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Author's :

Dr. Sheetal

Assistant Professor, Department of
Sociology, N.K.B.M.G. P.G.
College, Chandausi, Sambhal,
Uttar Pradesh, India.

SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT ON WOMEN : A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

Abstract : The growing use of social media has changed the social, economic and cultural lives of women. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp and X have created new spaces for communication, education, employment, entrepreneurship, self-expression and networking. Social media allows women to access information, develop new skills, connect with wider social networks and promote their work or businesses. It can also provide opportunities for women who have limited access to traditional social and professional spaces. At the same time, the benefits of social media are not equally available to all women. Gender inequality, limited access to digital technology, lack of digital skills, social restrictions and economic differences can affect women's online participation. Women also face online harassment, cyberstalking, sexual abuse, threats, privacy violations and other forms of gender-based violence. These problems may reduce women's freedom and confidence in using digital platforms.

This paper examines the impact of social media on women from a sociological perspective. It focuses on two major dimensions: social media and women's empowerment, and social media, gender inequality and online violence. The study is based on secondary sources and follows a qualitative and analytical approach. The paper argues that social media can support women's empowerment, but its benefits depend on women's social and economic conditions and their ability to use digital spaces safely. Equal digital access, digital literacy and safer online environments are therefore important for meaningful women's participation in the digital society.

Keywords : Social Media, Women, Empowerment, Gender Inequality, Digital Divide, Online Violence, Entrepreneurship, Sociology.

1. Introduction : Social media has become an important part of everyday life. The spread of smartphones, affordable internet services and digital platforms has

Corresponding Author :

Dr. Sheetal

Assistant Professor, Department of
Sociology, N.K.B.M.G. P.G.
College, Chandausi, Sambhal,
Uttar Pradesh, India.

changed the way people communicate, learn, work and maintain social relationships. Women are also increasingly using social media for education, employment, business, communication and self-expression.

Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp and X allow people to communicate beyond their immediate social environment. For women, this can create new opportunities to access information and connect with people outside their family and local community. A woman can learn a new skill through online content, join a professional group, promote a product, communicate with customers or share her views with a larger audience.

From a sociological point of view, social media is more than a communication tool. It is also a social space. People interact, create relationships, present their identities and respond to social norms through these platforms. Goffman (1959) explained that people present themselves differently in different social situations. Social media provides a new space for such self-presentation. Women can present their work, ideas, talents and experiences to a wider audience.

Social media can also contribute to women's empowerment. Kabeer (1999) explains empowerment through resources, agency and achievements. Social media can provide women with access to information, knowledge, contacts and economic opportunities. It may also support women's ability to express themselves and make choices. However, access to technology alone does not mean that a woman is empowered. Her family environment, education, economic position and social freedom also matter.

Social media can be especially useful for women who have fewer opportunities to enter traditional public spaces. Students can use digital platforms for learning. Working women can develop professional contacts. Women entrepreneurs can promote their products online. Housewives can use social media to connect home-based skills with customers and markets.

However, digital spaces also reflect inequalities present in wider society. Not all women have equal access to smartphones, internet services or digital education. Women in rural and economically weaker communities may face greater difficulties. Family restrictions and social expectations can also affect their use of technology.

Another important issue is online violence. Women may experience unwanted messages, sexual comments, threats, trolling, cyberstalking, fake accounts and privacy violations. Such experiences can discourage women from expressing their views or participating openly online.

Therefore, social media has both opportunities and challenges for women. It can support empowerment while also reproducing gender inequality. This paper examines both sides from a sociological perspective.

2. Review of Literature and Research Gap : The relationship between women, technology and society has been discussed through different sociological approaches. Kabeer (1999) explains women's empowerment through resources, agency and achievements. This approach is useful for understanding social media because digital platforms can provide women with information, contacts, knowledge and economic opportunities. However, these resources become meaningful only when women have the freedom and ability to use them.

Bourdieu (1986) explains the importance of social capital, which develops through social relationships and networks. Social media can increase women's social networks and connect them with people who can provide information, support and opportunities. These networks may be useful for education, employment and entrepreneurship.

