FEMINIST ACTIVISM THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Social media has proved to be a powerful vehicle for bringing women's rights issues to the attention of a wider public, galvanising action on the streets of cities around the world and encouraging policy makers to step up commitments to gender equality. Recent cases in many other country and India reflect the potential of social media to bridge the gap that often separates grassroots women's activism from policy-making processes. The explosion of social media and unprecedented use by women of new technologies represents important opportunities to bring gender equality and women's rights issues to the forefront of both policy making and media attention.

Social media has transformed the landscape of how information is shared globally and the relationship between citizens and governments. Beyond its use as a social networking tool, social media allows for the first time any individual to share content and opinions to a global audience, bypassing traditional media or other modes of information transmission. Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook or Twitter have allowed activists around the world to retransmit events live to a broad online audience. Local issues become global concerns; local activists become connected with global citizens.

This paper will discuss about the issues of the women, which is raised in the social media. The paper will study about the effectiveness of the social media which can be an effective lever to amplify women's voices and identify strategies to better facilitate their impact on decision-making processes. The paper will discuss the "advancing women's rights through social media".

INTRODUCTION

Connectivity has become a craving among adolescents and young adults, which manifested as over involvement in virtual world through social media. These websites are built to allow people to express themselves and to interact socially with others (McBride, 2009). A social network is online community where people share information about themselves on specific websites and connects with others through their social links in both real and virtual world, where users interacts with each other via the inbuilt communication facilities. Women Activism on social media had always been about networks, but since the early 2000s activism has been given a new platform: online social networks.

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In the early 21st century, millennial Indian women launched a radically new kind of feminist politics that had not been seen before. Inspired by a vocabulary of rights and modes of protest used by the youth across the world, such as Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring, they initiated a series of social media campaigns against the culture of sexual violence.

The earliest campaigns-the 2003 Blank Noise Project against eve-teasing, the 2009 Pink Chaddi (underwear) movement against moral policing and the 2011 SlutWalk protest against victim-blaming-were limited in their scope but set the tone for this new mode of protest. Campaigns such the 2011 Why Loiter project on women's right to public spaces, the 2015 PinjraTod (Break the Cage) movement against sexist curfew rules in student halls and the 2017 BekhaufAzadi (Freedom without Fear) March resonated with a much larger number of women, turning this social media-led phenomenon into a true feminist movement.

These online campaigns represented a heightened level of frustration among the youth in a country where, despite several decades of feminist activism, the deep-rooted problem of inequality and sexual violence persists.

FEMINIST ACTIVISM IN INDIA

Mainstream Indian feminism has tended to focus on issues such as child marriage, sex-selective abortions and dowry-related violence. It saw sexuality only in terms of extraordinary forms of sexual violence against marginal women, such as rape of Dalit (formerly "untouchable"), tribal, or Muslim women, or those living in the country's military zones such as Kashmir or the North East.

But it did little to address the question of eve-teasing-the everyday, supposedly harmless and largely sanctioned practice of sexual harassment and molestation that affects women on the streets and in workplaces, across class, caste and religion. For it, this problem could easily be solved by protecting and restricting women.

Things changed when India's 1990's economic liberalisation triggered an unintended and unexpected cultural shift in the country. It brought questions of women's freedom, choice and desire to the forefront. On the one hand, Western multinational companies that began investing in the country in a big way, opened up massive job opportunities for women in urban India. On the other, the arrival from the West of sexually explicit images-through film and cable TV-into Indian homes changed the meaning of sexuality and sexual desire for young women. Print and visual media, for example, began to show a new kind of Indian femininity that was comfortable with her modernity and sexuality.

These transformations unleashed a major backlash from conservative Indians who felt threatened by the changing lifestyle of a growing number of educated, professionally skilled and financially independent women questioning traditional gender roles and expectations.

Faced with the resultant rise of sexual violence in the society, rather than tackling the root cause of misogyny and sexism or ensuring women's safety in public places, the state and society responded by being patronizing and policing young women's behavior. They sought to keeping women safe by restricting their movement.

