

## Social Media and Women: A Critical Evaluation of the Behavioural Disconnect

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### ABSTRACT

*Media is established as an effective tool to achieve fruitful communication process. However, the media consumers have not known the use of the tool effectively. The emergence of New Media resulting in convergence is playing havoc in the developing situation.*

*Social Media has been a forum to exchange views and feelings which is confined to a community or individuals. Thus the characteristics of Social Media require examining its role under mass communication. Also, the larger objectives like moulding the public opinion or direct participation in the process of development needs to be relooked in Social Media. Moreover computer skills, technological peripherals and affordability, non-availability of vernacular language over Social Media are some of the big barriers.*

*Social Media, which is in its infancy, is perceived as the neighbours' enemy and the pride of the owner. While India is emerging as a powerful economy, the socio-economical – educational – political development of women in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, hierarchical society is a conceived reality. The empowerment of women and the potentiality of technology which are simultaneous occurrences call for a study of this kind.*

*With the above arguments, this study limiting itself to urban women has the scope to examine the role of participants in Social Media and has the objectives of checking it for its strength in societal influences including developmental activities. The significance of the study is in redefining the behaviour of women in Social Media. The methodology here is of a theoretical study with critical approach to probe into the status of participation of women in Social Media. The theoretical frameworks are Feminism, Social Responsibility and the theory of Out Of Reach that refute the Marketing paradigms.*

**Keywords:** Empowerment, out-of-reach, critical approach

### INTRODUCTION

Apart from the biological differences in the sexes, in spite of their many amicable factors, human life among the sexes has been in frequent conflict to gain superiority over each other. Gender, a social connotation attributed to the attitudinal and behavioural factors of the different sexes has been used only for gaining upper hand with the other sexes by casting aspersions upon the limitations of the capabilities in the sexes, for instance about the Libido in men, Amour in women, power to gain social acceptance by the transgender, LGBTs' and so on.

Beyond these fundamental instincts of the sexes to exhibit hostility by way of gender connotations, the power and vested interests, for instance political or economic lobbies, community orientations, racist inclinations and any hegemonic practices take refuge

immensely in bringing the conflict between the genders only with the sole aim to get away with their booty.

The status of women in most of the less developed countries remains a subject that is impending to engage by the scholars and activists across academic disciplines. Understanding female experience calls for continuous, consistent, ongoing investigation that highlights past and present events and conditions in these developing situations. The researches on such topic also call for multidisciplinary approach. The issues of gender equity though appears cliché at the dawn of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the reality and studies point out to the harsh truth of the need to address many issues of similar kind. There is a dire need for scholars and activists from a variety of academic fields to share their approaches and insights into how they interpret gender equity, how women face barriers, overcome limitations, form identities and shape their multiple roles through careers, family and religious life.

### **Women in India - Status and Challenges**

India, among the earliest of the civilizations was rooted in nature loving, culturally and spiritually rich people. On the other side, it is a land with multi-lingual, diverse society ridden with social hierarchy and predominantly a land of villages. Almost every individual is identified here with his caste or creed. The ranking of each caste decided the dignity and decorum of the individual in the society. To get an academic perspective of the behaviour of the women of India, first the same perspective of the behaviour of the men counterparts in India will have to be analysed. Women since ages on the Indian soil have been denied the opportunity to education and exposure to the refined traditional language called Samskrit, which was considered as '*Devabhasha*' (God's language). On reference to an ancient authentic Vedic scripture of India, the *Manusmruthi*, the status of women propagated in the early times is evident. A Vedic line says,

*'A widower is allowed to remarry but a widow is not. Besides, women are not considered fit for being free and independent. They should never be allowed by their guardians to act independently.'* (Manusmruthi, 5.147)

Many other extracts reflect the deprived status of women. Some of the practices encouraged then are as below:-

*A woman must never do anything even inside her home without the consent of her father, husband and son respectively. She must remain in control of her father in childhood, of husband in youth and of son after the death of her husband.* (Manusmruthi, 5.148)

It is not that the scriptures have grossly disrespected the women clan of the eons. About the value of women in the society of those times, it is said, "..... Participation of women is necessary for conduct of any religious or spiritual activity. *Man and Woman are incomplete without each other. Hence the most ordinary religious duty would demand participation of both.* Thus, those who deny Vedas or Vedic rituals to women are anti-Hindu and anti-Humanity....."

However, it is the indications of the subjugating practices that even the age old scriptures have been strongly practiced even to this day while the virtuous ones have remained only in the epics. To reflect the status of women in India today, the share of seats in Indian Parliament (2010) was Men- 89.2% and Women- 10.8% in Lower House and Men- 91.0% and Women 9.0% in Upper House.

**Table 1. Sharing of Seats in Indian Parliament – 2010**

Indian Parliament-2010	Men (%)	Women (%)
Rajya Sabha (Upper House)	91.0	9
Loka Sabha (Lower House)	89.2	10.8

Irrespective of what the socially hierarchical society is, women were always underprivileged and never shared equal rights among men in India.