Castells (2010) describes modern society as increasingly organised through networks. Social media is an important part of this network society. Women can participate in wider networks without being physically present in the same place. This can increase their access to information and social connections.

Goffman's (1959) work on self-presentation is also relevant to social media. Online platforms allow women to decide how they present themselves through photographs, videos, posts and other content. This can increase self-expression and visibility. At the same time, women may face pressure to follow particular standards of beauty and behaviour.

Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality helps explain why women's experiences are different. Gender does not operate alone. Economic position, education, location, age and other social conditions can influence women's access to technology and their experiences online.

Recent studies have also focused on women's digital entrepreneurship. Chakraborty (2023) examined social media participation among female entrepreneurs and found its connection with digital entrepreneurship intention and psychological empowerment. Manimegalai, Bagilesh and Shanmugam (2025) examined how Instagram can help Indian housewives become digital entrepreneurs. Balcar et al. (2026) also examined the role of social networks and social media in entrepreneurial entry among Indian women.

These studies show that social media can provide new economic opportunities for women. At the same time, recent discussions have focused on online violence against women. UN Women (2025) has highlighted the growing concern about online violence against women in public life, including risks linked with new digital technologies and artificial intelligence.

Existing literature therefore shows two important sides of social media. It can provide opportunities for empowerment, but it can also reproduce social inequalities and create new forms of risk. There is a need for a sociological discussion that connects these two sides. This paper attempts to address this gap by examining women's empowerment along with gender inequality and online violence.

3. Objectives : The main objective of this paper is to examine the impact of social media on women from a sociological perspective.

The specific objectives are:

1. To examine the role of social media in women's empowerment.
2. To understand how social media supports women's education, employment, entrepreneurship, self-expression and networking.
3. To examine gender inequality and online violence experienced by women on social media.
4. To understand the social conditions that influence women's experiences of digital platforms.

4. Methodology : The study is qualitative and analytical in nature. It is based on secondary sources and does not use primary survey data. Relevant books, research articles, academic studies and reports related to women, social media, empowerment, gender inequality and online violence have been examined.

The study analyses the subject through two major dimensions. The first focuses on the role of social media in women's empowerment. The second focuses on gender inequality and online violence. The analysis also considers differences in women's social and economic conditions. The paper does not claim that all women experience social media in the same way. Women's experiences may differ according to education, economic position, location, age, digital skills and family environment. Therefore, the findings of this study are based on the interpretation of existing literature and are not presented as statistical findings from primary research.

5. Social Media and Women's Empowerment : Social media has created new opportunities for women to participate in different areas of social life. One of its important contributions is access to information. Women can use social media to learn about education, employment, skill development, social issues, legal rights and other useful subjects. Easy access to information can increase awareness and help women make better-informed decisions.

Education is an important area in which social media can support women. YouTube, online groups and other digital platforms provide access to lectures, study materials, discussions and educational content. Students can learn outside the traditional classroom and can connect with teachers and other learners. Women who cannot easily attend regular educational programmes may also use online learning resources.

Social media can also support professional development. Women can join professional groups, follow experts, learn about employment opportunities and present their skills online. Digital networking can help women develop contacts beyond their immediate workplace or community.

Entrepreneurship is another important area. Social media has made it easier for women to promote small businesses. A woman can display products through Instagram, Facebook or WhatsApp and communicate directly with customers. Home-based businesses involving clothes, food, handicrafts, beauty services and other products can use social media for advertising and customer communication. For women who have limited financial resources, social media can provide a relatively low-cost method of reaching customers. It does not remove all barriers to entrepreneurship, but it can reduce the need for a large physical market or shop. Digital platforms can therefore help some women connect their skills with economic opportunities.

Recent research on Indian women supports the growing importance of social media in digital entrepreneurship. Women can use social networks to develop customer relationships, promote products and gain visibility. Housewives may also use digital platforms to turn existing household or creative skills into small businesses.

