Role of Social Media in Showcasing Women Atrocities: A Study on Jaipur Youth

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Abstract
This study tries to explore the various ways in which social media has played an active role in showcasing instances of women injustices and atrocities and to develop an overview of the opinion of the Jaipur youth regarding the role of social media in highlighting women related issues and problems.

Keywords: Social media, gender, audience

Introduction

Times have changed and present time is reflective of Social Media playing an instrumental role in changing the mindset of the people in various ways. It has been a major force behind many social changes, debates, mass movements and creating activist groups. Nobody is unfamiliar with some of the most brutal and heinous crimes related to rape like Nirbhaya Gang Rape, Kamduni Gang Rape Case, Delhi Uber Cab Rape Case, Mumbai Shakti Mill Rape Case, Mumbai Hospital Rape Case of Aruna etc. These cases of women atrocities would not have been able to draw such immense attention of the masses without the active employment of social media tools by them and the people expressing their strong opinion on the different facets of the case. Times are such where important happenings and issues become a matter of concern and widespread debate within seconds of the outbreak of the event.

Digital Activism has completely revolutionized the area of ICT and has created a platform which is more interactive, participatory, trackable and measurable and above all a very strong tool of mass sharing of ideas and viewpoints, resulting in the formation of very strong and active opinion groups or activists or advocacy groups. According to Guardian, “The new movement is powerful yet diffuse, linked not by physical closeness or even necessarily by political consensus, but by the mobilizing force of social media. A Hashtag or twitter can link the disparate fates of unarmed black men shot down by white police in a way that transcends geographical boundaries and time zones.

A shared post on facebook can organize a protest in a matter of minutes. Documentary photos and videos can be distributed on Tumblr Pages, through Instagrams and Vines. There have been innumerable instances where social media activities have been the root cause of social concern, widespread debate and discussion and social upsurge and where they have been the strongest tool behind all kinds of social activism based campaigns. When the question of Media Activism and specially internet activism arises, the power of social media cannot be undermined or ignored. No matter whether its blogging or facebook or twitter, they all have been equally instrumental behind inspiring and giving rise to so many uprisings and mass protests and revolutions.

India is full of innumerable examples where we find social media acting as a strong force behind many agitations, mass mobilization and mass opinion building. Whether its Ravi Srinivasan’s arrest for a tweet or the national wave of support for nirbhaya and the mass protest against outdated Indian laws or the public anger highlighted in the social media regarding reservation or the very sensitive gay sex issue becoming a strong matter of social media debate or the political activism created on social media by political parties like BJP or AAP where social media had an active role in influencing the mindset of the voters and bringing a major political change in the country.

Social Media and Women Issues and Atrocities

When talking about social media activism and its increasing significance in the direction of social change in the last few years, a major fact which cannot be denied is that social media besides dealing with the various aspects of society and its issues and concerns, has also been very active in showcasing women related matters and issues and has also at times acted as strong advocates of women’s rights and freedom.

There are quite a good number of cases where social media has been very successful in influencing the mindset of the viewers regarding their perception towards certain prominent women issues and problems and where it has been instrumental behind the formation of strong opinion groups and protests and mass demonstrations.

In the present times, we find the widespread use of blogs, social networking websites, twitter and smart phones as highly powerful and extremely influential platforms where issues related to women injustices and atrocities as well as violation of human rights, domestic violence and infringement of freedom of speech, thought and expression can be discussed or shared, thus contributing in building strong opinion groups or lobbyists with a very focused point of view and giving rise to people’s movements.
A term which is highly being discussed at various platforms is violence against women. The best example of growing usage of social media platform for bringing social changes is the example of various cyber campaigns which have taken place from time to time to showcase violence against women. Some of the prominent ones amongst them are Bell Bajao, 50 millions Missing Campaigns, Men against rape and discrimination, LAADLI-A girl child campaign and violence against women, Stop Acid Attacks E-Campaign, Safe Delhi Campaign and “I am Nirbhaya because I am not alone.

Review of Literature

As said by Mohammad El-Nawawy and Sahar Khamir in “Political Activism 2.0: Company the Role of Social Media in Egypt’s “Facebook Revolution” and Iran’s “Twitter Uprising”, “Social Media has been effective in bringing together the youngsters and empowering them in their fights against repressive regimes and their struggle for independence.

