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The Influence of Social Media on Feminism

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Abstract

If we talk about women empowerment, digital media has played an important role in providing social rights, political rights, financial security, judicial power and all the rights that men have, however, even now, especially in villages, women who are not connected to digital media do not know what their “basic and social rights” are. But the Government of India and the State Government have focused on women’s development, for this, under the leadership of Honorable Indian Prime Minister; many initiatives have been taken from Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao to better health and education facilities and to improve their daily lives and their long-term prospects. There have been many problems at the global level for a long time regarding the improvement of the social status of women and steps have also been taken from time to time for this. After independence, traditional media, radio, television, and newspapers were expected to improve the social status of women, but this

traditional media maintained the status quo and no positive results were seen in the social status of women. Today, in the era of digital revolution, new media has played a big role in women empowerment.

Key Words

Digital Media, Digital Revolution, Education Facilities, Social Status, Traditional Media.

Introduction

In recent times, the influence of media on society has increased a lot and it has taken various forms. Media has the capacity to play an active role in the creation and formation of the concept of the world and in fact it is influencing the nature of the world. Media is called the mirror of modern society. In fact, it is the media that shapes our life and its perspective. Society is influenced by media in many ways. Media provides information about many things to the public and tells them to give opinion and take decision on various issues. It is the media that gives us the latest information about what is happening around us and in the world. There is a need to listen, analyze and interpret the message of the media as well as create our own media. Media affects the human mind and the way we behave and work in society. The level of this influence depends on the availability and prevalence of media. All traditional mass media still have a great influence on our lives. Books once had the greatest influence because they reached people before newspapers, magazines, radio or television. Newspapers and magazines became more influential as they evolved. Sound recordings and films were influential

and still are. Radio and then television were very influential. After the end of the 20th century, television brought to us images and information about science, marketing, people's d (Cochrane, 2023) difficulties and beliefs, sexuality and violence, celebrities and many such things¹. New and influential media distribution channels emerged in the 21st century. Through the spread of the World Wide Web through the Internet, we are able to exchange information and ideas every day through blogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds and many other ways.

Literature Review

1. Numerous studies have highlighted the influence of social media in perpetuating narrow beauty standards and promoting unrealistic body ideals. Researchers have identified how images of idealized bodies, often retouched and filtered, can lead to body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem among women (Perloff, 2014; Fardouly et al., 2015).
2. Social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook, have been found to reinforce the importance of physical appearance, reinforcing the objectification of women's bodies (Saguy, 2018).
3. The relationship between social media use, body image, and self-esteem has been extensively explored. Research indicates that exposure to idealized images on social media is associated with higher levels of body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).
4. Women who engage in frequent appearance-focused social media use tend to have lower self-esteem and higher body dissatisfaction (Fardouly et al., 2015).
5. A comparison with others on social media platforms can exacerbate negative body image and self-esteem (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). The constant exposure to curated and perfected online images can lead to self-comparisons and feelings of inadequacy among women.
6. Feminist scholars have highlighted the importance of considering intersectionality when examining the impact of social media on women's body image and self-esteem. Intersectionality acknowledges the interconnected nature of social identities, such as race, class, and sexuality, and their influence on experiences of body image.
7. Feminist movements on social media have emerged as a powerful response to the negative effects of beauty standards. Online activism, body-positive hashtags, and campaigns promote body acceptance, challenge narrow beauty norms, and foster inclusivity. These initiatives encourage women to redefine beauty on their own terms and celebrate diverse bodies (Saguy, 2018). Feminist influencers and communities provide support, encouragement, and alternative narratives, fostering self-acceptance and positive body image among women (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018).
8. Feminist movements and online communities in India have emerged as platforms for challenging conventional beauty standards and promoting body positivity. Online campaigns, such as #EverydaySheroes and #AllTypesAllSwipes, have aimed to diversify representations of beauty, challenge body-shaming, and foster self-acceptance (Gupta, 2020; Dasgupta, 2021). These initiatives demonstrate the potential of social media in creating spaces that empower women, promote inclusivity, and redefine beauty on their own terms.
9. Indian feminist scholarship emphasizes the importance of intersectionality in understanding the impact of social media on women's physical appearance and self-esteem. Intersectional perspectives recognize the complexities of women's experiences, considering factors such as caste, religion, class, and regional diversity. Indian scholars argue that social media's influence on body image is shaped by intersecting identities and cultural nuances (Singh, 2015; Dasgupta, 2019). Considering the diverse experiences of Indian women is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

