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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Social media is becoming a potent weapon for influencing both men's and women's political engagement. It has altered how people access information, participates in politics, conduct political campaigns, and disseminate information. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and other social media platforms have made it simpler for politicians and parties to reach a larger audience and interact with voters directly. Users of social media can produce and distribute their own material. It's possible that women politicians are better able to engage the public than men since they need to possess exceptional talent and charisma to thrive in the traditionally male-dominated world of politics.

In the digital era, women's political participation has expanded across the Western Mediterranean, particularly in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia. Ten to twelve per cent of the political parties in India had women as members in the 1990s, which was still a low level of female engagement. The United Women's Front party was founded in 2007 and has pushed for raising the ratio of seats reserved for women in parliament to fifty per cent. Indian



women have also taken the initiative to start their own political parties. Using secondary data, the study analyses, and the impact of social media use on Indian women's political participation.

Keywords: Social media, Women, Political participation, Political activism

INTRODUCTION

Women have traditionally been politically marginalised while building up over half of the world's population (49.58 percent). But since the middle of the 19th century, social movements have been successful in bringing about significant changes. Women's rights are recognised under the UN Organization's (UNO, founded in 1945) charter. The UN General Assembly passed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), frequently referred to as an international bill of rights for women, in 1979 as a result of the growth of feminist groups in the 1960s and 1970s. The right of women to hold political and public office is upheld under Article 7 of the Convention. Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were outlined in the Millennium Declaration, which was accepted by UN member states in 2000. The initiative was expanded in January 2016 to focus on the achievement of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 5, which aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" by ensuring "women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life."

According to facts and empirical data, Indian women have participated in politics from ancient times to the present. Women have made significant contributions to Indian society's social, political, economic, and cultural life. The number of women serving on the Union Council of Ministers, in the Cabinet, as Speaker of Parliament, and as Chief Justices, as well as their representation in the Lower and Upper Houses of the Indian Parliament and as candidates in parliamentary elections. Social media have changed the way that every industry, including politics, communicates. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have changed how politicians communicate with the public and vice versa.



The statistics on women's representation in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha reveals that the proportion of women legislators has remained low in contrast to their male counterparts, despite the fact that women's voting participation in elections has grown dramatically. There is a condition called "internalised patriarchy" in which many women feel it is their obligation to put their families and homes before their political aspirations. The environment of information sharing across borders and the interaction between citizens and governments have been completely altered by social media (Shirky, 2011). Beyond its usage as a tool for social networking, social media enables anybody to share content and opinions with a worldwide audience for the first time, doing so without the need for traditional media or other means of information transmission (European Parliament, 2013). Activists from all around the world have been able to broadcast events live to a large online audience using platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, as was the case during the Arab Spring movement (Pew Research Centre, 2012). Local concerns become global ones, and local activists interact with people throughout the world. The unparalleled political and awareness-raising potential of social media has not been overlooked by women's rights movements. Participants in the Wikigender online debate emphasised the value of social media in enabling gender activists to connect locally and globally at a cheap cost. A younger generation of activists, who offer a crucial target audience to challenge preconceived notions and advance gender equality, have been drawn to activism in particular because of the rise of female bloggers.

Hashtag activism has aided in bringing women's rights to the public's notice and making issues that aren't covered enough in the media more visible. For instance, in 2013. The #BringBackOurGirls movement received over 1 million tweets, which helped to inform both domestic and foreign players of the need of assisting in the recovery of the kidnapped Nigerian schoolgirls (Tomchak, 2014). The case garnered little media coverage prior to the launch of the hashtag campaign (Dewey, 2014). The prominent and popular #HeForShe campaign by UN Women further demonstrates the capacity of social media to draw in new and larger audiences: More than 1.2 billion individuals participated in the campaign, which brought attention to the need for men and boys to be included in achieving gender equality.



Many women are unable to fully utilise social media for political campaigning due to illiteracy, language hurdles, and the infrastructure gap between rural and urban areas for digital infrastructure. Particularly rural and indigenous women's internet activism and networking opportunities are impacted by these variables. Women's online activism may suffer from fewer options for networking with cross-institutional partners, such as decision-makers and public figures, as well as a divergence from local women's organisations.

