Empowerment through Social Media Usage: A Comparative Study of Males and Females

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment through social media usage has become a popular topic of research, particularly with respect to gender differences. Empowerment is the development of an individual and exerting control over their lives along with the capability of effective decision making that is in favour of their comfort. Social media has emerged as a powerful tool that individuals can use to enhance their social, economic, and political power. Social media now plays a very pivotal role in our day to day life and has revolutionized our ways of interaction. It has not only changed the way we connect with people but has also created opportunities for empowerment and personal growth. This study adopts a comparative approach to understand how males and females differ in their use of social media for empowerment. By comparing the experiences of males and females in using social media for empowerment, this study aims to shed light on the potential challenges and opportunities that each gender faces.

Keywords: *Social Media, Empowerment, Comparative Study, Decision Making, Social Media Experiences*

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's economic empowerment are crucial issues that require the involvement of various actors, including governments, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the media. The media play a significant role in shaping the distribution and comprehension of information, improvement, and news. They can also accelerate women's empowerment and promote gender equality by disseminating healthy concepts and good examples of women's economic achievements. The media can contribute to the distribution of the ideas of gender equality through the implementation of media campaigns that overcome the differences between men and women (Narayana & Ahamad, 2016).

Carstensen (2009) examined the intersection of gender and web 2.0, including social network sites, "wikis", and "weblogs", and finds that weblogs offer an avenue for constructing various identities and expressing queer subjectivity and politics that are not necessarily linked to their real identities. whereas the design and usage of social network sites emphasize binary gender roles. Weblogs provide a space for the construction of diverse identities, despite the fact that the design and use of social networking sites still place an emphasis on binary gender roles. Social network sites and wikis provide a forum for tackling complex gender issues through fostering active networks, solidarity, and engagement in queer-feminist politics. Moreover, the act of self-presentation on such platforms can be a powerful tool for managing gender identities, as it demands individuals to develop new forms of self-control through media management and self-reflection.

Performance theory is a useful framework for understanding how gender is performed in social media. To begin, it is essential to recognize the gendered history of digital technologies. These technologies were formerly conquered by men, and as a result, they have always been gendered, with early computers and video games targeting primarily boys and men. Social media platforms provide distinctive affordances for specific gender, allowing users to create and manipulate their online identities. Social media can be used to both reinforce and challenge traditional gender roles. Some people use these platforms to challenge the prevalent gender typecasts and promote for increased gender equality. However, others use social media to reproduce existing sex role stereotypes, either because of software limitations or social pressure from other users (Webb & Temple, 2015). Chowdhury & Patnaik (2010) argues that promoting gender equality in India is impossible without the involvement and support of men. Although promoting women's empowerment through policies and programs is important, it is not enough to achieve long-term transformation in gender relations. Empowering boys and men through information, capacity building, and a change in mindset is necessary for achieving true gender equality. There is a significant importance on mutual understanding and cooperation between men and women in building an empowered society and family structure and a balanced and equitable family structure is necessary for achieving women's liberation and the survival of the family, society, and governance structures in India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is clear that social media has both reinforced gender stereotypes and offered opportunities for feminist politics. Although research has found that gender no longer plays an important part in the access and usage of social media, there are still fixed stereotypical ways of gender in the construction of these media which perpetuate the "binary gender system". Active users and resistant users have struggled against these scripts, but the possibilities for intervention in the way social media is build are limited. Still, the quantity of debates and discussions on gender in these platforms have improved, and the web offers a greater range of forums for people to connect and mobilize for feminist aims. While feminist views are often met with rejection and aggression, the rise of Twitter and blogs has supported decentralized networking and discussion, which is beneficial for feminist political activism. In this process of constituting, users act across sexism, stereotypes, negotiations, gender irrelevance, and empowerment (Carstensen, 2014).

Idemudia et al. (2017) studied the gender differences in social media continuance usage and found that women have stronger perceptions of "ease of use", "compatibility", "relative advantage", and "risk" in social media usage than men, while males have greater perceptions of "satisfaction" and "information quality". "Perceived usefulness", "ease of use", "satisfaction", and "compatibility" positively affect social media persistence use for both males and females but the relative advantage has greater effect on "usefulness" for women, while information quality has greater effect on "usefulness" for men.

The Arab region has undergone significant societal and political transformations in recent years, with the empowerment of large segments of the population, including Arab youth, women, and netizens. Social media usage has also grown considerably across the Arab world, with major changes in usage trends. Social media has been instrumental in the rapid and transformative changes that have occurred in the region, with women playing a crucial role in political and civic actions that have contributed to these changes. (Mourtada & Salem, 2011).

The struggle for women to be heard in administrative processes and to have adequate representation in public life is mirrored in their online activism. While women's online campaigns have gained high visibility and success, their ability to form and impact

policymaking remains sporadic and inconsistent. This is due to the broader marginalization of women in public life and decision-making processes. Increasing women's political participation has been linked to more gender-responsive public policies, but limited female representation within formal decision-making and leadership fora persists. The lack of quotas to promote women's political participation in many countries exacerbates this issue. Also, women's civil society organizations are often marginalized within national institutional mechanisms, further hindering their ability to shape policy-making (Loiseau & Nowacka, 2015).

Mazman & Usluel (2011) analysed the usage purposes of social networks, particularly Facebook, to determine if there are differences in usage between males and females and found that individuals use social networks for four main purposes- sustaining current connections, forging new relationships, employing it for academic pursuits, and pursuing specific objectives. The study found significant variances in all four usage tendancies, with males scoring higher in making new contacts and females scoring higher in the other three usage purposes. The dominant age group for social network usage was found to be 18-25 years old.

