**A STUDY ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH THE EFFECTIVE ROLE OF MEDIA**

**By**

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There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing.

Swami Vivekananda

In India, women comprise 52 percent of its total population and with the advent of the 21st century and its development in various scientific and technological eras the status of women is also changing at a fast pace but we cannot ignore the very existence of a world where women are discriminated, marginalized and oppressed because of various gender divide issues. Women empowerment is very essential for the development of the country and it could not be denied that women can change the destiny of a country. The country's overall development depends greatly on the inclusion of women in its development process. The social and economic emancipation of women could not be achieved without social media in the transition era of modern high technology because social media is becoming an agent of change. Media is the fourth pillar of society and a democratic medium of information has certain duties to follow in the betterment of society. It has proven potential for mobilizing attention and accountability for women's rights and challenging discrimination and stereotype. There still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programs and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other hand. Mass media can play a vital role efficiently in transmitting information to society in empowering women by educating society about their stand and worth in the prevailing period. It is instrumental in bringing about unity among the masses and is the backbone of the nation. Media is the mirror of society and media reports are a reflection of happening in society. New innovative decent presentations of women based on Indian culture and society through media must be introduced. The present topic has suggested how to increase the participation of women in decision-making through the help of media and how to promote a decent and balanced portrayal of women in the media the research article likes to conclude that social media is contributing to women's empowerment but there is virtual gender gap due to lack of literacy, cybercrime, cyberbullying, etc and women are not able to fully utilize the new space.

It can be said that there is an ongoing trend in Indian Media to portray women as busy and concerned with beautifying themselves, choosing make-up, new fashions, jewellery, cosmetics, constantly watching their weight, worried about their good figure and skin colour, proud of advertising and selling latest products. She is hardly portrayed as having social commitments, capable of intelligent decision making, or as capable leaders and policymaker. Usually, she is shown to accompany her husband like a shadow or as a decorative piece. Manu's dictum that a woman is protected by her father in childhood, husband in adulthood and son in old age is perpetuated in all media representation. In most representations, she is tactfully domesticated, and her place is 'home and hearth'. As Swami Vivekananda aptly said to the empowerment of women for the building of a strong nation that the nation which respects women will never become great…

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Media is considered to be the most important tool of society in modern times as it has the power to reach out to a large audience by mass communication and create an impact wherever it can reach, which now has become far and wide. Social media through its ever updating apps and networking is an inevitable source of influence on mass. The media at large has been instrumental though not to the degree desired in supporting the movement for women's emancipation by focusing on the neglect and marginalization of the position of women in society. Communication is extremely important for women's development and mass media play a significant role. It is to be distinguished that the growth of women's education and their entry into this business through employment has contributed to the growth of media.

Women have been seen portrayed differently from the year 1890s until the present. Back in the days, women dress well, covered with clothes to show that they have class, and hair was done in such a way that when hats were put on, elegance will show. The way women talk, walk and act soon changed over time. For every decade since the early 1900s, women were shown as weak beings, useless in business and politics and sometimes even portrayed as sex objects or sex icons on many occasions. Even though this case had been dragged on for a very long time, changes came soon after for the females. People's perception of women changed, women are no longer as weak as society thinks.

Moving on, the growth of mass media in recent years has made a huge impact on the looks of women in societies. Technological-wise, new communication technologies have become so prominent to people in so many households. With the help of the new communication technologies, the perception of men toward women gradually changes and hence the result is what women are today. Before moving on to what communication technologies had done to empower women, I am going to discuss first how women are being portrayed in the media from the 1990s to the present day.

Back in the days in the year of the last decade of the 20th and after, the portrayal of women was still blatantly stereotypical but it has changed over time. It is the human culture that believes that men are the stronger being while women are weak and could not achieve anything other than pleasing the men and also to clean after them. When television was invented, media started coming out with television shows to entertain people back in the comfort of their own homes. In these shows, women can be seen portrayed as sex symbols, weak housewives and sometimes gold diggers. The media has already set a limit for the audience to perceive women in such a way that it is now very common for any human being to think of women in a bad way.