According to Mirani, S., Pannu, P. & Malhotra.C., New Information Communication technologies have emerged as strong tools for social engagement. It plays a vital role in shaping social movements, raising awareness and ultimately giving rise to a voice-setting ground for activism and citizen journalism.

According to Sarup K (2005), The key role of media should always be to bring out cases of social evils and wrong doings prevalent in society. The writer brings before a major fact that cases of violence against women has always been very sensitive and sensational and this is the area which demands more cautious and balanced coverage by media. The author has stressed that media has a greater role to play in the direction of creating awareness amongst violence striken women section and make them more well informed about their rights in order to make them self independent and strong. According to her, “By increasing access to confidential resources and information about sexual assault, dating and domestic violence and stalking and by improving law enforcement communication between jurisdictions, media are critical to ending violence against women and girls.

As with most positive technological developments, potential negative impacts are inherent and should be addressed. So media should develop story lines, images, characters, programmes and products that promote healthy attitudes towards women, masculinity relationships and sexualinity. Media should provide fair and full coverage of women in politics, sports, business, health and education.

Women face various types of injustices like domestic violence, sexual harassment at workplace, acid attacks etc. Facebook page named, “Fighting injustices against Indian women “, discusses about the various women laws, women related major judicial declarations to make women sufficiently informed about some of the major issues concerning them and the legal remedy available in order to make them more confident and strong in the present patriarchal set up of society.

Another facebook page named, “ Arcis-Fight against women injustice “ by making use of highly motivating slogans and lines greatly inspires women to raise their voice against all kinds of injustices being done on them and ignites a tru spirit of courage and confidence in them.

According to Smith, C (2014), social media and specially facebook is one of the strongest platform where amongst all global issues, violence against women related issues finds the most supporters. The author also highlights 16 anti-violence against women related Facebook pages that are very impressive and unique in terms of the issues they deal with and their style of delivery.

Chakrabart, K. (2013) commented on the usefulness of new media and the transformative potential of social media by saying that in the post-facebook world, the nature of involvement and engagement of people have undergone remarkable changes. The freedom and independence of social media has provided ample opportunity to stage and bring forth the various contemporary women issues and women movement dealing with gender issues like women atrocities and injustice. The author pointed out that the very decentralized, interactive and participatory nature of social media has enabled various women activists and organizations to raise their voices against the vicious impact of gender bias and gender violence. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, My Space, Blogs, You Tube and numerous online communities have created platforms for strong participation of the people in some of the major debates and discussions concerning gender discrimination, specially discrimination of women in terms of equality of rights and security.

A major study which has rightly described how social media has been instrumental in the direction of maligning the status of women, thus affecting their position in society was done by Halder, D.(2015). The author cited certain examples of women celebrities who are female journalists and how they have been harassed due to the damaging impact of social media. The author has criticized social media by commenting that the advent of digital communication technology has made the attack on women more frequent, more viral, organized, personal and with a set pattern. The author by citing the example of Sagarika Ghosh, a senior woman journalist tried to draw the attention of the masses towards how women are harassed and have been the victims of social media abuse, specially twitter.
VAWA (Voice Against Women Atrocity), is a facebook page which regularly posts inspiring write-ups focusing on gender laws and showing the path towards how women should fight for their rights and freedom.

The description given by Ahmed, F. (2005) in his blog, “The Law:Legal Analysis Wing” has very rightly described the present contribution of social media platforms. He says that social media nowadays is just not restricted to gossiping, love and friendship based postings but rather its being increasingly used to discuss serious socio-economic and legal issues which greatly influence the mindset of the viewers. The author says that nowadays social media is flooded with pictures, posts, links and videos strongly advocating women issues, specially gender equality.

According to internet link, “How has facebook affected the quality life for women in india”, in today’s patriarchal society, social media is the first platform which has provided equal opportunity to both men and women. Facebook has given new dimension to a woman’s identity by serving the purpose of being the most widely used platform where women can post her feelings in the form of facebook status, pics, comments, likes and shares and thus stage her opinion in a very strong manner amongst the masses which was earlier unnoticed and unheard.