Feminism

Feminism is a category of social and political movements and ideologies that share the goal of defining, establishing and achieving gender equality in political, economic, personal and social terms. Feminism holds that society prioritises the male perspective and that women are discriminated against and treated unfairly in these patriarchal societies. Its goals include establishing educational, professional and interpersonal opportunities and outcomes for women that are equal to those of men. Feminist theories aim to understand the nature and causes of gender inequality and explain the resulting politics of gender discrimination and its impact on the principles of the balance of power. Feminist political campaigns focus on reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay rights, sexual harassment, discrimination and sexual violence. The core theme of the feminist ideal is that gender should not be the basis for legal rights. The main criticism of modern feminist discourse has always been that its principles and philosophy have been primarily based on Western values and philosophy. However, feminist discourse remains active at its own level in every country and geographical boundaries at the grassroots level and feminist discourse of every region has its own specific problems².

Women's Connection and Presence on Social Media

Social media has become a powerful tool today, through which we not only express ourselves but can also keep an eye on the news of the whole world. Social media has also become a means of resistance and voice of the people, questioning the government, which has played an important role in feminism and various movements in changing times. The advent of technology in the world has brought significant changes in the economic, social and political scenario globally. Social media has emerged as an important tool for feminist movements in India, which gives people an opportunity to raise their voice, gather support and start discussions on various issues such as gender violence and sexual and reproductive rights. Feminism includes the principles of social, educational, economic, cultural and political equality, which advocates the removal of gender inequalities and equal opportunities and rights for people of all genders. Whereas traditional offline movements organized people by going door-to-door campaigns with the help of membership of organizations, groups, political parties, social or educational institutions. On the other hand, digital activism or movements can mobilize a large number of people much faster than offline. Although digital media reaches a limited number of people, it promotes a more inclusive approach where people can participate in movements and connect with each other through petitions, protests, personal experiences or writings without worrying about gender, class, caste or community. Social media is playing a vital¹ role in amplifying the voices and social issues of marginalized communities, running viral campaigns, challenging mainstream narratives and reshaping and organizing grassroots activism. Although women are still underrepresented on social media in the country, social media is another form of protest that tackles patriarchy, misogyny and conservatism in its own way. Through the use of technology, feminism has emerged as a powerful form of expression and resistance in the virtual world. Today, women are using digital mediums to demand accountability from governments, institutions and leaders and make their presence felt. In India, digital feminist movements rely heavily on social media platforms. With its wide reach, social media has empowered the voices of not just women but all genders, fostering global solidarity and initiating change in the world against patriarchy and conservatism³. It is not just about hashtags but much more than that. This feminism also questions patriarchal structures and those in power. Digital feminism is real and as valid as the normal protests and movements that emerge on the streets. It may not be fully inclusive, but it shapes the feminist discourse today. Despite proving its importance, digital activism and protest should not be seen in isolation from offline protests.

Obscene Image of Women and Media

Be it print media, television, cinema or radio, every man and woman in the society, even the villagers, have accepted them as a part of their daily life, but when they sit with their families and watch programs telecast by the media, then on seeing any erotic, obscene scene or advertisement, everyone becomes

uncomfortable and stares at the ground or turns their face away⁴. In the advertisements related to women's fashion, cosmetics, AIDS prevention, contraceptives in the media, the ancient traditional Indian dresses have disappeared and western dresses have been adopted and women have been shown in an obscene form. Due to which the limits of Indian women started breaking. Now new limits have started becoming the stronghold of discipline and behavior.

Feminist Leadership and its Strategies

The years after the sixties saw a radicalization of Indian politics, giving rise to a new women's liberation movement. The revolt of the youth, poor Dalits, marginalised peasants, educated Dalits, tribal men and women and industrial workers manifested itself in the formation of a number of special interest groups which addressed the needs and demands of the local population. Inspired by different political ideologies, the opposition movements of the lowest strata of society had adopted an aggressive path of struggle, while at the same time; there were significant changes in the rhetoric of larger political processes⁵. The authoritative communist parties were facing a major political challenge in the form of the Naxalbari movement in Kerala, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Punjab. In 1974, a mass movement was launched by the middle class of Gujarat against corruption, price rise, extortion, speculation, hoarding and black marketing which came to be known as Navnirman Movement. This movement was revived in Bihar as Sampurna Kranti Movement under the leadership of Gandhian leader Jayaprakash Narayan.

