

***The Role and Impact of Social Media
on the Lives of Indian Women : A
Sociological Analysis with special
reference to the COVID-19 Pandemic
Situation***

Priya Singh* and Sushma Pathak**

The use of the internet has steadily increased among people of all ages and places since it was invented. With the advent of the COVID-19 outbreak, social media, which is an internet product, has become increasingly popular, especially among women who constitute half of the population. More and more women are starting to use social media platforms, so it is important for them to understand its role and impact on their lives and minimize its negative impacts. This paper aims to find the negative and positive impact of social media on women in India before and after the COVID-19 outbreak. This paper is based on secondary data and case studies. Authentic websites, articles, and research papers have been reviewed for writing this research

* Research Scholar, SRF in Sociology, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Avadh University, Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh (India) E-mail: <priyasinghvj.03@gmail.com>

** Professor, Raja Mohan Girls P.G. College, Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh (India) E-mail: <Smpathak90@gmail.com>

paper. It has been shown that social media plays very important role to raise awareness about various privacy settings which women can use on various platforms for their safety.

[**Keywords** : Social media, Internet usage, COVID-19, Pandemic, Indian women]

“Social Media is about sociology and psychology more than technology.”
—*Brain Solis, Principal of Future Works*

1. Introduction

The Internet is one of the most powerful inventions which turned the whole world into ‘a village’ connecting the whole world on a platform. Social media is a product of the internet which is bringing revolution all around the world and its popularity is growing with each passing day. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This vivacious pandemic took the whole world in its grip and caused death to over 6.4 crore people. Before the outbreak of COVID-19 people were free to go outside but this infectious pandemic brought almost all countries of the world under lockdown and quarantine. Lockdown forced everyone to stay in their home which resulted in heavier use of social media. People started using the internet more often, specifically social media platforms in order to stay connected with the outside world. Social media is a medium of communication that has gained popularity in recent times. Lockdown allowed working from home which in short increased leisure time.

Amy Kean, senior marketing manager, Internet Advertising Bureau has rightly said that “Regardless of what may be the hot social media property of any particular month or year, social networking has become a core part of our daily lives.”

According to the internet and marketing association of India (Kantar), Internet users in India will rise by 45%, from around 622 million in 2020 to 900 by 2025. By 2025 rural India will have more active internet users than urban India. When it comes to gender division, clear demarcation can be seen in both urban and rural India, the gender ratio for internet users is 57:43 in urban India and 58:42 in rural India. Reports revealed that around 98% of people use it for entertainment, 90% for communication, and 82% for using social media platforms. There is a need to understand how it plays a positive and negative role in women’s lives since half of the population is female, and this will facilitate the mitigation of its negative effects.

Spreading awareness about everything around is one of the most powerful gifts of social media for women, they are getting empowered by social media. According to Iris Vermeren, the old saying “Men are from Mars, women are from Venus” holds water when it comes to how men and women use social media. Females use social media less than men for business reasons, whereas women use social media to share more personal information than men, revealing more about their personal lives.

2. The Role and Impact of Social Media vis-a-vis the Lives of Indian Women

Social media has opened the door of education, it has democratized the education sector e.g. online education as well as audio-visual aids are available at any time and place. As we all know, a mother is the first teacher of the child and social media is helping numerous mothers in numerous ways, who want to learn and teach their kids. It is helping those women also who want to learn and earn but got deprived due to any reason. Social media has provided online classes both free and paid which is helping in skill development, by which women are getting jobs based on their capabilities, similarly, women are learning online and preparing for various exams. Skill learning has provided a platform for women to work online and earn while sitting at home. Women are getting acquainted with what's happening in their country and around the world. The Russia-Ukraine war which happened recently became a hot topic even among women, this is the power of social media. Social media is becoming an integral part of women's free time, allowing them to experience peace and joy. During the time of the pandemic when people were not stepping out of their homes, women and family members remained in touch through social media. Women living far from their children can keep an eye on them through social media platforms. Reema (age 42, U.P. East) told about how she kept connected with her children studying in a foreign country and other family members who were living in India during the Pandemic through the use of social media, and afterward, she told about various benefits she is getting through the use of social media.