A very important article by Sanghani, R.(2014) rightly emphasizes on the ever increasing significance of social media in terms of bringing forth women issues, specially rape cases. She comments that women are rather nowadays sharing their personal stories of rape on social media, self-identifying as rape survivors. But she has also pointed out that the increasing number of posts are also at the same time very saddening as they reflect clearly the increasing cases of sexual violence in India and the government’s negligent approach.

Some Popular Campaigns and Cases on Social Media

Nirbhaya Gang Rape Case

A case which shook the conscience of the masses and literally forced every person to come on the streets and stage their protest against the lethargic Indian Legal system and which shook the very foundation of the functioning of the judiciary. The 23 year old medical student who was gang raped and then brutally murdered in a bus in Delhi on 16th Dec, 2012 questioned the basic issue of woman safety and security. The case wouldn’t have become a widely discussed one had the social media not played its active role in making the incident a matter of public debate and discussion. Facebook and Twitter played a major role in not only showcasing the anger of the masses but it proved out to be the strongest platform where people staged their anger and utter frustration against the government’s indifferent attitude towards the incident.

The case rather encouraged many journalists also to resort to facebook and twitter for updates on events and check the feedback of the activists. An Australian Reporter said that, “Twitter was really helpful to get a sense of the public sentiment and developments.” He followed the # delhigangrape hashtag, the official Twitter account of the Indian Government, women’s groups, pressure groups and Indian media on the subject. Facebook was the only place where strong opinion groups were formed and were posts became viral within seconds or people showed their support for nirbhaya by changing the facebook profile picture to a black dot.

Turkey’s Twitter Campaign

In a major case in Turkey, a woman was murdered brutally when she tried her level best to protect herself and stop the rapist. The incident immediately sparked mass agitations in Turkey and encouraged many more Turkish women to take on to social media in cases of women atrocities, murder and all kinds of sexual harassment.

A major observation was done by E.D.Ockterman (2014) in her write-up titled, “Rape Survivors talk about why they tweeted their stories.” The article raised a major question as to whether all sorts of conversation about sexual assault on social media helps victims to heal their pain or rather on the contrary hurts them.

The article describes a case of Jo Anne Cusick who had to face sexual assault at a very tender age of eight but unfortunately lacking in courage at that time could not speak about it but after 28 years she shared the tweet on social media, joining the group of hundred other victims who also tweeted about their stories of assault. All these victims responded to one simple question as to what were they wearing when they were assaulted.

The posts soon became viral and ignited widespread conversation on social media and blogs among victims as to whether sharing stories on public platforms of social media was truly a healthy step in the recovery process.

The debate started when Christine Fox, a young woman who regularly tweeted under the handle @ steenfox, had to face an argument from a follower that women were themselves responsible for all these assaults as they often wear revealing clothes and then they are assaulted. She strongly contradicted by replying that most of the women who are raped are decently dressed and added a hastag: # RapeHasNoUniform.

There are many cases where woman have expressed all their personal miseries and pain on twitter and they have never felt
shy about it as they strongly feel that exposing such stories through social media platforms rather makes the woman more careful, more strong and courageous and gives them a lesson of never to trust anyone as they can only be the perpetrators.

In fact it has been reported that female social media users have drastically gone up, clearly indicating the real power of social media. Women have been the right users of social media, whether it’s the question of bringing forth their painful stories or igniting thought provoking conversations on various issues related to women atrocities or gender inequality and social change.

**Delhi Rape in Uber Cab**

A horrific case took place in Delhi which again shook and questioned the basic issue of safety of girls in delhi was the rape case of a 27 year old finance executive working in a finance company in Gurgaon. The 27 year old was raped by a taxi driver while she was returning home from a dinner party in Gurgaon. The incident gave rise to certain reports titled, “ Delhi Rape: Twitter flooded with angry messages against Uber”.

Social Media played a very active role in the case and the comments and opinion of the people on Twitter made the public think for a while about the woman safety issue in such hired taxis. Uber had a tough time to win back the trust of the customers as the mass uproar on social media had completely damaged it image in the market.

Twitter was flooded with messages posted by previous Uber Cab users who said that they all were deleting the app and refused to use its services in future.