In India, female politicians were featured in the media less frequently than male politicians and were discussed more in terms of personal traits and domestic concerns than political accomplishments (Golder, 2012). The pattern was the same on Facebook: Women were portrayed in Indian news media as supporting male candidates (Guha 2018). The first female president of Liberia was given more attention for her roles as a mother and grandmother than for her accomplishments as a well-known economist (Anderson et al., 2011).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Harris (2008) new technologies are often perceived as important resources in attracting young people to formal politics, but less is known about how young people use them to create participatory practice on their own terms. This article examines young women's less conventional technology enabled political and social activity in order to understand how these are operating as emergent modes of participation in a new political environment. It explores young women's use of online culture, blogs, social networking sites and related technologies to open up questions about what counts as politics, and what is possible as politics for young people, and young women in particular, at the present moment. It suggests that these activities represent new directions in activism, the construction of new participatory communities, and the development of new kinds of public selves, while also telling us important things about the limits of the kinds of conventional citizen subject positions offered to young women at this time.

Schuster (2013) This study investigates the effect of young women's online activism on the visibility of feminist participation in New Zealand while taking into account ideas from 'third-wave' literature. The author argues that internet activism is an important form of engagement for many young women based on 40 interviews with women of different ages



who are interested in women's political problems in New Zealand. The author finds a generational split in the methods these women engaged in feminism. Online activism hides many young women's actions from the general public and from politically engaged women of previous generations since it is only visible to those who utilise it. The interviewers were unaware of the political zeal that young women expend in online forums like Facebook and blogs. They worried that there wouldn't be enough young women to take over their jobs once they retired as a result. To connect and encourage one another, have political conversations, and plan events in the "real world," the young women in my research employed new media. The new medium was prized by the young women for its adaptability, accessibility, and capacity to reach vast audiences. They also valued its simple and inexpensive usage. The study comes to the conclusion that political online activity presents a variety of chances for feminist engagement, but excludes others who do not use new media, so fostering a generational difference among women who engage in feminism.

Lehtonen (2014) examines how social media affected women during the 2011 Arab unrest in Egypt. Women actively participated in the uprisings at Cairo's Tahrir Square. In order to understand women's usage of social media and their thoughts on whether it made it easier for women to participate in those revolts, this thesis explores women's involvement in those uprisings from their own point of view. In order to consider the thesis' conclusions, this subject is also looked at from the perspective of earlier research. Eight written materials and two YouTube interviews make up the study's data. As a technique for data analysis, qualitative content analysis is applied. The results of the data analysis indicate that social media played a variety of roles in the protests. It served as a tool for motivating people, spreading information, and planning activities. It played a bigger part in empowering women as well. The study's findings indicate that while social media performed admirably as a general tool during the Arab revolt, it also empowered the women activists on a personal level, serving as a mechanism for female activists' support. When social media provided a platform for women's freedom of speech, improved awareness, and encouragement, women were ready to get involved in the revolt and the politics of their nation.



Leticia (2017) Historical gender disparities remain in both political participation and the production of internet material. This study examines how much men and women participate in politics especially on social media in order to further these literatures. To examine if there are any gendered disparities in how people encounter and react to political information on social media, new survey data are used. Although a wide range of political behaviours are measured on social media, little gender disparities are found. Women may purposefully participate in less obvious or less likely to offend political behaviours than males, according to research, which suggests that if disparities do arise, they are most frequently among the most prominent political behaviours. Important concerns about political involvement, representation, and gender are raised by this.

Valentina (2021) Social media in particular, according to digital optimists, will change politics and give previously disadvantaged individuals leverage. The reality is a bit different: politics are the realm of a small elite, both online and offline, with males constituting the majority yet nonetheless needing to be less reserved and more open when discussing politics online. Theresa May, Hillary Clinton, and Jacinda Ardern's political communications are compared in this article. It investigates whether they feminised politics by using digital technologies during elections and evaluates the extent to which female politicians adopt leadership and communication styles that defy conventional male political behaviour norms, prioritise issues that are likely to have an impact on the lives of women, and speak out for other women.

This study focuses on these three politicians to investigate whether there is a relationship between their support for women's rights, their gender, and their political communication. In particular, the study evaluates if there are any lessons to be learnt from examining women who represent women in diverse ideological, political, and legal contexts. It claims that by analysing how May, Clinton, and Ardern use current political communication to spread their message, we may begin to grasp the role that gender plays in political communication research.

