. Nidhi spoke to *She The People Tv* and said it was essential that both police and social media platforms take online threats more seriously (Kathuria, 2018).

In another incident, in April 2018, an independent journalist Rana Ayyub received gang-rape and death threats after she was falsely quoted in a tweet on 20 April, 2018. According to it, Ayyub was supporting child rapists, stating that Muslims were no longer safe in India. In fact, she has been facing intense abuse, ever since she released her book *Gujarat Files* in 2016. Ayyub clarified that the tweet was a hateful one and tried to defame her, her phone number and residential address were leaked online and she was flooded with the threatening messages after that. The condition became

so serious that United Nations took up her case and international journalistic organisations advocated for her safety to the Indian Government (Kathuria, 2018).

The extraordinary growth in online threats to women reduces the spirit of democracy in the country. It has become crucial for the Indian government, police, social media platforms and media to collaborate and work in solidarity to make the country a safer place for female.

Awareness about the Usage of Social Media

As per the *NCRB report 2019*, a total of 44,546 cases were registered under Cyber Crimes, showing a huge increase of 63.5% in registration over 2018 (27,248 cases). Crime rate under this category increased from 2.0 in 2018 to 3.3 in 2019. During 2019, 60.4% of cyber-crime cases registered were for the motive of fraud (26,891 out of 44,546 cases) followed by sexual exploitation with 5.1% (2,266 cases) and causing disrepute with 4.2% (1,874 cases).

There is a website called '*cybercrime.gov.in*', this portal is a Government of India initiative to enable victims/complainants to report cyber-crime complaints online. This portal's special focus is on cyber-crimes against women and children. Complaints reported on this portal are dealt by law enforcement agencies/police.

Under the tab '*Resources*', the portal has some online safety tips and handbook for 'Students on Cyber Safety'. The content of 'Online Safety' includes the following:

- Cyber awareness and hygiene for parents
- Cyber awareness and hygiene for teens and young adults
- Cyber awareness and hygiene for organizations

Under these headings, they have given the detailed information about the careful usage of social media platforms.

Under the tab of 'Cyber Awareness', there is one sixty pages document called 'Cyber Security: Awareness for Citizens' in this document one can understand the importance of cyber security, identity theft, social media frauds, online banking frauds, general Tips to keep you safe and incident reporting. This document can be easily accessed on this portal.

Some of the important tips have been given which everybody should follow to protect themselves and their information while using the social media platforms:

- Don't accept friend requests from stranger on social networking sites;
- Don't download 3rd party application
- Don't share/forward unverified posts/news;
- Don't use cyber cafes to access social media; and
- Do report, if someone post offensive contents or if you feel that you are a victim of cyber-crime.

Post Delhi rape cases, especially 'Nirbhaya Case' many social media activist groups have mushroomed like 'Delhi for women's safety' which have been incessantly supporting the women to attain and accomplish their dreams, express their thought, opinions, as well as register their discontentment and disagreement.

Social media enables the quick dissemination of information/news. Many cases have unveiled/the victims disclosed it through social media and they got justice as the users took it up and shared, tweeted, #hash tagged and consequentially succeeded in begetting justice to the victims. Another instance of how Social media helps women, is now women are mor or less fearless to travel alone as they never feel lonely as they are connected to their people through social media.

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With an objective to impart equal rights to women and make them self-reliant and independent, *Jaipur Rugs Foundation* has started the prevalence for equality, justice and peace through social economic development opportunities for all women. The main motive is to assist women and educate and train them so that they can stand and survive alone without leaning upon anybody else. Today, however, so many people from different parts of the globe are supporting this foundation, both in monetary and non-monetary forms. This is helping women at a very large scale.

Now, women have better awareness about their rights and powers that every woman in a society holds, with equal rights as men in every respect.

Reporting of Cyber-Crime Related Complaints

There are some platforms/organisations, where a woman/girl can file the complaints related to cyberbullying. They are as follows:

- 1. Cybercrime.gov.in:** One can file complaint on National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal. Complaints reported on this portal are dealt by law enforcement agencies/ police based on the information given by the victim. There are two options available for filing cyber-crime complaints – one is only those cyber-crime which are ‘related to women and child’ and another is for ‘other cyber-crimes’.
- 2. The Ministry of Women and Child Development:** They have dedicated email address for reporting the cyber-crime online. A dedicated email address has been created for women and children to file complaints related to online abusive behaviour, harassment and hateful conduct on social media. Such complaints may be sent to complaint-mwcd@gov.in. The aim of this initiative is to restrict online abuse against women, once they receive the complaint, they forward it either to the concerned social media platform or to the Cyber Crime Cell for necessary action against the culprits.
- 3. National Commission for Women (NCW):** This organisation has a dedicated portal for registering the complaints online called ‘Complaints Registration and Monitoring System’ where one can register first and then proceed with the submission of online complaints. Girls/Women can file complaint about cyber-crime/bullying/stalking/abuse to National Commission for Women (NCW). They have provided one email address also where one can send the complaints. The email id is – complaintcell-ncw@nic.in.

The time has come for us to take online violence against women seriously and there is a need of creating awareness about the safe usage of social media platforms.