The Form of Relationships in the Family also started Changing

Relationships have now become formal and the seriousness of relationships has started decreasing. Earlier there used to be discipline, dignity, modesty, shame, hesitation, traditional sanskar in the family and society⁶. There was a time when husband and wife never joked in front of children or children never joked in front of elders. But today the entire family very easily watches obscene scenes in media advertisements. The society, especially women, blindly imitate the glamorous, sex symbol and fashionable image of women presented in advertisements. Due to which economic, social and cultural ill-effects on society are increasing. Due to the increasing liberal behaviour, whether it is a joint family or a nuclear family, both are going through a period of stress and disintegration/disintegration of families is also visible. The number of divorce cases in the court has also started increasing. Advertisements have created economic and mental stress in families⁷.

Women in Media

Case Studies

1. In the 2020 film 'Thappad', when Taapsee Pannu's character Amrita talks about getting a divorce just because of a slap, the women supporting Amrita in the film, her lawyer Netra Jai Singh or her brother's fiancée Swati Sandhu, are seen being told by the male characters of the film that they are becoming more feminist than lawyers. At many places in the film, both these characters have to hear such things from their male colleagues or partners because of supporting Amrita. Such dialogues show how far behind cinema is still in terms of feminism. It is ready to make films on gender issues but runs away from feminist ideology. One reason for this is that we live in a male-dominated society. Our industry, media, art and cinema industry are also not untouched by this. This is the reason that even though today media or cinema presents a strong and confident image of women, even today men have a monopoly here. Their side dominates every decision. 'Girl boss feminism' dominates here more than inclusive feminism.
2. Women also suffer immensely from the impact of media on society. The image of women as sexual objects in popular culture is also a threat to the well-being of our society.
3. Research also shows that their exposure to sexualized female images also leads to low self-esteem, negative thinking and symptoms of depression in adolescent girls and women.

4. Objectification of women in media representations treat them as objects rather than as whole human beings. This occurs in various contexts including advertising and cinema. Feminist thinkers believe that objectification of women implies a sense of denigration of women's personal and intellectual abilities and capacities and in this women's capacity or role in society is degraded to a tool for providing sexual pleasure that arouses sexual feelings in the mind of others. Media often portrays women as weak and easily possessive.
5. In India, print media and electronic media are taking advantage of their wide circulation potential. They also have an impact on the general reader and policy makers. Events rather than processes constitute news. Most issues related to women's concerns do not even fall within the traditional concept of what is considered news. Women's empowerment should lead to a situation where women can utilize their full potential and ability to create a better human society for all and the media should play a vital role in this process. The commitment and support of the media is considered essential to influence social reform and initiate various movements for women to get a better life.
6. Due to the wide popularity of television and its ability to reach a wide range of people and without making illiteracy a barrier, various governments/administrators have started using television as a medium to disseminate information about development. From the mid-1970s onwards, television started being used to propagate the messages of development among the Indian people.
7. Most of the serials on Indian television are sexualized. Even some of the so-called family TV serials victimize young girls and daughters-in-law in their homes and teach them how to be 'good'.
8. The general understanding of women's images is formed from birth as superior to men's. Even when women are presented as powerless, the patriarchal context is inevitably present. Qualities of strength and aggression are portrayed as something extraordinary about women and challenge the male ego. In families where women's roles are mostly traditional, television can reinforce such gender roles. Thus television certainly plays a role in the construction of gender roles.
9. ²The images of women and men in advertisements are constructed according to the constructed definition of femininity and masculinity. To be a woman is to be feminine and to be a man is to be masculine. There is little chance of change or role reversal. The only exception to this can be said to be the small area of new marketing. In the world of advertising, women and men are constantly presented in a stereotyped way. Men are portrayed as more autonomous than women, with men being shown in many occupations while women are shown only in the role of housewife and mother. Men are often shown advertising cars or business products, job websites, while women often appear in advertisements for household products.