Madushani and Uluwaduge (2023) this study used the 2019 presidential election as a case study to examine how social media has affected women's political engagement. The research employed a combination of methodologies. Primary and secondary sources were used to



collect the qualitative and quantitative data. Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to gather primary data. There were 80 responses in the sample size. Books, research reports, government reports, journal articles, newspapers, websites, and other secondary sources were used to gather the data. To analyse quantitative data, SPSS was employed. The qualitative data were analysed using content analysis and theme analysis, and they were presented as texts, narratives, tables, charts, and figures.

According to the survey, social media has given women the ability to speak for themselves and express their political views. These elements were a result of social media's important role in promoting political change and women's technical literacy. The study also made clear how crucial it is to promote gender equality and create networks, websites, and a pool of candidates for unique platforms by implementing the proper regulations. By enhancing its cyber security laws and promoting them, the study's conclusion revealed that Sri Lanka may boost the political engagement of women.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WOMEN'S VOICE

Social media has proven to be a potent tool for raising awareness of issues affecting women, inspiring global action, and persuasively influencing policymakers. Almost anyone with an internet connection can use and view social media. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have created a platform through which local issues can become global concerns and local activists can connect with global citizens by overcoming obstacles like distance and geography. However, social media activism has also produced measurable outcomes in addition to raising awareness for a wide range of causes. The hashtag #DelhiGangRape brought gender-based violence in India into the public eye following the gang rape in Delhi in 2012 that resulted in the death of a young physiotherapy student.

The hashtag crusade brought into impact public road activation, bringing about the public authority presenting explicit enemy of assault arrangements in the Crook code. The use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and others has been largely credited for this protest's success. These platforms made it possible for people from all over the world to vent their anger and have their voices heard. One more illustration of the force of public reaction via web-based entertainment is the production of the #StandWithPP hashtag in 2012. After



the Susan G. Komen Foundation announced that it would no longer be funding Planned Parenthood, a global nonprofit that provides reproductive health care, this hashtag was created.

On Twitter, supporters of Planned Parenthood used the hashtag "#StandWithPP" to express their support for the organization. Within days, Komen responded to the backlash and reversed their decision. Adding on to this, high profile instances of rape like those in the #MeToo development, alongside resulting media consideration and overpowering judgment of misuse, has changed a formerly unacknowledged subject, one that was talked about in murmurs or code words assuming even examined by any means, to one of worldwide interest and reach. The digital divide in infrastructure between rural and urban areas, illiteracy, and language barriers all limit the opportunities available to many women. Over the long haul, there is potential for ladies to acquire sufficient help that approach creators can't disregard the issues they address. The truth will surface eventually, however online entertainment is starting to change the story for ladies' voices. Additionally, social media gave users the ability to strategically communicate about a range of topics, deciding when and when to emphasise their gender identity (Kim, 2012).

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE WOMEN'S POLITICAL INTEREST

Women have historically encountered a number of obstacles to participating in politics, including gender prejudice, stereotypes, and restricted access to conventional political networks. By giving women another way to participate in politics, social media has assisted in removing some of these obstacles. Bypassing conventional gatekeepers enables people to speak out in front of a larger audience. Issue-based advocacy has been made easier by social media platforms, which is especially important for women's political interests. These venues may be used by women to promote awareness of issues affecting them, such as sexual harassment, gender inequality, and reproductive rights. Such campaigning has the power to inspire and organise women around certain political objectives.

Women now have a forum to share their political ambitions and successes thanks to social media. Social media provides a platform for female politicians to engage with voters directly, convey their policy platforms, and show off their leadership abilities. Social media's



prominence can motivate other women to enter politics and pursue positions of power. Women may interact with like-minded people and create networks around political topics via social media platforms. Women may join political parties, locate support groups, and take part in online conversations. These online networks provide people a feeling of community and empowerment, which can boost interest in and participation in politics.

According to the National Democratic Institute's "Women, Technology, and Democracy Survey," "90% of women in Europe, Central Asia, and 85% of Latin America" utilise social media for political discussion. It also looked at how most female politicians use digital platforms for online debates and political campaigns. Social media has a positive impact on women's empowerment by enabling them to network with other women, gain confidence, appeal to other women and peers through directly relevant and appealing styles and issues, and provide alternative power bases that might be of interest to mainstream politicians.