On 1st March 2020, Smt. Rekha Sharma, Hon'ble Chairperson, NCW in an interview with The Hindu BusinessLine paper has given some important details about cyber-crime and ways to deal with it. She said that NCW has been working to strengthen the capacity of women to use technology-based tools to defend themselves efficiently.

NCW has collaborated with Facebook and Cyber Peace Foundation to initiate the ‘*Digital Literacy Programme*’. It intended to make young girls and women aware of their digital rights and empower them to become safe and aware users, follow safe online practices, recognise and report online risks.

Social Media and Women's Empowerment

Social media is a new platform for women to debate and raise their voice, their view, and organize online campaign. Social media has proven potential for mobilising attention and accountability to

women's rights, and challenging discrimination and stereotypes. Strategies to enhance social media's potential for women's empowerment include enabling their access to technology; increasing women's representation in public life and media; and working with a cross-section of actors.

According to (Madhu Kumari, 2020), now a days, there is a trend of *#Hashtag* activism, these are the movements to eliminate violence and viciousness against women. Social media is a robust platform to deliberate and share experiences to channelize hashtag movement to stop sexual violence and to break gender stereotypes. It is a new trend to organise campaign by women's rights activists to come forward and fight for gender equality efficiently. *#Hashtag* activism has facilitated to mobilise public attention on women's rights, increasing the visibility of issues that are underreported in mainstream media. These are some *#Hashtag* movements which were very popular and effective, like:

- 1. #MeToo Movement:** This was founded by Tarana Burke in 2006 to support survivors such as dark girls and women against violence and discrimination. *#MeToo* is a movement through social media to share experiences of violence and sexual assault which became prominent by the tweet post of actress Alyssa Milano of sexual harassment in the film *fraternity* in 2017. In 2018, *#MeToo* movement shaken India as prominent and well-known personalities, actors suspect of sexual abuse and harassment.
- 2. #HeForShe:** It is a harmony drive for women by United Nation which invited people of all gender to make a daring, evident and cohesive power for gender equality. *#HeForShe* is a campaign on social media such as Twitter and Facebook. This movement was started back in the year of 2014 at United Nations by Ban Ki-moon, UN General Secretary and Emma Watson, Actor and UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador. It is an opportunity where people can reveal and discuss openly about various issues such as gender stereotypes, gender discrimination, and viciousness/violence against women, which are destructive to the growth of society.
- 3. #DelhiGangRape & "DelhiForWomenSafety":** We all remember the Nirbhaya rape case, because of this *#hashtag* campaign, within 10 days after this monstrous incident, two hashtag activism have been created called *#DelhiGangRape* & "*DelhiForWomenSafety*" and it received approx. 2 lacs likes and many people came forward to fight such crime against women in India. This heart breaking and monstrous incident got so much social media attention that Govt. of India came in action and took some very strict actions against the accused by passing more powerful/strict law to prevent such incident in future.

Apart from this, *National Commission for Women* (NCW) is also working very efficiently to fight against cyber-crime against women and relentlessly they conduct various virtual awareness programs across the nation online as well offline.

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, nationwide lockdown has been imposed across the nation to contain the spread of this virus. During the lockdown, NCW has received 2043 complaints about crime against women in June 2020, highest in eight months and 2914 complaints in July 2020, highest since November 2018.

The reason behind the increase in complaints is the amplified activity of the commission on social media platforms. NCW was so active on social media that they were registering cases received on Twitter and Facebook too. To make it more effective, NCW has launched one special WhatsApp helpline number dedicated to only receive complaints related to domestic violence or any other violence faced by women across the country, this was an initiative taken by NCW so that the victim

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can easily reach the commission by sending message, it was an easy way for women to reach out to NCW and this is one of the biggest reasons why the number of complaints has been increased during June and July 2020.

So, this is also a sign of empowerment that at least women are coming forward and reaching to the agencies for justice through social media platforms.

In the present scenario, it is a fact that technological advancements are directly or indirectly exerting its influence on women empowerment. Many issues which were neglected or ignored by the mainstream media were brought into the attention of the Public through social media, Additionally, it acts as a platform on which women can stand and express their views, creativity, thoughts and grievances in front of the world. It reverberates their ideas, opinions and concerns. It is actively playing a pivotal role in actualising the concept of women empowerment.

It has to be noted that more action-oriented programs and strategies which will explore the possibilities of Media as an effective medium which can help in realizing the vision of women empowerment are highly required at this point of time. It is also crucial to check the Cyber barriers or crimes which are fencing the women from utilizing the possibilities of virtual platforms. It is necessary to ensure that women are portrayed in a decent and dignified manner A stringent legislative effort with a wide spread social awareness with morality and ethics is required to fight these cybercrimes including the concern of objectification of women.

There is no doubt that social media can be one of the most effective platforms which can back up the concept of women empowerment. However, the effectiveness can be achieved if it used appropriately and responsibly. Therefore, it is essential that media should assign a good percentage of their programmes to create awareness among women and the society at large, giving information about women's rights and machineries to approach for their all-round development.

The paper recommends that the effectiveness of Social media as a pertinent platform which can help in the process of women empowerment should be ensured by creating awareness among men & women regarding the social media usage, its problems and possibilities. The powerful and positive role that the media can play in the empowerment of women and gender equality should be supported and further explored.

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