Social media also provides space for self-expression. Women can share their opinions, experiences, achievements, creativity and knowledge. They can discuss social issues and communicate with people from different backgrounds. This can increase their visibility and provide opportunities to participate in public discussions.

Networking is another form of empowerment. Women can create and join groups based on education, occupation, interests or social concerns. These networks can provide information, emotional support and practical assistance. Digital connections can sometimes provide opportunities that are not available within a woman's immediate social environment.

The concept of social capital is useful here. Bourdieu (1986) shows that social relationships can provide useful resources. Social media can expand these relationships and create new forms of digital social capital. Women may gain information, contacts and opportunities through these networks.

Social media may also challenge traditional ideas about women's roles. When women become entrepreneurs, educators, content creators or professionals through digital platforms, they can demonstrate new forms of participation. Their visibility can contribute to changes in the way women's social and economic roles are understood.

However, social media should not be considered an automatic source of empowerment. A woman may have a smartphone and social media account but still have limited freedom to use them. Family restrictions, lack of education, financial dependence and social expectations can limit the benefits of digital technology.

Therefore, social media can support women's empowerment by increasing access to information, education, networks, economic opportunities and self-expression. The extent of this empowerment depends on women's ability and freedom to use these opportunities.

6. Social Media, Gender Inequality and Online Violence : The opportunities created by social media exist alongside continuing gender inequalities. Digital spaces are influenced by the same social values and power relations that exist in wider society. Women may face restrictions on internet use, family monitoring and criticism of their online activities.

The digital divide is an important issue. Women do not have equal access to

smartphones, reliable internet, digital education and private digital spaces. Economic differences can affect the ability to purchase devices and internet services. Women in rural areas may also face problems related to connectivity and digital literacy.

Education is another factor. Women with limited digital skills may find it difficult to use online platforms safely and effectively. Lack of knowledge about privacy settings, online payments, account security and reporting systems can increase their vulnerability. Gender stereotypes can also continue through social media. Women may be judged on their appearance, clothing, relationships and behaviour. Social media can create pressure to follow particular standards of beauty and femininity. Such expectations may affect women's confidence and self-expression.

Online harassment is one of the major problems faced by women. It may include abusive comments, unwanted messages, sexual remarks, threats and repeated unwanted contact. Women who express opinions on public issues may also face trolling and personal attacks.

Cyberstalking is another concern. Continuous unwanted monitoring or repeated attempts to contact a woman can create fear and insecurity. Fake accounts can also be used to impersonate women or damage their reputation.

Privacy violations are particularly serious. Personal photographs, videos or information may be copied or shared without consent. Image-based abuse can cause serious social consequences. Technological developments have also created new risks through manipulated images and videos and other forms of digitally created content.

Online violence against women is connected with wider gender inequality. It is not simply a technical problem. When women are targeted because of their gender, online abuse becomes connected with broader patterns of discrimination and unequal power.

Online violence may also affect women's participation. A woman who repeatedly experiences harassment may stop posting, make her account private or avoid public discussions. In this way, online violence can indirectly reduce women's digital freedom and visibility. Women who have a public presence may face greater exposure because their content reaches larger audiences. The same visibility that can provide professional and social opportunities can also increase exposure to harassment.

Intersectionality is important in understanding these experiences. Women from different social and economic backgrounds do not have the same opportunities or risks. A woman with higher education, financial resources and strong digital skills may have greater ability to protect herself online than a woman with limited resources.

Therefore, reducing gender inequality in digital spaces requires more than providing internet access. Women also need digital literacy, knowledge of online safety, privacy awareness, social support and effective mechanisms for reporting abuse.

7. Discussion : The analysis shows that social media has a complex impact on women. It can create opportunities for empowerment while also reproducing existing inequalities. These two aspects are closely connected.

Social media can provide resources such as information, knowledge, social contacts and economic opportunities. These resources may help women participate more actively in education, employment, entrepreneurship and public life. In this sense, social media can support women's agency.