The other part of the world today feels that the Indian families of the upper caste enjoy a higher quality social status. But the fact in India is regardless of the social status of women, a vast majority of the populace is the most ignored and depressed sections till date. If we look into social anatomy of the status of women, for the liberation of women in India, there came lot of leaders who fought for it. Even after many years of independence, the liberation is a mirage. Most women are confined to kitchen, labour, considered as home-maker, seen as the one just to take care of a family- all of these are the textures of a male-dominated society. For many decades, it looked like men had upper hand against the women force. After some five decades of free India, a girl child was seen in a class room. Even today, lakhs of girls do not see a bench in the class room. Though the empowerment of some of the middle and upper class women is evident of late, the quantity of discrimination is phenomenally high. Female foeticide and infanticide is common in the nation. This being the social status of women regardless of caste or religion, women remains the downtrodden with a gross inequality.

**Table 2. India's Population as per Census-2011**

Total Population	1.21 billion
Male Population	623.7 million
Female Population	586.5 million
Sex Ratio	940 females per 1,000 males

(Retrieved on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2012, from [www.Indiaonlinepages.com](http://www.Indiaonlinepages.com))

Police in the eastern Indian state of Orissa exhumed skulls and body parts believed to be from three dozen aborted female fetuses and murdered girls in an abandoned well, a grisly find that highlights the persistence of infanticide in the country. The shocking discovery of body parts of what appear to be fully formed female fetuses in a pit of a nursing home at Nabaghanapur in Orissa is a national shame and a scandal that should outrage the conscience of every citizen.

### Daughters of God

Discrimination of girl child can come in any form. There are large numbers of earlier, yet continued instances in South India, viz., the *Devadasi System*, where the 'Daughters of Yellamma (goddess)' is wives of everybody! The *Devadasis* come from very deprived sections of society.

The trouble stricken poor and illiterate families normally visit the sanctum sanctorum of Yellammadevi Temple to offer their prayers to save them. When they approach the priestly class for the blessings of the Goddess, in most cases, they get the advice to donate their girl

child to the Temple, only then they will be blessed by the Goddess and all their problems would be solved. After the child attained puberty, the priestly class exploits them for their pleasure wooing them for promised blessings and later they name them as 'Daughters of Yellamma' and a *Devadasi* (maidservant of the Goddess) which ultimately resulted in gross adultery.

Later merely for their livelihood these *Devadasis* are exploited by different people of the society. Their children become parentless and those children continue the same system and *Devadasi System* continued for generations. The illicit born children become orphans, never went to school. The *Devadasi* families were socially isolated and the stigma of *Devadasi* family continued for centuries. Many efforts from the democratically elected governments went in vain to convince them to send the children to school and rehabilitation of the clan with support of financial schemes. The customs performed by *Devadasis* called 'naked demonstrations' in the name of pleasing goddess also was banned by the respective governments which also had led to law and order problem. But now since some of the *Devadasi* families are rehabilitated and special schools with residential facilities are put in place. It is to gradually achieve self-sufficiency and empowerment yet it doesn't mean the eradication of the system in total.

In the state of Karnataka, it is found that more than one lakh girls are supplied to the brothels of Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata. The women and girls from North Karnataka are regularly trafficked into the sex-trade, during their search for a job to gain their livelihood. Similarly, in South Karnataka, the school going young girls go missing everyday and this is not being given due attention. Currently in India, for every 1,000 boys under the age of six, there are only 914 girls. Ten years ago, there were 927 girls per 1,000 boys. India's 2011 census shows a serious decline in the number of girls under the age of seven. Activists believe eight million female foetuses may have been aborted between 2001 and 2011. Domestic slavery including child labour is quite rampant and in many cases the owner's family sexually exploits the domestic workers. Traffickers are using different strategies like job assurances, marriage, modelling opportunity, entrance into the film industry to lure the minors into the sex trade (University of Mysore, 2012). There are cases of selling children for livelihood, especially the girl child. As an instance -

### **Case Study #1**

In the Thandas of Lambani clans (Tribal clans in Gulbarga district, Karnataka State, India) due to poverty they resort to selling girls. In spite of mid-day meal schemes provided by the Government of Karnataka to attract children to schools and Right to Education made mandatory, the poor clan depends on their children for living by way of child labour. Going beyond, selling the girl child is reasoned for an outcome of the impact of the Globalisation as it has destroyed the skills and their opportunities to work. The Lambani clan, who would go to forests gathering wood, prepares rangoli (household traditional decorative white powder) to earn. The Deforestation Act prevents them entering the forest and the result of urbanisation has introduced synthetic decorative hence no buyers for rangoli which has deprived them of their living.

### **Practices Accepted or Otherwise**

Observations on the traditional aspects of Indian women, the basic beliefs of the institution of marriage are deep rooted. In spite of best education or literacy, and with all the freedom and emancipation of Indian women, the self-imposed subjugation continues.

The attachment to spouse, the family bond, the soft-corner in the heart, the traits of affection and many such other virtues has made the Indian women bear the brunt. Knowingly or unknowingly the exploitation continues. The culture, psychology and thinking are tuned to the conventional setting. For instance, hesitating to call the husband by singular or by name is an all time example.

Personal ambitions, dietary restrictions, bearing the hunger during *pooja* (worship) performances, compromises and sacrifices at every step for the family sake- have all added to the virtues of tolerance and patience of Indian women. The male dominated society also expects similar traits from the women. In India, the decision making, judgments and the final say should vest with men.