Improvement of the Social Status of Women³

There have been many problems at the global level for a long time regarding the improvement of the social status of women and steps have also been taken from time to time for this. After independence, traditional media, radio, television, and newspapers were expected to improve the social status of women but this traditional media maintained the status quo and no positive results were seen in the social status of women⁸. Today, in the era of digital revolution, new media has played a big role in women empowerment. Digital media is an internet-based communication in which the person using it, whether a woman or a man, can create an online community and share any kind of information, thoughts, personal communication, video or audio with them on blogs, websites, Facebook, Twitter, Hike, Instagram, Whatsapp, YouTube etc. Through this new digital media, not only can one share one's thoughts but also earn lakhs of rupees from it, due to which women are becoming self-reliant in addition to making their voices heard⁹. If we talk about its examples, there are many such examples like Savitri Jindal, who is the chairperson of Jindal Steel and Power Limited, her annual income is said to be 8.8 billion dollars. Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw started a company named Biocon on her own.

Her total annual income is 3.6 billion dollars. There are many such examples which have earned recognition not only in India but in the whole world.

Possibilities of Feminist Movement

Thinkers associated with feminism believe that in today's age of scientific thinking, with the expansion of education; it has become clear that there is no difference in the mental and physical abilities and responsibility-related abilities of men and women.

Image 1: Social Media as a Tool to Advance Women in Cardiology: Paving the Way for Gender Equality



(Source: CJC Open Volume 3, Issue 12, Supplement, December 2021, Pages S130-S136)

Wherever women have got opportunities, they have proved themselves. Women have not lagged behind men even in the areas related to physical ability. Women have also set new records in the fields of army and sports¹⁰. Therefore, it is not logical to see women only as weak or helpless. The inferior status of women is the product of social system and not the result of natural system. The feminist movement has had more or less an impact on all types of societies. Due to the feminist movement, the condition of women has improved a lot and many far-reaching results have also been achieved. Various laws like right to vote, right to education, right to privacy, change in the law of marriage and divorce, ban on dowry and child marriage and awareness about their rights have brought revolutionary changes in the condition of women. Even today, the efforts of women empowerment are being made by the administration, government and non-government organizations, which have yielded positive results and there are many possibilities in the future¹¹. Today, the aim of feminist thinkers is not to make women equal to men but to accept the natural differences and make full use of their potential and try to remove the artificial inequalities established by the society because the complete development of any society is possible only by establishing gender equality.

Conclusion

Regarding the devaluation of women, Alison Jager has said, "The male perspective of measuring and transcending the world has always been different. Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche etc. had deep doubts about the intellectual and logical capacity of women, but the liberal movement started in 1960 and from 1970 to 1980, most of the feminist movements were conducted to free women from the shackles of slavery". The woman who was revered and respected in the Vedic period is not only the embodiment of indomitable power but is also the complement of man. The changes that have come in her with time, the voice against sexual exploitation, immorality and atrocities are indicative of progress. It is said in the Vedas, "She is a rare gift from the creator, the mother, the power, the worshiper of devotion and faith, the biggest earth in the world. She deserves the first salute. Mother is the priceless story of love. Media is the mirror of society in which the society can introspect by seeing its reflection. Participation of women in print and electronic media is praiseworthy. The way media has been cashing in on the identity of women for the past few years is pushing

the society into an endless abyss knowingly or unknowingly. Media, the messenger of religious, virtuous society, has strayed from the path of a guide and has entered the race of commercialism. Today media has also become commercialized. Today women are being displayed as an object for advertisements. During IPL matches, when a player hits a four or a six, the enthusiasm of the players is increased by displaying the body parts of women. Indirectly, such display by media shows the distorted mentality in the society, which gives strength to crime in the society. Display of women's body is seen in almost every advertisement of media. Display of women's nude body in advertisements gives the message of repulsion, not attraction. Rapes, sexual exploitation etc. in the society is the result of this. The basic mantra of commercialism is 'what is seen sells', that is why women are included in every advertisement. In front of the human beauty of a woman, the woman is being colonized by the body market. It is believed that woman is the symbol of beauty. And a beautiful sight pleases the mind. But when beauty is brought forward crossing all limits, then it becomes a symbol of misery. The development of any country's society is possible only when the women of that country are respected. Today, the media will have to be inspired to re-establish the Vedic image of "where women are worshipped, there the deity resides" instead of the materialistic image of women.

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