Advertisement plays a huge role in portraying certain things as well. Even though advertisements are short and simple, it gives a huge impact and an enormous influence on the viewers as well as the spectators. For example, an advertisement for Calvin Klein by Kate Moss and Mark Wahlberg became very controversial at that time because the mindset of the society wasn't that open yet. In the advertisement, Kate Moss was pictured half naked and only wearing underwear produced by Calvin Klein in one of the photographs. In India, the advertisement of Milin Soman and model Madhu Sapre created controversy. When the advertisement was released and shown to the public, mixed reactions were received.

Many debated saying that it was inappropriate as the advertisement showed that women are only being used as an object and also to be portrayed as sex symbols. A trend was then started showing women in skin tight clothing in the advertisement as it was the ‘in-thing’ to present women in that manner. There are groups out there that support women from getting bullied or other cases. In this case, pro-feminist cultural critic, Robert Jensen accused mass media and also advertising of using women as an object to promote the goods and services being sold to the public. These women rather than being treated as human; instead they are being used as living, breathing mannequins to show off the goods better.

The role of media has portrayed women as sex symbols/icons/objects. This can be seen in rap videos of most of the artists and other rappers in the industry. Women are dressed in almost nothing except for tight clothing to cover their private parts and are also seen wearing stilettos. These women are only used as props in the music videos to attract viewers. It's not only degrading to the female community but also very shameful. This is especially hard for the black women as the influence of others on black women changes as they can be seen in these music videos dressed inappropriately and performing actions that are not suitable for minors. This sexually explicit content in rap music videos promotes an unhealthy view of black women. The view of others toward these women will start to grow negatively and it will also downgrade the positive trait of these women.

Television plays a huge role in feeding societal beliefs to the viewers. Television doesn't just teach the viewers how a particular gender should act; it also shows how the other particular gender should act as expected by the first gender. In the broadcast of television shows, women are portrayed in several manners. Women are sometimes portrayed as motherly people to little children, sometimes also portrayed as passive and innocent women; examples are stay-at-home housewives in most American movies. As also mentioned earlier, women are shown as sex objects or can just simply be overlooked as an unimportant existence. Bear in mind all these examples given are from the year 1990 and forward.

As years passed, women were soon coming out as stronger and more positive figures in society. In movies produced in recent years from the year 1990 to 2012, women can be seen running in congress in politics, they are also much more involved in the corporate world, working as a CEO or in other positions. Some women started working in the police force, and women are now even allowed to join the army. After the long run of portraying women as low as garbage, the media has taken a turn and started to show that women are powerful in certain aspects and they are allowed to hold certain posts as well. With the use of media, women are starting to get more promotions in their career more than they have in the past when women are shunned by society for being the weaker gender compared to men.

The media does not only influence society, it also holds the current societal values of the society and also the society's views. Since the media is said to be a very powerful medium, it creates a very solid and united front toward socialization. It is indeed true, according to the theory, "by endlessly presenting endless portrayals of reality in its content, mass communications provide experiences from which we collectively shape our meanings" (Weimann, p. 31). Even though it is so, as television becomes more popular in society and it has gradually become more of a way of life, it may start to develop as an even more influential medium in society. The importance of media is evident, as I have mentioned several times earlier and also the way women are being used and portrayed should be of vital interest to society.

Continuing on the topic of how women are being portrayed in the media, I may have mentioned this several times before but since it's still on the same topic, the women portrayed by media are expected to be both virginal and sexual at the same time to attract the attention of viewers. These depictions of women trying to be virginal are seen dressed in a childlike or angelic outfit to define their virginal innocence. This may seem ironic as these same women who are being portrayed as virginal are being depicted sexually and lustfully. A clear example of these depictions can be seen in Victoria's Secret advertisements or their collections. In one of Victoria's Secret collections, soft pastel colours are seen being used in their clothing line, angelic poses by the models; some were even given white fluffy wings to be worn while they were parading in their outfit, these points are non-forward but yet they are still very sexual photos photographed. These advertisements/collections/photographs are sending out a message saying that we may be innocent in your eyes, but we’re also ready to please you.

In the media world, media has already set impossibly high beauty standards and the result of this often leaves women in a losing position in reality. The media has already set firm a message saying that a woman's worth is strongly dependent on her sexuality. Women's sexuality is valued mainly on their beauty and also their performance. Since the media has already set such high standards women's beauty standards, hence women will spend countless amounts of money on beauty products and clothing and also countless time to bring themselves up to attain the same level or even higher to achieve what the media has already set. Unfortunately, with the concept that I've mentioned above on the virginal and sexual depictions of women, women are being set to be disappointed and fail. This is sole because no woman in the world can be both portrayed as innocent and sexual at the same time so women are being forced to choose either one.