**Oxfam India Campaign**

Oxfam India shared the popular campaign named, “We can Campaign towards reduction of violence against women and for political empowerment” and launched, “ The Close the Gap Campaign in Social Networking” like social networking sites having the tagline, “Indians demand equality for women”. These campaigns have been highly successful in reaching out to the masses including rural India too through its interactive response system which encourages the users of social media to express their opinion too in the form of conversations dealing with gender issues and gender equality.

**Bell Bajao E-Campaign**

This was a very popular and a successful campaign meant for fighting against domestic violence. The campaign appealed to the local residents to adopt a sincere and a serious stand against domestic violence through simple acts which were meant to interrupt all kinds of domestic violence taking place in their vicinity.

The acts could be either borrowing tea or a glass of water. The campaign gave a very clear message that through such acts the residents can show the accused that they are aware of such atrocities on women and if they want they can resort to certain actions too.

**Objective behind the Study**

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To develop an in depth understanding about the growing significance of social media in highlighting various women issues and problems
2. To explore the various ways in which social media has played an active role in showcasing instances of women injustices and atrocities
3. To develop an overview of the opinion of the Jaipur youth regarding the role of social media in highlighting women related issues and problems
4. To derive a conclusion on the basis of the opinion of the youngsters regarding whether social media has been successful in strongly raising the various women issues and cases of women atrocities and thus creating a strong opinion base amongst the masses.

**Methodology**

**Data Collection**

The research made an exhaustive study of various online secondary data available which described about the growing significance of social media in strengthening women’s status in society by acting as strong advocates championing their issues and point of view. The study also employed primary research method and a survey has been conducted on Jaipur Youth by employing Questionnaire Method.

**Sample Design**

The study employed Survey Methodology in the form of questionnaire distributed randomly to a sample strength of 50 students of the age group of 18-28 to gather primary data in the form of their feedback on the topic and to seek their opinion about how much and in which way do they feel social media to be emerging as one of the strongest weapons for safeguarding women rights and freedom of speech, thought and expression.

**Results and Findings**

Data so obtained was analyzed on the basis of percentage method and presented below from Tables 1-10.

1. **Regular user of Social Media**

Response to the question, “ Are you a regular user of Social Media?” (Pie Chart 1)

**Key Findings**
Out of the total 50 respondents, 96% youth confirmed that they are regular users of Social Media and a very nominal 4% of the sample said they were not regular users. The results clearly demonstrated that in the present times social media has emerged as the strongest and the most widely used media platform by the youngsters.

There are a number of reasons behind growing popularity of Social Media amongst the youth, whether it is their interactive and very participatory format or interesting quality or the fact that they are a very important networking medium. But it cannot be denied that this media has tremendous influencing impact on the mindset of the youth.

2. Regularly used Social Media
Response to the question, “ If Yes, then which one of these do you regularly use?” (Pie Chart 2)

Key Findings
A major observation of the study was that out of all social media tools maximum number of respondents, i.e. 38% of the youth used Whatsapp as one of their most liked and preferred digital media tool, followed by 34% using Facebook as the most preferred tool. The third highest percentage was of twitter being used by 14% of the sample. Rest media tool consisting of You Tube, Pinterest and Blogs secured a very nominal percentage less than 10%. The results indicate that youth of the age group of 18-28 years were mostly using whatsapp and facebook and the contents on these digital platforms were mostly noticed and talked about by the youth.

3. Frequency of Usage of Social Media Tools
Response to the question, “ What is the frequency of usage of Social Media Tools?” (Pie Chart 3)

Key Findings
The above results made it very clear that social media has undoubtedly taken the place of being the most popular media amongst the youth, although they might be using it for different purposes. Therefore it becomes very necessary to find out their frequency of the usage of social media so that it becomes clear as what level of significance do they attach to these tools. More than half of the sample, i.e 56% of them used social media 4-5 times a day. 30% of the sample replied that they used social media 2-3 times a day. The findings are clear indications that youth are very addicted towards social media. The percentage of usage in terms of other frequency interval was very less, i.e 10% and below. The findings revealed that social media contents greatly influence the perception of the youth as they are the regular users of this media and moreover they mostly use it 4-5 times a day, which is a sufficient number to indicate that they love using social media and consider it as one of the most beneficial and interesting tool to reach out to their friends, relatives and the public at large and a very effective medium to bring forth their views and opinion in front of the public.