NEW INDIAN FEMINISM

The 2012 fatal gang rape of a 23-year-old student in Delhi became a tipping point. An unprecedented number of millennial youth launched a rallying cry for women's unconditional freedom. Recently in 2018 young girl 8 years rape in J& K and brutally murdered. Few people asserted that women have absolute right to their choices, their bodies and to their movement in public spaces at any time of day or night. They challenged outmoded cultural beliefs that women invite sexual violence through their clothes and behavior.

By bringing the discourse of freedom, sexuality, choice and desire into the public realm-in the streets and through social media-this agitation forced the government to expand its legal definition of rape, introducing harsher punishment for rapists and criminalizing stalking and voyeurism.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. Social media has proven potential for mobilising attention and accountability to women's rights, and challenging discrimination and stereotypes.

2. Obstacles remain in translating women's online advocacy to pushing for systemic change through policy.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA REVOLUTION AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Social media has transformed the landscape of how information is shared globally and the relationship between citizens and governments (Shirky, 2011). Beyond its use as a social networking tool, social media allows for the first time any individual to share content and opinions to a global audience, bypassing traditional media or other modes of information transmission. Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook or Twitter have allowed activists around the world to retransmit events live to a broad online audience. Local issues become global concerns; local activists become connected with global citizens beside the campaign people started the # hashtag activism. Women's rights movements have also been quick to capitalise on social media's unprecedented political and awareness-raising potential.

a. **HASHTAG ACTIVISM** bringing women's issues to the forefront of political agendas: Hashtag activism has helped to mobilise public attention on women's rights, increasing the visibility of issues that are under-reported in mainstream media. For example in 2013, the #BringBackOurGirls campaign reached over 1 million tweets, helping to raise awareness of both national and international actors of the need to help rescue the abducted Nigerian schoolgirls (Tomchak, 2014). Before the hashtag campaign's success, the case received little media attention (Dewey, 2014). UN Women's successful and high-profile #HeForShe campaign further highlights the potential of social media to attract new and larger audiences: the campaign engaged with more than 1.2 billion people, putting the global spotlight on the need to engage men and boys to achieve

gender equality. After the Delhi rape case was first reported, activists adopted several approaches to nomenclature to mobilize and energize participants. Some activists tagged content with generic subject matter headings, which functioned much like common search terms, as in the case of the #delhirapecase or #delhigangrapehashtags. Many also followed the lead of newspapers and television channels in using pseudonyms to name the victim without naming her. In an environment of competition for an original scoop, pseudonyms proliferated such as #Amanat, the Urdu word for "treasure," or #Damini, which means "lightning, or #Nirbhaya, "the fearless one." To participate in a common cultural conversation, some Twitter users deployed all three hashtags in one tweet, sacrificing valuable ASCII characters in the name of comprehension.

b. **TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS:** Social media tools have helped female victims to share their experiences of violence with other victims, creating a space to exchange knowledge and information on their rights, legal processes and welfare services. In 2010, HarassMapwas launched in Egypt as an online mapping tool to allow victims to anonymously report cases of sexual harassment directly from their mobile phone. This crowd-sourcing initiative maps all the reports and is coupled with campaigns to raise awareness on the scale of the problem in Egypt (Young, 2014). The mainstream media is very much politicized and it picks up women issues according to the political interest of patron political parties. Due to the lack of resources and trained work force, the media is not capable to produce widely impressive materials. Some of the women issues like trafficking, prostitution and rape come in the media just to create sensation. The media seems to be less concerned about women's issues and rights. the following

recommendations can be advanced for futher action regarding media advocacy to combat violence against women.

c. **PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY:** Social media has been increasingly used by women's grassroots organisations to call for greater public accountability towards gender equality. Following the 2012 gang rape of a young woman in Delhi, the #DelhiGangRape hashtag campaign brought the scale of gender-based violence in India into the spotlight. The hashtag campaign supported public street mobilisation which saw the government introduce specific anti-rape provisions in the Criminal code (Sharma, 2014). Similarly, in Turkey, the rape and murder of a young woman led to a mass Twitter protest through the hashtags #sendeanlat (tell your story) and #ozceganaslan. Large street protests provoked a discussion among political and civil society leaders about violence against women in the country. One area of concern in the public education sector is the increasing involvement of private players in developing interventions that can create dependencies and skew learning processes in inimical ways. The numerous initiatives in digital literacy undertaken through private partnerships with the public education sector need a careful assessment for their pedagogic and educational outcomes. Given that girls are often targeted by such programmes, it would be useful to know how such initiatives ground themselves in national education policies and vision on gender equality and social justice.

THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF WOMEN'S ONLINE ACTIVISM

Despite the high visibility and success of many of these campaigns, the extent to which women's online activism has been able to shape and influence policy making remains patchy and

unpredictable. This mirrors the struggle of grassroots women's activism to be heard in decisionmaking processes, and the broader marginalisation of women in public life. Increasing their political participation has been linked to more gender-responsive public policies (Brody, 2009). Recent results of the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), a measure of discriminatory social institutions across 160 countries, demonstrate that 86 countries have no quotas to promote women's political participation either at national or sub-national level. Limited female representation within formal decision-making and leadership for a is compounded by the marginalisation of women's civil society organisations within national institutional mechanisms.

Barriers to women's political agency are replicated in women's online activism.

a. **WOMEN'S LIMITED ACCESS TO NEW TECHNOLOGIES:** Fully taking advantage of social media for political advocacy is restricted for many women by illiteracy, language barriers and the digital divide in infrastructure between rural and urban areas. These factors affect in particular rural and indigenous women's online advocacy and opportunities to connect with other activists.

b. **LIMITED NETWORKING WITH INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS:** Lower networking opportunities with cross institutional partners, including decision makers and public figures, and disconnection from local women's movements can negatively affect the success of women's online activism.

c. **INFORMATION OVERLOAD AND SCALING UP**: a plethora of small online campaigns on specific issues can overwhelm and lead to activism fatigue. This affects the ability to scale up a campaign to a global level and attract new audiences.

d. **CENSORSHIP AND HARASSMENT:** Female-written blogs and websites have also been subject to censorship by governments. Sexual harassment of female activists has been reported in the online discussion and websites providing information on subjects related to sexual health and reproductive rights have been taken offline. Negative gender stereotypes and lower representation of women in both traditional and new media organisations also silence women's online voices.

A HOLISTIC MOVEMENT

What is unique about this movement is that it is a multilayered struggle. It combines freedom from sexual oppression with freedom from caste, ethnic and religious oppression.

The ChaloDilli or #NotInMyName movements rose up against the right-wing state led violence against Dalits and Muslims. In this sense, this new feminist agitation represents an impressive level of maturity, inclusivity and political sophistication.

There is new movement as the rise of "fourth-wave" feminism in India. That barrow's the idea from the British journalist and writer Kira Cochrane and the American feminist blogger Jessica Valenti. While Cochrane and Valenti define the fourth wave in the West as online feminism, fourth wave in India, I claim, is a mostly social media-led holistic movement that combines women's freedom with a wider call for social justice for minority men and women.

CONCLUSION FOR ENHANCING WOMEN'S ONLINE ADVOCACY

The importance of stronger female representation in decision-making processes and public life as a means to tackle entrenched inequality, discrimination and negative gender stereotypes.

"Train women to make greater use of information technology for communication and the media" Ensuring equal access to and use of new technologies is critical for maximising social media's advocacy role. Training gender advocates on strategic means for organising an online campaign (e.g. use of hashtags, monitoring impact, identifying target audiences and developing strong messaging) could optimise women's social media use. "Increase women's capacity to participate in decision making and leadership" Increasing female leadership in media organisations as well as in decision-making processes can help the success of online advocacy campaigns focusing on women's rights. Strategic partners can ensure that the policy loop is complete and that advocacy can influence both decision-making processes and public awareness on key women's rights issues. Involve a cross-sector of actors, including grassroots women's networks, traditional media and men. Social media campaigns need to build on and collaborate with local women's movements in order to strengthen advocacy efforts. In particular, linking social media with traditional media can scale up campaigns. Moreover, involving men and other nontraditional partners can reinforce messaging and help campaigns attract greater attention both locally and globally.

Women's presence in social media as activists, as individuals with a distinct sensibility and identity of their own is an inspiring trend. Even though it is restricted primarily in the urban India and the hurdles in the form of online stalking and abuse of various kinds is ever present, women have emerged as cautious yet conscious online presence who will soon build itself into a force to be reckoned with.

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