There is another side of the story. Many stages of Women Empowerment have gone by and very little of positive results have emerged. Political reservation at the parliamentary legislation level could not succeed even after decades of efforts. The Women Reservation successfully implemented at the Local Body level (*Panchayat Raj*) always had a critical eye from the other side about the husbands or their men folk who execute the decisions and dominate in the name of the elected women leaders. Even today, the voting behaviour in India is calculated in terms of husband and wife wherein the *dictat* from the husband to vote to whichever political party he decides.

Where the empowerment is apparent, it has come with increase in arrogance, like in slapping dowry harassment case for trivial issues with spouse; or false impression about the womanhood, like in using body as a commodity in various forms.

Development Paradigms incorporated in India have many women dedicated projects only in the books and is ridden with acute aberrations after implementation. For instance, take the use of electronic gadgets for household utilities like a Dish Washer. Though useful, it is simply rejected by the masses for all wrong reasons, resulting in what could be termed Out-Of-Reach (OOR in Ravi, 2011) in Technology. There are many such parallel instances where virtually too the technology has not been convincingly adopted by Indian women.

### Women Empowerment

Literacy rate of women is gradually increasing; however that of the Girl child needs attention.

**Table 3. India's Literacy rates by sex in the Age group of 10 -14 yrs**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
1991	77.0	59.7
1981	66.7	44.8
1971	59.8	38.2

Source: Census of India, 2001

Self Help Groups with mostly women in the lead throughout the country have started organising themselves. Women in India have also started participating in agitations and movements. Participation in democracy has steadily increased after Rajiv Gandhi brought an amendment to the Indian Constitution reserving seats for women, SC's, ST's and OBC's in the local and regional bodies like local self governments, *Zilla Panchayats*, *Taluk Panchayats*. Even young women have started thinking politics, participating in politics and have started constructing opinion among themselves, take self decision about voting, a rare

development in the history of India. Earlier, the husbands would dominate in the voting decisions. It is all because of decentralisation of electoral policy.

Similar is the case within a family between a male and girl child. The girl child will have to get up early, do the household chores while the male child is allowed to sit on an easy chair reading the morning newspaper. A study depicts that 90 percent of the rural girls perform home duties while 80 percent of the urban girls perform so.

Thus the psychology of disparity and hierarchy very much prevails and is far from vanishing. This finding is the strong face to analyse the effects of SNS usage by women or its utility for women in India.

**Indian Media – Responsibility Factor**

Media without responsibility is functioning with all its conflicts and confusions. One of the reasons is that multiple types of media are adding to the existing media while their relevance with the people has got entangled and often conflicting to each other. Media functioning has got blurred during this convergence era. The complexity of the debate is increased with added technological implications.

However, media is established as an effective tool to achieve fruitful communication process. When the mass media is viewed individually for performances and effects, it is found that the birth of any other new media is a result of overcoming the shortcomings sighted in the earlier ones. Therefore it calls for the need to recognize the possibility of a plurality of mass media-high, intermediate and low, co-existing and amenable for application to different sectors of economy and society. It needs to be recognized that all mass media are appropriate, contextually. Endorsing technological pluralism is an important challenge of the twenty-first century.

The Indian media saw the stages of its infancy, then the unsystematic growth ending in its Transformation which resulted in the Metamorphosis of the Media, later turning into an industry, liberating on its own and grappled itself with globalisation.

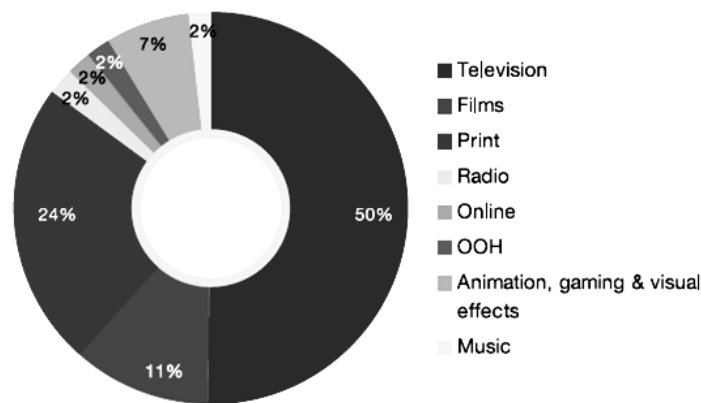


Figure 1. Segment-wise break-up of the E&M industry projected up to 2015

Source: PwC Analysis and Industry Estimates

The mighty media of Television has usurped the large chunk of the market. Scientific Studies and surveys have already pointed out and declared that by the end of 2013, the number of Indian Television channels will be one-and-half times more than that in the USA.

**Table 4. Growth of Indian television industry 2010-2015**

INR billion	2010	2011F	2012F	2013F	2014F	2015F	CAGR
Television distribution	192.0	222.0	254.0	293.0	334.5	376.5	14.4%
% change		15.6	14.4	15.4	14.2	12.6	
Television advertising	101.5	116.0	133.0	152.0	175.0	200.0	14.5%
% change		14.3	14.7	14.3	15.1	14.3	
Television content	13.0	15.0	17.0	20.0	23.0	26.0	14.9%
% change		15.4	13.3	17.6	15.0	13.0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>306.5</b>	<b>353.0</b>	<b>404.0</b>	<b>465.5</b>	<b>532.5</b>	<b>602.5</b>	<b>14.5%</b>

Source: PwC Analysis and Industry Estimates

### The New Media

Information pouring on to an individual through New Media is affecting his thoughts and is bearing on lifestyle, even competing with TV’s power to occupy human minds. For the generation today, New Media has become the *manna* dropped from the heaven. For today’s teens and the early youth, forming a neo-culture means getting themselves isolated from the family. Neo-culture is equated to be devoid of social contact, subscribing to the theory of isolation. Only the ‘neo-media’ is seen as a solution, the guide, the panacea for everything.