4. Purpose behind using Social Media
Response to the question, “ You use Social Media mostly for?” (Pie Chart 4)

Key Findings
A major finding of the research study was regarding the purpose behind youth making use of Social Media. Majority of the respondents, i.e 40% of them were of the strong opinion that they used social media for gathering information about latest issues, happenings and trends of the society, indicating that in the present times people, specially youth who are the regular users of social media consider it to be as one of the major news source too besides just using it as tool for networking with friends or entertainment. We also cannot ignore the fact that one of major functions of social media has always been making friends and networking with them, so 34% of the sample’s opinion was that they use this media for this purpose. 18% of the respondents were again of the view that social media nowadays by also showcasing various prominent issues and happenings of the society, specially women issues contribute to great extent in sharing and building up strong opinion groups amongst the masses. A major finding which emerged from the study was that the least number of people, i.e. only 8% of them nowadays use social media just for entertainment. Thus 74% of the youth nowadays use this tool very constructively for being informed and then sharing their opinion with all like minded people and finally building a strong opinion group.

5. Nature of activity mostly done by respondents on Social Media (Pie Chart 5)
Response to the question, “ What is the nature of activity mostly done by you on Social Media?”

Key Findings
A major observation of the study was that in the present times, since this digital tool is being used primarily by youngsters for sharing and building a strong opinion group amongst the masses, the nature of activity they mostly resort to is liking the various post and comments related to social issues as 44% of the sample fall in this category. An equal number of youth i.e. 22% regularly post their thoughts concerning the major issues of society or share those posts which they like and believe in. 12% of the sample believed in commenting on various posts which reflected their point of view.
6. Social Media as a powerful platform for influencing the mindset of the viewers about the prominent issues related to women. (Pie Chart 6)

Response to the question, “Do you feel Social Media is a powerful platform for influencing the mindset of the viewers about the prominent issues related to women?”

Key Findings
A major objective of the study was to find out the opinion of Jaipur youth regarding the role of social media in highlighting women related issues and problems. The findings revealed a major fact that almost the entire sample of population which consisted of Jaipur Youth i.e. 96% were of the opinion that social media is a powerful platform for influencing the viewer’s mindset about women related issues. No doubt we see that all those cases concerning women whether its regarding women rights or various types of atrocities against women, primarily rape cases which go unnoticed in the mainstream media, find a place for them in social media, where people immediately voice their opinion, share it with many more, give rise to debates and discussions and create a strong follower group. Thus Jaipur Youth strongly felt that social media in a way has emerged as a platform which has given voice to the voiceless and the very neglected and tortured women sections of the society, where they don’t shy away in bringing forth their painful stories amongst the masses and such stories greatly influence the mindset of the youth propelling them to come forward and stage their view point on it and build up a strong opinion group.

7. Women Issue which attracts the attention of the respondents to the most
Response to the question, “If yes, then indicate which type of women issue attracts your attention to the most?” (Pie Chart 7)

Key Findings
A major objective of the study was to know the opinion of Jaipur Youth regarding do they feel that Social Media has emerged as a very strong alternate media in showcasing women issues and atrocities and does it really motivate the masses to come forward and fight for gender justice. Majority of the respondents, i.e. 52% of the sample were of the opinion that issues related to rape and sexual molestation grabbed the eyeballs of the youth to the greatest extent and have been successful in giving rise to mass agitations and protests. 28% of the youth were mostly influenced by issues of gender bias. 12% of the youth revealed that cases of domestic violence attracted their attention to the most and a very nominal number of people, i.e. 8% were affected by cases of dowry related tortures and deaths. The results made it clear that presently social media has become one of the strongest platforms where women can talk about their personal worries and pain, specially cases related to rape and all kinds of sexual assault have been successful to the greatest extent in agitating the youth of the nation and compelling them to come on the streets to demonstrate their unity in fighting for gender justice and equality.

8. Whether Social Media News activates people to the extent of staging protests and agitations (Pie Chart 8)
Response to the question, “Do you think Social Media News and Updates can activate people to the extent of staging protests and agitations?”