However, access to resources does not automatically result in empowerment. Kabeer's (1999) approach shows that empowerment also involves the ability to make choices and achieve meaningful outcomes. A woman may have access to social media but may not be able to use it freely because of family restrictions or social expectations.

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital also helps explain the importance of digital networks. Social connections can provide useful information and opportunities. Social

media can expand these networks, but women's ability to benefit from them depends on their existing social and economic position.

Goffman's (1959) concept of self-presentation is also relevant. Women can use social media to present their identities, work and achievements. However, online self-presentation can also be influenced by social pressure and gender stereotypes.

The digital environment therefore does not exist separately from society. Traditional gender norms can enter online spaces, but digital spaces can also provide opportunities to question those norms. Women can use social media to express themselves, build networks and challenge traditional expectations.

The two major dimensions of this study are therefore connected. Women's empowerment through social media requires access, skills and freedom. Gender inequality and online violence can limit these conditions. Safer and more equal digital participation is therefore necessary if social media is to provide meaningful opportunities for women.

8. Major Findings : The study identifies the following major findings:

- I. Social media provides women with greater access to information, education and knowledge.
- II. Digital platforms can support women's employment, professional networking and skill development.
- III. Social media has created new opportunities for women entrepreneurs, particularly for small and home-based businesses.
- IV. Digital platforms provide women with opportunities for self-expression and wider social participation.
- V. Social networks can provide women with information, support and economic opportunities.
- VI. Women's digital opportunities are affected by economic position, education, location, age and digital skills.
- VII. The digital divide continues to limit equal participation among women.
- VIII. Gender stereotypes and traditional social expectations can continue in digital spaces.
- IX. Women may face online harassment, cyberstalking, threats, sexual abuse and privacy violations.
- X. Online violence can discourage women from participating freely in digital spaces.
- XI. Social media can therefore work as both a source of empowerment and a space where gender inequality may be reproduced.

9. Suggestions : Digital literacy among women should be strengthened. Women should not only learn how to use smartphones and social media but should also understand privacy settings, account security, online fraud and reporting mechanisms.

Equal access to digital technology should be promoted, especially among women in rural and economically weaker communities. Affordable internet services, access to devices and digital education can help reduce the gender digital divide.

Educational institutions can provide digital awareness and online safety education. Women students should be encouraged to use digital platforms for learning, professional networking and skill development.

Women entrepreneurs can benefit from training in digital marketing, online payments, customer communication and business management. Such training can help women use social media for sustainable economic activities.

Awareness about online violence should be increased. Women should know how to block abusive users, protect personal information, preserve evidence and report serious online abuse.

Social media platforms should provide simple and effective systems for reporting harassment, threats and non-consensual sharing of personal content. Emerging forms of

digital abuse should also receive attention.

Families and communities should encourage women's safe and productive use of technology. Unnecessary restrictions on women's digital participation can limit educational, professional and economic opportunities.

Future research should include primary studies of women from different social backgrounds and regions. Rural and urban comparisons can help understand how social and economic conditions influence women's digital empowerment and online experiences.

10. Conclusion : Social media has become an important part of contemporary social life and has created new opportunities for women. It can improve access to information, education, employment, entrepreneurship, networking and self-expression. For many women, digital platforms can provide opportunities to participate in social and economic activities beyond traditional spaces.

At the same time, social media does not remove existing social inequalities. Gender stereotypes, unequal access to technology, limited digital skills, social restrictions and online violence can reduce the benefits of digital participation. Women may experience harassment, threats, privacy violations and other forms of abuse that can affect their willingness to participate openly.

The sociological study of social media therefore needs to consider both empowerment and inequality. Technology itself does not automatically bring social change. Its impact depends on the social conditions in which it is used. Equal access, digital skills, freedom of participation and online safety are important for women to benefit from social media.

Social media can thus become an important tool for women's empowerment when women have the resources and freedom to use it safely. At the same time, reducing gender inequality and online violence is necessary to ensure that digital spaces remain accessible and meaningful for women. A more inclusive digital society requires not only technological development but also social awareness, equal opportunities and protection of women's rights in digital spaces.

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