It is an unduly heavy dependence on new media. It is so acute, that any technological disturbance of the new media will collapse the whole life-style of an individual, unlike earlier. The Projections of the New Media Industry in India amidst the other mass media is as under:-

**Table 5. Cumulative Average Growth Rate of different segments of Indian Media: 2008 -2013**

Segment	2008 (\$ billion)	2013 (\$ billion)	Per cent CAGR
Television	4.81	9.45	14.5
Print	3.45	5.32	9.0
Film	2.18	3.37	9.1
Animation	0.35	0.79	17.8
Gaming	0.13	0.55	33.3
Internet	0.12	0.43	27.9
Radio	0.16	0.33	14.2
OOH	0.32	0.59	12.8
Music	0.14	0.21	8

Source: KPMG-FICCI Report-2010

It is observed from the above table that the investment on New Media Communications is quite less but its CAGR is also very large, which means the mileage is quite high due to this media.

In another case of media activity, the Internet made it possible to get world information at low cost with high speed to everybody. But to process all this information, understand the same and to implement, is a work of knowledge. Information is not knowledge. Though computer has become a necessity of today's life, social justice, economic equity, political decentralization and humane philosophies are more important and, these cannot be extracted out by any technology. The answer lies in how we use this tool to address our problems.

Digital Revolution in India is only a bubble. Access to Digitization is a mere propaganda by the IT companies in India. On the obstacles for technological utility in India, research scholar Ravi BK observes-

*“For successful functioning of digital media as far as Indian context is concerned, the road blocks are many. Still looming low literacy rates among members of society reflected in their acute limitations of comprehending technological intricacies; Missed opportunities of technologies compatibility to predominant regional languages of the soil; the unaddressed socio-economic divide in terms of caste, creed, religion, status and the prestige of economics; poor management of equity, access and parity in distribution of technologies; affordability towards technological tools owing to narrowed vested interests in terms of extreme business practices or the enigmatic reason of irrational fear of misuse among the holders of the tool; lack of political will towards comprehensive progress and development of the nation.” (Ravi, 2011)*

True to the declaration by Wilbur Schramm, the renowned communication scientist that ‘no media can exist in a cultural vacuum’, both the traditional media and the digital media will have to operate within the cultural contexts of a nation, else its credibility will soon be severely affected.

The authors of a study (Venkatesh and Morris in MIS Quarterly, 2000) agree that when they investigated for five months among 342 sample workers, using the Technology Acceptance Model, the gender differences in the individual adoption and sustained usage of technology in the workplace, it was found that, “..... men's technology usage were more strongly influenced by their perceptions of usefulness. In contrast, women were more strongly influenced by perceptions of ease of use and subjective norm.....”. The researchers question ‘Why don't men ever stop to ask for directions?’ This upholds women with better sense of direction of purpose in which they are moving.

Yet, “the academic community preoccupied with such prestigious issues as new communication technologies or the future of public broadcasting or the effects of political communication, does not come down very easily to the more mundane level of media use in the daily lives of ‘ordinary women’ ” (Zoonen, 124:1994)

### **The Social Networking Markets**

It is to be noted here that among the ten nations with top Social Networking Markets, two are also among the LDCs – Brazil and India, with their prominent presence.



**Table 6. Growth of Top 10 social networking markets worldwide during 2009-2010**

Total worldwide: Age 15+, home and work locations*			
	Social networking unique visitors (000)		
	Jul-2009	Jul-2010	% change
Worldwide	770,092	945,040	23
United States	131,088	174,429	33
China	N/A	97,151	N/A
Germany	25,743	37,938	47
Russian Federation	20,245	35,306	74
Brazil	23,966	35,221	47
United Kingdom	30,587	35,153	15
India	23,255	33,158	43
France	25,121	32,744	30
Japan	23,691	31,957	35
South Korea	15,910	24,962	57

Source: comScore Media Matrix

The table below shows that the SNS participation will be increasingly involved by indigenous Indian partners either collaborating or having their stakes in the market. Shtyle.fm and Bharatstudent.com are seen to have been increasingly accepted by the teenage visitors for their purposes from 2009 to 2010.

**Social Media: A Bottom-Up Viewpoint**

Apparently, the term Social Media in the academic circles as well in society has been connoted with the meaning related to the Social Networking Sites, that of the internet, the web- under the New Media Technologies, one of the revolutions in IT at the dawn of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, under research conditions, the term Social Media is attributable with a very different meaning for making it more appropriate and meaningful with respect to a developing society like India. The meaning is attributed to the role of all media that catalyses the bond between different sections of society, enhances the degree of relationship between the sexes, mitigates the gaps between the genders, establishes an interface between society and media, particularly while women are reflecting as a key role player in any society. It is rather the realistic bottom-up viewpoint of Social Media in a complex, diverse structure and condition of India and women living there.