Key Findings
The above findings revealed that social media greatly influences the opinion of Jaipur Youth regarding various cases of women atrocities and they have been highly instrumental behind giving rise to various online debates and discussions, thus leading to the formation of a strong opinion group which fight for women justice. Another major conclusion which emerged from the survey was that 96% of Jaipur Youth just didn’t consider social media as a strong tool for showcasing cases of women injustices but they also were of the opinion that many such cases of women atrocities highlighted on social media have even been highly successful in not only influencing the perception level of youth but also driving them to the extent of expressing their opinion in the form of mass protests and agitations thus demanding for women justice.

9. Whether social impact and strong reaction generated by Social Media can lead to change in Government Policy
Response to the question, “Do you think Social Media can lead to change in Government Policy or the Social Environment?” (Pie Chart 9)

Key Findings
Majority of the Jaipur Youth were of the opinion that cases of women atrocities highlighted on social media and the resulting opinion of the masses expressed through protests and demonstrations results in changing the social environment, thus forcing the government to change their policy which some way or the other has helped in restoration of women equality and gender justice.

10. How can Social Media be used to highlight atrocities on women and create strong public opinion and ensure justice
Response to the question, “To create strong public opinion, how would you use Social Media to highlight atrocities on women and ensure justice?” (Pie Chart 10)

Key Findings
A major objective of the study was to find out how youth make use of social media to bring before women issues and cases
of atrocities against women. 40% of the youth use social media for discussing and debating on various issues of women atrocity and gender equality and justice thus creating a strong group of like minded people who come on the streets to fight for women justice. Second highest percentage of youth, i.e. 28% were of the opinion that they use social media for posting their point of view regarding cases of women injustice and atrocities although not to the level of influencing others to unite and form an advocacy group. 16% of Jaipur Youth believed in sharing messages and videos on various social media platforms which would keep the masses aware and informed about women issues. A very nominal percentage, less than 10% of the youth were of the opinion they used social media for either posting videos on You Tube or commenting on others comments or sharing tweets and hashtags.

Conclusion

The research study made it amply clear that social media has emerged as a very strong digital platform. It is the most widely used Digital Media Tool where cases of women atrocities are just not noticed but where the masses, specially youth get a chance to express their strong opinion on various issues, thus giving rise to various forms of protests and demonstrations both on social media platform as well as on the streets which finally results in compelling the government, which is most of the time indifferent and partial to change their policies in the direction of restoration of women equality and gender justice. The study through certain cases as well as by conducting a survey on Jaipur Youth revealed that youth greatly feel that this is one of the strongest platform which highlights women issues, specially those where women have been the victims of all kinds of atrocities like rape and sexual molestation and taking into consideration the very interactive and participatory nature of social media, it has also given the youth a place to bring forth their strong opinion as well as protest against the negligent and lethargic attitude of the government.

References


APPENDIX

Regular User of Social Media

Yes: 48
No: 2

Pie Chart 1

Regularly used Social Media Platform

Facebook: 19
You Tube: 7
Twitter: 4
Blogs: 1
Whatsapp: 1
Pinterest: 2

Pie Chart 2

Frequency of Usage of Social Media Tools

4-5 times a day: 28
1-2 times a day: 15
1-2 times a week: 1
4-5 times a week: 5
Others: 1

Pie Chart 3
Purpose behind using Social Media

- Getting Information: 20
- Networking with Friends/Relatives: 4
- Entertainment: 17
- To share and build up opinion on various issues: 9

Nature of Activity mostly done by respondents on Social Media

- Posting: 22
- Commenting: 11
- Sharing: 6
- Liking: 11

Opinion regarding Social Media as a powerful platform for influencing the viewer's mindset about women issues

- Yes: 4
- No: 46

Women Issue which attracts the attention of the respondents to the most

- Rape and Sexual Molestation: 26
- Gender Bias: 14
- Dowry: 4
- Domestic Violence: 6
Whether Social Media News activates people to the extent of staging protests and agitations

Pie Chart 8

Whether social impact and strong reaction generated by Social Media can lead to change in Government Policy or the Social Environment

Pie Chart 9

Using Social Media to highlight atrocities on women and create strong public opinion and ensure justice

Pie Chart 10