All information is at their fingertips, women are learning the art of cooking, the art of dressing, and whatnot from social media. Women from different fields are making diverse content and that content is getting consumed all over the world. Ganga (age 34,

Bangalore) told about how she learned the art of cooking through the use of social media and now she is educating her children by taking the help of social media. She used social media to sell cakes online and earned, which has helped her and her family during and after the pandemic. Ganga talked about being connected to her maternal family members who are living in Uttar Pradesh, which indeed gave her confidence and support during COVID-19 and she never felt lonely. Many political activists have awakened and aroused women through social media. Women are participating in various political programs whether offline or online, and they are expressing their political views along with actively participating in politics through the use of social media. Women are getting a voice for themselves by watching other women who are sharing their exploitation and awakening stories, now they are getting aware of their rights. Social media is also acting as a threat to all those who were blackmailing women, now the public can see and the police have to act due to the power and pressure of social media. Darshan (age 47, Ayodhya) told about how she is getting politically active by getting connected to various political groups on social media and she is also planning to stand for the local councilor election. She talked about raising awareness among girls and women in her city. She also talked about how women are using social media as a platform for standing against exploitation and harassment. She encourages women in her area to actively participate in various political and social functions and also awakens them to stand up for themselves.

Economically women are getting self-dependent by using social media, Instagram (a social-media platform) is providing a platform for women to open online stores and sell their handcrafted items from home, they are also selling services such as counseling, tutoring, etc. Social media has connected women to the outside world while simply sitting at home and giving them opportunities to earn in numerous ways. Women are getting inspired by seeing other women on social media who are doing well in their fields; this is one of the positive impacts of social media. Sheela and Meena (age 24 and 18, New Delhi) these two sisters are running an Instagram store, on which they are selling art and craft materials. They have grown so much during and after COVID-19 that now they have their own office, they are helping their family, and they are economically self-dependent. They talked about various opportunities which women can use to earn while being at home, and they explained how they started their small business from home and now shipping items all over India.

Some women envy other women, they continuously stalk and feel bad about themselves by taking other women as their reference group (Merton coined this term to refer to those groups, of which we want to be a part) and killing their peace of mind, even trying to defame them. YouTube has provided a platform to make videos and earn, many women such as Nisha Madhulika, Kavita kitchen, Mostly Sane, Riksawali, etc are making e- content and earning a lot of money. YouTube, which is one of the most popular social media has provided an earning as well as a learning platform, this has encouraged many women from rural as well as urban areas to earn money by making educational or lifestyle videos. Women are learning new skills from this platform. YouTube and other platforms have reduced the gap between rural and urban, rich and poor women all around the country as well as the world. Women are getting cheap internet which is loaded with all kinds of information thus it is democratizing the sphere of learning. Priyal (age 35, Goa) talked about how she learned to make rangoli and bake cakes from YouTube. She opened her YouTube channel Priyal Foods and Arts, now she is showcasing her talent and earning money. She also started her online cake-selling business in her locality which is helping her earn and now she is getting recognized for her brilliant work. She is grateful to social media for providing platforms that are helping her and many women all around the world.

While in the personal lives of women it has provided contentment, peace, and happiness through entertainment, learning, sharing, and getting connected with their loved ones. It is helping them connect with their friends and not feel alone. Neelam (age 63, Noida) told about her kitty parties which are making her feel connected socially. Neelam is old and she is living alone as her son is working abroad, she joined social media and now she is connected with all her family members living far away, she also reconnected with her friends who are continuously talking and meeting which is giving her happiness and fulfillment in her life.

With positive implications social media has a vulgar face that has been created by narrow and dirty-minded people, they are making fake IDs of women, uploading edited nude pictures of women, and harassing them. Social media has popularized sexual content which is threatening the security of women. A criminal mindset has been developed in many women through the use of social media. The

honey trap is one of the outcomes of social media which shows that many women are using social media platforms to commit crimes and earn money illegally. Many women have defamed their husbands and exploited in-laws' families by filing false allegations against them. Shweta (age 19, Hyderabad) told about getting stalked and harassed on social media. She talked about how boys stalk and pass dirty comments, which are irritating, and how it makes her feel insecure on social media platforms. She also talked about seeing other successful friends and relatives and getting jealous and feeling inferior to them. She pointed out many benefits of social media but also explained as a teenager how she felt left out from her peer group and got demotivated due to excessive use of social media nowadays.