**The Top-Down View point**

Social Media is attributed to the SNS under the New Media. The after effects of *Convergence* are considered very huge on all walks of life. Some of its effects are beneficial while some of its impact such as on culture is still questionable. The convergent media has its share of supreme impact on urbanization and industrialization too.

Social Media, a part of the New Media is also an interactive media with people’s direct, unmediated participation. Social Media that include a host of networking sites, blogs,

microblogs and RSS feeds is renowned with names like Twitter, face book, Orkut, Zorpia, LinkedIn, MySpace, Quepasa, and so on.

### Women and Indian Media

Exposure of media was never there for women folk. Media was never near to women. Print was simply out of reach as masses were illiterates. Cinema remained far to the majority including many high-status and prestigious families, so called *Oonchi khandaan* [family with top-class ancestry] remained rigid and saw cinema as abominable. In fact, early Indian cinema saw male actors dressed up as female, e.g:- in one of the earliest Indian movie *Raja Harischandra*. Father of Indian Cinema Dada Saheb Phalke could not find female actresses. The feudal psychology of Indian male allowed their women to the theatres only under the sentiment of the mythological content and to see the Gods like Lord Krishna or Lord Rama on screen. Women in the Cinema of mid 20<sup>th</sup> century were projected as weaker section. However, soon the Indian Cinema played a major role in liberating Indian women, it became a social outing and separate space was reserved for women for film viewing. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the portrayal of women in Indian cinema saw a sea change. Transformation in the thinking women also was influenced by the time to time content of Indian cinema. However, Indian television as a mighty media, due to its commercialisation and in the guise of competing for its supremacy over its counterparts, has contributed for the distortion of the image of women which gave a different dimension for their democratic participation.

In an era of transition, the participation of women in media has increased at very fast rate. The percentage of women working in night shifts and technical personnel like engineering graduates are on a fast and steady rise. Women Journalism and Mass Communication graduates are higher than ever. The priorities of urban woman are changing along with their lifestyles and conventions. Empowerment of religious minorities is very strong in India. The literacy rates of minority girls are seeing a ray of hope. For example, the presence of Muslim girl child in India is gradually increasing in the class rooms. Indian Muslim women, irrespective of their social status are entering the main stream in all walks of life.

### Content Slant on Indian Media

As the whole world knows, once it was the Hollywood that dominated the cinema scene but now it is the era of Bollywood. India tops the chart in production of movies per year. In fact, a very rich nation like the USA is much behind in the numbers. A small nation like Japan is able to churn out quite number of movies.







Rank	Country	No. of Movies/Year
# 1	 India	946
# 2	 United States	611
# 3	 Japan	310
# 4	 China	212
# 5	 France	203
# 6	 Italy	134

Chart 4: Number of movies produced by countries per year (courtesy: *wikipedia*)  
Even in the FM Radio or community stations which are on top now has female Radio Jockeys with lilted voices of hyper-articulation, keeping aside the serious language usages. Rural girls also have upper hand in this vocation of today. It all seems like indirect liberation of women for the outside world. Also in the film industry, song is a strong triumph card of Indian cinema. Movies are a hit mostly due to the songs. Even the Top-10 hit charts revolve around women characterization. The regional cinema songs are simply women dominated. To top it all, viewership of Indian Cinema has women on the higher side. The content of Indian film industry and the success of Indian films also seem to be because of feminine audience and not the male audience. Also, semi-urban and rural women are of the habit of visiting the theatre repeatedly. Whenever sentimentally attached movies, they view it more than twice. Hence the repeated audiences are women. They get emotionally carried away and likely to see the same movie again and again with different friends or relatives.

It is apparently known that the content on electronic media revolves around woman. Fiction on TV is majorly women based. Women newsreaders, women anchors and women reporters are portrayed as more successful and prominent, sometimes they really raise high in the ladder of profession too. Even the choice of recruitment is favourable to women in the TV networks of India for some tangible reasons. Decision makers in the production room often think that women employees attract larger target audience. Major Indian produced serials are of women dominated characters, either Mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, daughter or as personal secretary. Also, all the male targeted programmes are anchored by women. It is the same case with the Advertising industry also. Even if it is a traditional programme, it contains issues of child marriage, harassment cases, affairs, illicit relationships, all woven around women.

The social impact of a TV serial on a middle class family is evident wherein a housewife refuses to serve food for the family during the serial time. The content of the serial is dictating the priorities of family life, lifestyle, changing the very food and rest habits. Even social outings are getting a beating.

Majority of the Indian dailies, just like anywhere in the world, particularly in their supplements or pull-outs, majorly target women with content dedicated and etch-marked for them. Advertisement component has 80% of its models as females. Almost all the goods related to even masculine need, sports need, etc., also use women models in Advertisements.

Under the IT revolution, the cell phone proliferation due to the privatization policy has resulted in the vanishing of landlines which had not borne fruit to an expected extent. Total numbers of mobile phone subscribers in India have reached 881.40 million as of Oct 2011, compared to 33.19 million fixed line subscribers. However, through cell-phone, the exchange of text and calls are yet mostly confined to personal aspirations and proclivities, not much for any participation in national economics or uprisings.