In the past, many stereotypes portrayed in mass media have unfortunately held women back. Fortunately, there appears to be a new wave of consciousness and action emerging, where women are being portrayed as strong and capable, achieving anything they set their mind to get. Since no woman can be portrayed as both innocent and sexual at the same time, they would either fail at being a sexual being by choosing the choice of being virginal or they would fail at being a virginal being by choosing to be sexual. The usual side effect of such cases is very significant and also has shown a very obvious impact on women and also on women defining their sexuality.

Women are very vulnerable and have been treated unequally in every aspect of life. If there is no active participation of women in aspects of life, the world may not function as properly as it can be and it may even fail without women because women occupy half of the population on Earth. In their lives, women should make a stand and realize that they do have rights to not only women's rights but also to work and good health care, education is provided, economic security and last but not least, the right to have political power. A wise man, Mahatma Gandhi, once said that he firmly believes that the status of women would not change merely by bringing legislation; it must be supported by the change in the women's social circumstances and situations and also man's sexist attitude towards women.

Even though the idea of new communication technology has been lingering in the thoughts of people and has been around for centuries, the concept of this new communication technology only began to rise to the attention of people as a form of media communications in the middle of 20th century. After surfacing at the top, new media started generating and these new media including electronic mail, voice mail and fax machines were produced and were then used for interpersonal communication.

Seeing that media is already a powerful tool in influencing society, the use of new communication technology can be used as an effective tool to empower women. With the help of different types of mass media campaigns, they could pitch in to help organise campaigns to allow society to understand their medium using a traditional form of communication such as story-telling, puppetry and several other mediums. With introductions of more feminist oriented research to explore and also to theorized the ways women have meddled to challenge the mainstream media representations of women; themselves by producing several different types of new media where the women's feminist values can stand in the centre of which both the content of the media produced and also the production process has it, the feminist values.

New technologies provide the opportunity for women to acquire new skills that enable them to undertake tasks requiring multiple skills, logic, inventiveness and creativity that in turn increase their motivation to learn more. This may offer more employment opportunities for women in areas that were not available or appropriate for them before. One effect of mechanization and computerization of manufacturing is that it reduces the need for physical labour and increases the need for skilled labour. This opens up new possibilities for women to get employment in manufacturing fields after undergoing technical training. In the metallurgy industry in China, for example, women used to comprise only one per cent of the total workforce, but with the introduction of new technologies, the 'heaviness' of work has reduced significantly. Further, with the abolition of the distinction between 'heavy' and 'light' work, it is easier to argue for equal wages for women.

The broad impact of ICT on women has two perspectives: it serves as a tool in gender mainstreaming, but it also allows women to take a more active part in technology development, including the ICT itself. The way technologies develop is now changing: the production of ideas alone is no longer sufficient for accomplishing innovation. The workforce of the future has to be multi-skilled and must involve collaboration between workers at different levels of skills and with different perspectives. Women, through the connectivity provided by ICT, can take a proactive role in technology development: being half the population, they can influence the direction of technology development by bringing their ideas and their consumer perspectives to bear in shaping the direction of technology development.

It is a commonly held view that women are less engaged with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) than men. The new communication technologies are available for everyone to use and women have to be an equal benefit from the advantages offered by the technology, also the emergence of the use of the products and the processes. The benefits accumulated from the knowledge will not need to be restricted to the upper class of society but have to flow freely to every part of the female population. The series of areas in which the new communication technologies can put better supervision in the hands of women is very extensive and also continuously spreading. The ICT after converging with other forms of communication have the actual potential to reach those women who are present and have not been reached by any other media, hence empowering them to start participating in economic and social progress and also to make an informed decision on issues that will affect them dearly.

The subject of women and media is quite relevant in the present day context from platforms the discussions on the subject are being initiated. The issues normally faced by women such as gender equality, equity and empowerment of women have now started to become even more significant in these women's lives as they have a vital role in the growth and also a transfer of knowledge, which often forms the prototype of survival for the communities to start to adapt and also to minimize the women's risk in unfortunate circumstances. Because of women's biological and social roles, they are generally more persistent than men in the regions of their habitat. Women are therefore much more aware than men of the environmental, economic and social needs of their territory. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, you can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women.

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