When we talk about religion and culture, now with the use of social media women have started celebrating traditional festivals of our country more than ever before and in a much more organized way. Many women who were leaving Indian culture due to western influence are now getting influenced by social media and have started opting for and loving their traditions i.e. Karwachauth, Tulsi-vivah, Chhath pooja, etc. Social media and real-life preachers and influencers such as Nand Kishori, Anniruddhacharya, Sadhguru, etc are teaching about the rich culture of India and encouraging women of every age to opt for Indian culture and tradition. Social media is also inculcating love for our country, its tradition, and culture among women and everyone. Sangeeta (age 55, Reewa) is a widow living in a village, she talked about how she managed to get herself motivated to do all the work after her husband's death. She talked about listening to Satsang online which helped her know the truth of life and stay positive even in traumatic times of her life. Neetu (age 28, Mumbai) talked about how she started celebrating Karwachauth and Chhath puja after getting influenced by social media which she was ignoring after leaving her hometown in Bihar.

Social media has provided women a stage to reach millions of people and tell them about their intellectual thoughts, creativity, and whatnot. Social media has broken the shackles of language and culture and has converted this world into a village, which indeed helped women to be part of the real world by using it. Social media has equally benefitted all the disadvantaged groups of society such as women, the third gender, Dalits, and tribes. Social media has enhanced the horizons of learning and is developing different

perspectives which indeed has developed the minds of women, they can now think and grow on their own. Women in both rural and urban India are using social media but we have seen a sudden rise in its usage with the advent of COVID-19. Pratibha (age 39, Ayodhya) is a homemaker and mother of two children. She talked about posting her poems online and getting recognized through it, she also talked about being invited to various poetry programs which helped her in many ways.

Even after so much development women of India got subjugated by a patriarchal society but social media has connected their voice, which is getting expressed through poems, videos, articles, and blogs. Social media has provided freedom of expression but it also removes privacy and is open to the public who can praise or criticize. A survey suggested that every fifth woman who uses social media is a victim of harassment and abuse. Many cases of suicide have been reported due to body shaming, social media has made an image of fake perfection, after which everyone is running which is leading to mental problems such as an inferiority complex and even suicide in many cases. Preeti (age 44, Gujarat) talked about her daughter who committed suicide due to peer pressure she was getting on social media after failure in her class. She is upset about her daughter and wants to awaken other parents about the negative influence of social media.

A noticeable remark made by eminent social feminist Simone de Beauvoir is worth noting, “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” She wrote about family as the “primary source of socialization where a firm line is drawn between men’s and women’s identities and roles while secondary socialization is done through media which enforces gender roles on women.”

The phrase “picture perfect” is ruining the lives of young women, who are making themselves suffer just to look perfect on social media. Commodification, a term used by Karl Marx, goes very apt when we look at social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, etc. These platforms project women as a commodity whose appearance looks pleasant and this is causing mental insecurity among women and leading them to alienation (separated from themselves and society). The worst impact of social media is visible among teenagers who are going through an identity crisis. At a very young age, they are dealing with relationship pressure, rejection pressure, and looking cool pressure which is taking their

growth away and causing life-threatening situations in many scenarios. Young girls are getting in touch with strangers through social media which is increasing fraud, crime, trafficking, cyberbullying, and cyberstalking which is putting their lives in danger. According to the Indian Digital club, the use of social media by women is leading to a loss in their self-confidence, an increase in competition, tampering look with plastic surgery, skin complexity, eating disorders, depression, and complication in relationships. Sunandini (age 18, Mumbai) is a college-going girl, she talked about getting trolled for her weight by her college mates. She starved herself and even made up her mind to get surgery but later on after getting counseled she is now happy with herself.

There are two sides to any coin, the same way when social media provided a platform for growth and development, a place where everything is democratized on the other hand provided privacy of connection, which is giving space for crimes. Cases of cyberbullying are more common in women than men, which include image editing, abusing, threatening, blackmailing, uploading inappropriate posts, spying through web cameras, indecent messages and making videos viral, etc. Social media has enhanced women's sense of entitlement and their egos have been inflated which has given them dreams of marrying millionaires, they have started to use filters and makeup even going through surgery to get the social media image of perfection. According to women's daily magazine, suicide has risen in both literate and illiterate women due to mental health caused by social media, the use of drugs by celebrities, and influencers encouraging women to take drugs and fall into vices.