According to an analysis of global media coverage of female lawmakers, Western and non-Western nations differ significantly (Joshi et al. 2020). In addition, women politicians were frequently considered as a homogenous group with little attention paid to their colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or family history (Joshi et al. 2020). For instance, the French press compared white female presidential candidate Arlette Laguiller to her male rivals (Barnes and Larrivee 2011).

SOCIAL MEDIA, WOMEN'S POLITICAL AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The #MeToo campaign was started by Tarana Burke to provide girls who had gone through similar things a place to interact in a secure environment. Alyssa Milano, an actress, started a global outpouring of disclosures and support for other women who had been silent about their experiences with sexual assault in 2017. Since then, #MeToo has transcended racial, economic, and other barriers to become a global movement. It was echoed with the hashtags #BalanceTonPorc in France, #QuellaVoltaChe in Italy, #SendeAnlat in Turkey, #AnaKaman across the Arab States, #RiceBunny in China, #Cuentalo in Spain, and so on. Women all over India took to social media to organise under the hashtag #IWillGoOut when they were upset and tired of being victimised in situations of sexual harassment and sexist remarks. Like-minded people began to communicate using the hashtag #IWillGoOut,



and soon the discussion reverberated on the streets with the national #IWillGoOut march, mobilising and uniting women from all walks of life to denounce sexual harassment and gender inequality in India

A turning point may be noticed in Nisha Susan's usage of Facebook for the Pink Chaddi campaign. It acknowledged the value of social media as an activist tool. In response to the attack on women by the Hindu right-wing organisation Sri Ram Sene in a bar in Mangalore, the pink Chaddi movement was started in 2009. A Facebook group started by a group of women going by the name "Consortium of Pub-going, Loose, and Forward Women" attracted close to 30,000 members in a week. The campaign gained notoriety not just for its unconventional method of protest that questioned conventional ideas of activism but also for how it skillfully utilised social media to draw attention to its cause. Digital technology has since been studied.

According to Graham and Castells (2001) access to digital technology is seen to have given a platform to a number of underrepresented perspectives and generated democratic spaces, resulting in more open environments for consciousness-raising. When Raji, a Dalit feminist activist and poet, says in an interview that, "In Kerala, the voices of subaltern groups are very prominent on social media, especially sexual minorities and Dalit groups," she is alluding to the significance of having access to digital technology. Only a select few communities are given the opportunity to be published in major media. Social media gives underrepresented voices the chance to participate in public conversation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A strategy that inspires action and gives young people the internet knows how they need to participate in fan activism that tackles real-world issues is just around the corner. Only those who are prepared to participate in political discourse on social media will be able to take full use of the adaptability and diversity of social media platforms and fully realise social media's potential for facilitating political engagement. The government should step up its security efforts, particularly during elections, and raise public awareness of gender-based violence, threats, and intimidation. It should also implement stringent and punishing policies for individuals who engage in violence. To address the issues of rape, serial murdering,



kidnapping of women in politics, sexual abuse, and other behaviours that dehumanise women, the government should have clear policies in place.

Whether female politicians have more equal access to social media in terms of engaging users and galvanising supporters. On the ability of male and female politicians to promote themselves by interacting with social media users during an election campaign, our findings show that social media actually enables female politicians to generate more engagement; their posts significantly increased user engagement in terms of the number of Likes and Shares compared to male politicians, while they had the same number of comments and discussion participants. Claiming that female politicians receive more support than male politicians on social media.

Women should investigate and take use of all available chances to advance their involvement in politics. Current women's activism demonstrates that women themselves are not assuming the mantle or making the most of the opportunity, especially in light of current international and national legislation and the options accessible to them. This study tried an explorative investigation of women's political participation in its conclusion. The study, which focuses on women's opinions, provides insights into the non-Western political engagement processes beyond voting. The findings of the study emphasised how difficult it is for female politicians to personalise their messages on social media in a patriarchal environment. To further understand the impact of cultural norms and conventional beliefs on women's political participation and the potential impact of social media, more research in other cultural contexts is required.



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