A study (AIDS Care, 11:4, 1999)<sup>\*</sup> finds that married women are at high risk of acquiring HIV infection in India and health education remains the most feasible preventive tool in their context. In a survey conducted among 350 married women in Bombay, it was found that a majority had acquired information about AIDS from the mass media, especially television. Although 87% of women who knew of AIDS had been exposed to AIDS-related information in the mass media in the past four weeks, only 57% had discussed it within their social networks.

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<sup>\*</sup><http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09540129947820>

Those with more exposure to AIDS information in the mass media were significantly more likely to discuss AIDS within social networks. The women were most likely to discuss AIDS with their husbands as a general social issue, followed by friends and family members and least likely to talk to husbands about AIDS as a personal issue relating to their sexual relationship. Increased frequency and duration of AIDS messages on television will have a positive influence on AIDS knowledge in this group.

‘Romances occur on the internet without physical or visual contact’ (Wiseman, 1998). ‘People communicate with friends and relatives via technologies. There is a sense of being close connection to distant people and places, yet also a sense of isolation’ (ibid.)

*According to a Rapleaf study titled ‘Dr.Media’<sup>†</sup> [conducted a study of 13.2 million people in 2008 on how they're using social media], while both sexes still use social networking sites in huge numbers, women are the ones holding down the fort. It's interesting to know that women have always been able to get followers faster, over the whole spectrum, than men have. Men usually grind through the hours and gather their followers that way. Women seem to have some kind of magnetic pull that significantly increases their ability to rack up higher numbers of followers. Women, by contrast, are big on casual games and most social networks - especially those dominated by third-party applications - are essentially big casual game networks. Young women also spend much more time decorating their social network profile pages and making slide shows. Popular sites such as Whateverlife.com facilitate this trend by offering and catering MySpace layouts to young women.<sup>‡</sup>*

*There is a spurt in the urban Indian women entrepreneurs who have started exploiting SNS for their commercial purposes of home stay, matrimonial, retail outlets, marketing a book publication, clothing, travel or tourism (Living, Deccan Herald, May 12, 2012).*

*Another study (Teresa & Hinsley, 26: 2-2010) shows the difference in behaviour of genders in the usage of social media. Using a national sample of US adults, the study investigated the relationship between these three dimensions of the Big-Five model and social media use (defined as use of social networking sites and instant messages). It also examined whether gender and age played a role in that dynamic. Results revealed that:-*

*“.....while extraversion and openness to experiences were positively related to social media use, emotional stability was a negative predictor, controlling for socio-demographics and life satisfaction. The findings differed by gender and age. While extraverted men and women were both likely to be more frequent users of social media tools, only the men with greater degrees of emotional instability were more regular users. The relationship between extraversion and social media use was particularly important among the young adult cohort. Conversely, being open to new experiences emerged as an important personality predictor of social media use for the more mature segment of the sample.”*

In the light of the above arguments, the study “Social Media and women– a critical evaluation of the behavioural disconnect” finds significant and relevant as a crucial contemporary sociological study.

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<sup>†</sup><http://www.bitrebels.com/social/the-gender-differences-on-twitter-in-data-infographic/>

<sup>‡</sup>[http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/may2008/tc20080516\\_580743.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/may2008/tc20080516_580743.htm) (The Social Media Gender Gap by Auren Hoffman)

## METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study is to examine the role of urban women participants in Social Media and has the objectives of checking it for its strength in societal influences including that of developmental activities. The significance of the study is in redefining the participation and behaviour of women due to the influence of Social Media and vice versa.

The methodology here is of a theoretical study with critical approach to probe into the status of participation of women in Social Media. This study confines to urban women while the story of their rural counterpart calls for a larger, longitudinal and complex, recurring types of studies. Among traditional women, Cattle rearing assignments, farming, cooking, carrying water– are all already missing. If this is their fate, among urban women, the technological gadgets have made them simply preoccupied. The consciousness of why and for what the gadgets are being used is eluded. Though the features of these technologies are highly appreciable, improper human intervention has made all the difference. The study also provides leads by other media which are obscuring the new media messages thereby justifying the bottom up approach of Social Media practices by Indian women.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

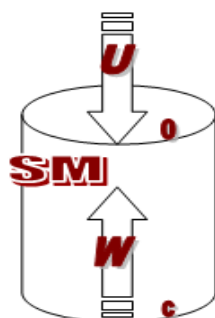
The Feminist theory of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Social Responsibility theory of Media by Dennis Mc Quail and the Theory of Out-Of-Reach propounded by the author of this work each refuting each other the Marketing paradigms constitutes the theoretical framework upon which this study dwells upon.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study has the design of analysing the problem in two-pronged vertically dynamic approach. The first prong is the conventional, traditional forms of media scene through which the majority of Indian women express themselves, communicate and transact their emotions as well as the business of life.

The other is the miniscule section of urban women who participate in SNS activities, yet with no sufficient decision making powers in the affairs of the society or the nation. Only the combination of these two viewpoints will suffice the findings of this study and bring out the substantial, realistic scene of women in India participating through media.