The correct amount of medicine can heal a person in the same way controlled and regulated use of social media can uplift women. Excess and uncontrolled use of social media in women is leading to increase in obesity, social media addiction, weakening of eyesight, increase in frustration, depression or anxiety, loss of creative thinking and writing, wastage of time and money, obstruction in children's growth and wellbeing, increase in fraud, extramarital affair, divorce, etc. Hacking is one of the major drawbacks which has caused financial loss and even loss of life to many women, recently in Lucknow a mother was killed by her teenage boy for not letting him play an online game likewise a couple in Agra lost their 15 lakh rupees due to online fraud. Social media addiction has been reported worldwide, it is the first thing we are checking in the morning and the

last thing we are using before going to bed. Its impact on our eyes and mind has been deteriorating. Women are busy with their phones and not paying attention to their growing kids, which is leading to obstruction in children's growth. Social media has created a world full of fake relations, women and men are ignoring the real-life people who are sitting next to them. Gaining popularity on social media has become so important to women that they are ready to leave their families and break marriage bonds. The most common scenario that we can see in a modern home is everyone is busy on various social media platforms and not talking to each other, sharing online but not offline, communication gaps have increased with the increase of on-screen time.

On one hand, we see awareness in society about various mal-practices and false notions through the use of social media while on the other hand, we see the commodification of women on social media platforms. Social media has provided means of freedom but many women are using it to show nudity, for getting popularity through controversies, and create chaos online. Live-in relationships which are against our Indian tradition are getting popularised among women through social media. Women are experiencing mental harassment through stalking, abusing, and commenting we can see an increase in sex-related crimes and even blackmail and kidnapping in many cases. The dark side of social media is taking vulnerable women into its grip and forcing them to be victims of various types of crime. Women can only empower themselves if they positively use social media and not for nudity or to sell themselves as a commodity. In India, the status of women has always been degraded and few women are using social media to degrade that status instead of uprising and awakening downtrodden women.

“It is okay to own technology, what is not okay is to be owned by technology. No technology is good or bad, the real disease is human recklessness. Power is power only when used with caution, if used wildly, all power is poison”? Abhijit Naskar, *Mucize Insan: When The World is Family*

3. Conclusion

Proper knowledge and awareness of how to use social media can minimize its destructive side and can make this platform a beautiful sphere of learning, growing, and connecting. Social media is beneficial when used in moderation and it can prevent health

hazards. It is very important to raise awareness about various privacy settings which women can use on social media platforms for their safety. Cyber laws should be implemented strictly which will eventually reduce cyber crimes. Knowledge of the fake social media world can help women to feel good about themselves. It is essential for women not to get attracted to negative social media life and its dark ways of thinking. Social media should be used for connecting, sharing, growing, and motivating. In the end, it is appropriate to say women need to know how to control social media instead of getting controlled by it.

References

- 10 Great Quotes on Social Media - WorthvieW, available at <https://www.worthview.com/10-great-quotes-social-media/>
- <https://www.statista.com/statistics/255146/number-of-internet-users-in-india/>
- <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/technology/india-to-have-900-million-active-internet-users-by-2025-says-report/articleshow/83200683.cms>
- <https://www.tutor2u.net/politics/reference/simone-de-beauvoir-1908-1986>
- <https://hindi.thequint.com/voices/opinion/social-media-is-dangerous-of-women#read-more>
- Mishra, Deeksha, "How Social Media Is Influencing Women", *The Times of India*, September 30, 2022.
- Rajendran, Anusuah, "Social media in Women Empowerment", July 2015, (PDF) available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281198252_Social_media_in_Women_Empowerment.
- Ridley, Jane, "Social media can ruin women's self-esteem", *New York Post*, available at <https://nypost.com/2018/05/07/social-media-can-ruin-womens-self-esteem/>
- Social Media Addiction Quotes (124 quotes) available at <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/social-media-addiction>.
- "The Impact of Social Media on Women's Self-Image and Self-Representation", IDC, available at <https://indiadigitalclub.com/social-media-on-womens-self-image-and-self-representation/>
- Vermeren, Iris, "Men vs. Women: Who Is More Active on Social Media?", *Brandwatch*, available at <https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/men-vs-women-active-social-media/> ★