Rousseau S & Puttaraju (2014) studied the different uses of social networking sites among young adults in Bangalore city and identified gender differences in its usage patterns. They found that both males and females use social media as a tool that facilitates relational connectivity and interactivity. Males primarily use social media to find old and new friends, build contacts, chat, share inspirational quotes, respond to friends' posts, promote their favorite brands and actors, and for dating purposes. On the other hand, females use social media to check what their friends are doing, create and share new content, share knowledge, update their whereabouts, like posts, read messages, use hashtags, and look for jobs.

Kashyap (2014) highlighted the potential of alternative media, such as social media, to empower women by providing them with a new space to express their views and feelings. Private settings on social networking sites are especially important for women who face harassment or stalking in real life, as they can use these settings to avoid unwanted attention. Alternative media allows women to participate in debates and discussions, share grievances,

and connect with individuals across the world. Women may still feel restricted by social boundaries and may have fears that are present in actual social settings.

Krasnova et al. (2017) argues that sustainable user participation is essential for the success of social media and social media initiatives. It is important to consider gender differences in factors influencing the decision to continue using social media. The study, which surveyed 488 users, indicates that women are primarily motivated by relational purposes, such as preserving strong connections and acquiring social knowledge from both near and far networks, whereas men tend to base their intentions to continue using social media on their capacity to obtain general information. Haferkamp et al. (2012) suggests that men and women show very distinct reasons for their use of social media. Women tend to use them for recreation and "self-presentation" purposes, while men emphasis on practical purposes such as finding friends. They also found that women have a tendency to form names for their circles and portrait photos for self-presentation, while men utilise full-body shots. Social media has become an important tool for self-presentation and self-expression.

Females tend to place a higher emphasis on the presentation of their profile and personal information, whereas males tend to focus on finding friends and using social media to study their competitors and expand their connections. Psychological aspects should also be considered when studying this topic, and the identification of similar aspects in gender differences in social media use and communication is not enough (Alzahrani, 2016).

The study Rose et al. (2012) explored gender stereotypes in self-selected social media displays, specifically on Facebook, and found that men were depicted as "active", "dominant", and "independent", whereas women were depicted as "attractive" and "dependent". The study shows how individuals present themselves on social media and the gender stereotypes that are prevalent in these displays. It also highlights the importance of understanding gender differences the creation and sustaining of impressions in social media.

Objective of the Study
To study Empowerment through Social Media Usage

Methodology
The present study is based on a survey conducted with a structured questionnaire. In the analysis, there were 160 participants who took part. To identify the results, statistical

techniques such as mean and t-test were employed. The research employed a convenience sampling method, where participants were selected based on their availability and accessibility.

Table1 Empowerment through Social Media Usage

Serial No.	Statement of Survey	Mean Value	t-Value	Sig.
1.	Building communities provide a sense of belonging and support, which can be empowering, particularly for marginalized groups.	4.27	9.911	0.000
2.	Social media platforms provide opportunities for networking, career advancement, and entrepreneurship.	4.32	9.927	0.000
3.	Social media provides a powerful tool for advocacy and activism.	4.37	10.271	0.000
4.	It is important to use social media responsibly and to be mindful of its impact on ourselves and others.	4.29	7.966	0.000
5.	Users may share information, stories, and news about a wide range of issues.	3.97	4.974	0.000
6.	Social media provides individuals with the ability to connect with others, share information, and express their views.	4.49	11.815	0.000
7.	Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for empowerment.	4.43	11.531	0.000
8.	Social media allows people with shared interests or goals to connect and form communities.	4.30	9.463	0.000
9.	Users cannot pressurise governments and organizations to change policies and practices.	3.85	4.568	0.000
10.	Social media provides a platform to raise awareness about social issues, injustices, and other concerns.	4.41	11.952	0.000

Table 1 summarizes the mean values for various statements related to the study empowerment through Social Media Usage, and the highest mean score of 4.49 was obtained by the statement "Social media provides individuals with the ability to connect with others, share information, and express their views". The second highest mean score of 4.43 was

obtained by the statement "Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for empowerment". The study found that the social media had an impact on social issues, as shown by the mean value of 4.41 for the statement "Social media provides a platform to raise awareness about social issues, injustices, and other concerns". Another concern was advocacy and activism as "Social media provides a powerful tool for advocacy and activism", which had a mean score of 4.37, and the statement "Social media platforms provide opportunities for networking, career advancement, and entrepreneurship" had a mean value of 4.32. The mean score for the statement "Social media allows people with shared interests or goals to connect and form communities" was 4.30, while the mean value of 4.29 was obtained for the statement "It is important to use social media responsibly and to be mindful of its impact on ourselves and others". And the mean value for the statement "Building communities provide a sense of belonging and support, which can be empowering, particularly for marginalized groups" was 4.27. The last two statements, "Users may share information, stories, and news about a wide range of issues" and "Users cannot pressurize governments and organizations to change policies and practices", had the lowest mean scores of 3.97 and 3.85, respectively. All statements had a significant t-value, indicating a positive impact on the empowerment through social media usage, with a significance value of less than 0.05.

CONCLUSION

The concept of empowerment is multifaceted and includes dimensions such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, and agency. In the current scenario, social media has established itself as a imperious platform for individuals to express themselves, connect with others, and access information, thereby potentially contributing to their empowerment. The study suggests that social media has the potential to promote gender equality and empower individuals, but it requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the challenges and risks associated with its use. The findings indicate that both males and females use social media to enhance their self-esteem, build social connections, and expand their social networks. However, gender differences exist in the way that males and females use social media, with females being more likely to engage in online activism and support groups, while males tend to use social media for professional networking and career advancement. Despite these differences, social media remains a powerful tool for empowering individuals and promoting gender equality. By recognizing these differences and harnessing the power of social media, individuals can

continue to leverage these platforms for personal and professional growth, while also working towards a more equitable and just society.

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