### Illustration for the Study



The above illustration is to depict the dual nature of Social Media involvement by Women in India  
*U = Urban women using SNS [open mouth 'O' of the cylinder of Social Media SM]; W= other women using various other media in the society [closed end 'c' of the cylinder]; Arrows depicting participation and approach by the women in India.*

It shows the two-way angle of approach to see the activities of women folk in India with respect to social media phenomenon. It can be seen that the masses of women participating from the bottom (W) where opportunities are simply closed for them and they hanker for some kind of ways for better life. The open ended mouth of the cylinder representing Social Media (SM) shows that the avenues for Urban women (U) is wide open yet there is same quantum of zeal in participation. W– the participation from bottom is also indicative of vast numbers and forming the base of the social media thus supporting the activities. U – the participation from the top open end also indicates openness yet seemingly hollow in approach by the women participating.

The media depiction of women changed only due to the increased urbanisation and modernization. Many a subject of Indian cinema is of dominating woman, and many among them are also of urban woman. In literature, new media and many such others, the projection of women is more as a commodity and less as a social participator. Merely due to any information revolution and availability of technology, no problem of women is solved, and it is not the only answer. The exposure of technology also will not yield the desired level of freedom and empowerment of women.

English is the embedded language in the front end utility of most technology including that of IT. With less than 20% of world's population able to grasp the language, a meagre five per cent of India able to comprehend it and while half of that percentage of Indian women can do so, is a block to SNS usage, forget any revolution through them.

While media owners encourage sensationalism, the practitioners glorify the same, whether it is of women or otherwise, and the people talk of it over and again till the entire women clan is put to shyness and go into a nutshell. Adding to the story of distortion is the emergence of New Media resulting in convergence which is playing havoc in the developing situation. The youth succumb to the lure of porn, voyeurism and extreme stands on womanhood. The empowerment of women and the potentiality of technology which are simultaneous occurrences call for a study of this kind.

## Case Study # 2

*Even in case of urban situation, due to promiscuity of porn sites and vulgarity of the internet, parents are very strong in having control over the use of the net by the girls and women. Depiction or exhibition of photographs on SNS has become prominent cause to ruin the lives of girls. A supposedly modern girl after engagement and due for the marriage puts some photos on face book about her drinking some liquid with her class mates. Some accepted friend downloads those photos and shares it with the family of the girl, only to be rejected by the prospective groom.*

Morphing of photographs of women with misuse of technology is for the perverted minds to get the kick of the technical usage. A working woman with her boss (a tweaked photo) will lead to connotations. Some pictures morphed into a couple of opposite sex in compromising positions leading to break of the marriage in the waking for the woman. A senior politician with a film star got leaked through SNS to many acquaintances and later he accepted the relationship and got into wedlock for the second time. It all boils down to the psychology of a dominant male in not accepting the liberty of the women.

The mass media that function as message carriers is onto anonymous audience and no individual control over the messages. But in Social Media, personal controls by choice are inherent. Just like showing their home albums, including their pets, old photos, old songs, marriage or birthday invitations, new findings or new adventures, offer a cake and so on,

technology has influenced the woman to show or showcase the same today through visuals over Social Media.

For urban women, it is the existing family links that matters. SNS is more merely for the bragging by showing proofs of photographs and videos of marriages, excursions, some intellectual interactions, prizes won by their off-springs, their status symbol, prestige and the users are happy in being like that. Overall, it is all mere imitation, nothing original and is amounting to morbid source of destruction of society.

Social Media has been a forum to exchange views and feelings which is confined to a community or individuals. Thus the characteristics of Social Media require examining its role under mass communication, if any. Also, the larger objectives like moulding the public opinion or direct participation in the process of development needs to be relooked in Social Media. Moreover computer skills, technological peripherals and affordability, non-availability of vernacular language over Social Media are some of the big barriers.

Social Media, which is in its infancy, is perceived as the neighbours' enemy and the pride of the owner. While India is emerging as a powerful economy, the socio-economical – educational – political development of women in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, hierarchical society appears to be a conceived reality.

Tweeting and the reactions pouring over it, many a times redundantly, the opinion seeking through micro blogs and the making of friends with strangers through the SNS has taken its toll of pre-established relationships, career, character and even life. Due to the inherent smarter and stronger reach, the SNS enlarges the message in the minds of the users well beyond its limit of stretch. Hence, it has become more of gossip rather than usable message.

### **Case Study # 3**

*It was a 3-months campaign about pulse polio in Bangalore, India. The date was announced through all media including new media and SNS about administering the drops to kids in the residential pocket of Asia's largest residential layout, Jayanagar. More than 52 per cent of the sample constituted mothers and were asked through a survey about the knowledge of where and when the pulse polio will be administered in their localities. In spite of widespread nursing homes and hospitals available in such a sophisticated area, all such mothers found the information completely new and surprising! They all rushed to the nearby administering kiosks only after knowing the information from the researchers! It points to a fact that procrastination is the basic psyche of the urban, metro life-style even as they are exposed to new media.*

It was a similar response about the voting awareness among urbanites. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen real use of SNS and the web as a whole by almost every political party in India but more by the individual politicians, mostly with modern outlook and heavyweights. They have been capable of influencing the voters in their own mite. But the outcome of using the Web is as below.

### **Case Study # 4**

*By a survey a magazine group, the date of voting remained a surprise in spite of frequent shouting by most SNS. The voting behaviour is influenced by many other factors and very less by the new media. The other factors that mattered also were not directly or indirectly affected by new media and hence not on the decision making of the voters.*

SNS usage by Indian women confines to mere transmission of information to the groups, that too mostly intimate, after thorough acquaintance. SNS is capable of bringing same vocation

and professionals together, exchanging valuable information. Indian society behaves domestically and does not mix up professional work with personal life. The personal life is confined to acquiring property or products, safety and comfort of spouse, children, kith and kin or involving in pabular talks. So basically SNS is for interpersonal communication and is exaggerated to Mass Communication and thus needs redefining.

### **Leads by Other Media Obscuring New Media Messages**

There are distortional factors of the other media for the presence of obscure messages of new media. Redefining priority of the media consumer is given a boost by the women icons over any media. For an instance with TV shows Director Ekta Kapoor where an issue is looked beyond the cultural context, she dares to violate any formalities. That's how the divorces, illicit or multiple relationships, family conspiracies, capturing position for owning property. This has increased promiscuity for distorted psyche, rapes, murders, judicial conflicts etc. It may find accepted among society members and not taken as taboo. The re-module of TV content is happening on these lines. By the projection of female characters of that kind, the tender psychology of the commoners conceives it as factual and real.

For a marriage situation of Indian kind, all vocations are needed for the celebration. Caste or community has no bar here. Nowhere in the world is such well-knit celebration seen like that of an Indian's. Village festivals and conglomerations are so organised that everything and everybody gets their share. When Global Village is talked of, it means the typical village values that are prominent and accepted even in the globalised situation. Amalgamation of cultures is perhaps the prerogative of complex nations like India. Technology has often proved only to beget monoculture due to similar, persistently recurring practices and usages.

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At the outset, over SNS, with no control over content input or retrieval there seems to be no fear factor regarding the limits to freedom of expression and appears to be influencing and all powerful. However, they are a mere platform to exchange views and nothing much of an impact over the masses. Though SNS performs a function of mass media, the mass opinion is seldom formed. It inclines more to the interpersonal convincing. SNS can build opinions but not influence. That too, in order to mould the opinion, credibility and nativity are essential. Mere presence of the word 'social' in the nomenclature of the media does not concoct the literal meaning of it.

With urbanisation and the rise of technology, SNS had given the advantage of being one of the very few ways of depicting emotions to the urban women. It is simply an era of transition. New media on some dimensions is used for economy building and strengthening a nation. But Social Media is just social in nature. New media is a growing media. So, the users are not matured in usage. Mostly used for very personal likings.

Academicians and experts look SNS as meant for exchange of information and an agent of transformation. Yet the time or situation is not that ripe. Even if the big thinking is realised through intended motivations through Social Media, such technologically simulated stimuli begets only technologically simulated response and not a real-time participation. It is applicable even to socialisation. Corruption ridden societies for a long time, with or without SNS will raise their voice. SNS may only be complementary; it is only that the Marketing agencies project the role of SNS as prominent and significant.

If mighty strong highly influential Indian cinema could not achieve considerable change in societal improvements, meagre convergence Social Media cannot achieve the desired change,



because the prerequisite for participation in new media is skill of letters. Though Social Media increases relationship, it is mostly temporal and also gives scope for increased suspicion amidst already established relationships. There are many instances of broken relationships, broken understanding for prospective marriages, false images and identity in participation of people over Social Media.

Even due to Positive Media Interventions, the intervention of media in many cases of deviations on women lives in India is a testimony of the fact to establish the degree of relationship and bearing that the media has on women. The murder cases of teenager Aarushi, business woman Jessica Lal, foreigner Scarlet Kealing, politically involved nurse Bhanwari Devi and so many other women in the past reflect the prominent role of media in India. However, the media consumers have not known the use of the tool effectively. Media owners, practitioners and people will have to share the blame equally for the inappropriate use of the media tool.

Acculturation is a silently raising phenomenon in the urban circles of women. Depiction of women on electronic media that ensures maximum reach is only for the race to achieve the TRPs. A major question before any professional in any TV channel is to retain a TV consumer (viewer) with it, i.e., to secure the commercial profits. The psyche of the women constituting a major portion of the population matters to the society which is ridden with many sentimental simpletons. To retain the feminine media consumers, the media show the unusual, not of contemporary time. Eg:- the same old stuff *Panchatantra*, *Sati Savitri*, etc.

Urbanisation and modernization are only to the confines of mere materialistic comforts. Entry of technology does not ensure change of peoples' psyche. It just quickens process of dissemination of information, hasten the gratification, but the influences on attitude is void. The cultural fabric of India is so strong that such media has little effect on basic patterns of living. It is not an exaggeration to state that SNS is only an exhibit or a reflection of snobbishness by the use of Indian women.

## EPILOGUE

The study clearly comes out with the findings that there has been no considerable impact of social media on the behaviour of women in India. Neither the women participation in Social Networking Sites on the web nor the participation of Indian women through various social media has been able to take standards of life of the masses of Indian women to a new height.

There is a need for the Governance, the agencies, the male counterpart citizens of the nation and the success tasting Indian women both within India and abroad to address the various issues hindering the progress and participation of women in nation building by regularly intervening in the law making, media monitoring, political actions and technological repercussions.

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