

# THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEM\*

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## ABSTRACT

Today, the media constitutes a big part of our lives and almost everyone benefits from the mass media. The impact of the social media is hugely significant in women empowerment, particularly among young women because of its effect in the dissemination and interpretation of knowledge, innovation and news. Social media are forms of electronic communication such as Web sites and Apps through which people create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages etc. The growing access of the web in the late 20th century has allowed women to empower themselves by using various tools on the Internet. Social media can empower young women economically, socially and emotionally through uplifting articles shared through blogs by various bloggers specifically aimed at women where matters of the heart are being discussed. According to a report, Facebook is the most frequently patronized social media website, the availability and ease of use of affordable smart phones have also contributed their own quota to young women frequently visiting the site. The influential power of social media cannot be over emphasized. More women should be empowered by enhancing their skills, knowledge and access to information technology.

**Keywords:** Social Media, smart phones, Facebook, blogs, information technology.

## INTRODUCTION

Media is considered to be the most important tool of society in the 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 (Pavlik and MacIntoch, 2015). Social media, through its ever updating apps and networking, is an inevitable source of influence on the masses. The media at large has been instrumental, though not to the degree desired in supporting the movement for women emancipation, by focusing on the neglect and marginalization of the position of the women in the society. Communication is extremely important for women's development and the social media plays a significant role in doing just that (Ananta and Ahamad, 2016).

## THE SOCIAL MEDIA

According to Wikipedia, social media are computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks and they are interactive Web 2.0 Internet-based applications (Han, 2016). User-generated content, such as text posts or comments, digital photos or videos and data generated through all online interactions, are the lifeblood of social media (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Social media facilitate the development of online social

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networks by connecting a user's profile with those of other individuals or groups. Users typically access social media services via web-based technologies on desktop computers and laptops or download services that offer social media functionality to their mobile devices e.g. smart phones and tablet computers (Madge *et al.*, 2009).

The term social media is usually used to describe social networking websites. The most well-known social media sites are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. These sites allow one to share photos, videos and information, organize events, chat and play online games. These social media websites have more than 100,000,000 registered users (Obar and Wilman, 2015). Mobile social media refers to the use of social media on mobile devices such as smart phones and tablet computers. Social media websites are popular on mobile devices such as smart phones and young people have high usage rates of smart phones, which accounts for them being the significant users of social media websites. A characteristic of social media is the capability to reach small or large audiences; for example, either a blog post or television show may reach a number of people or millions of people per time (Tang *et al.*, 2012). A blog (short form for the word weblog) is a discussion or informational website published on the World Wide Web consisting of discrete, often informal diary text entries or posts or simply put; a blog is a frequently updated online personal journal or diary. A blogger is a person or administrator who maintains a blog (Chen, 2015).

People who are homeless, living in poverty, elderly people and those living in rural or remote communities may have little or no access to computers and the Internet; in contrast, middle class and upper-class people in urban areas have very high rates of computer and Internet access. In one report, a 2015 study found out that 65% of Nigerians, 61% of Indonesians and 58% of Indians agree with the statement that "Facebook is the Internet" compared with only 5% in the US. This list of the leading social networks based on number of active user accounts as of August 2017 (UNESCO, 2015) are given as follows:

- a. Facebook: 2,047,000,000 users
- b. YouTube: 1,500,000,000 users
- c. WhatsApp: 1,200,000,000 users
- d. Facebook Messenger: 1,200,000,000 users
- e. WeChat: 938,000,000 users
- f. QQ: 861,000,000 users
- g. Instagram: 700,000,000 users
- h. QZone: 638,000,000 users
- i. Tumblr: 357,000,000 users
- j. Twitter: 328,000,000 users
- k. Sina Weibo: 313,000,000 users
- l. Baidu Tieba: 300,000,000 users
- m. Skype: 300,000,000 users
- n. Viber: 260,000,000 users
- o. Snapchat: 255,000,000 users
- p. Line: 214,000,000 users
- q. Pinterest 175,000,000 users

Social media alters the way we understand each other. Social media has allowed for mass cultural exchange and intercultural communication. For example, people from different regions or even different countries can discuss current issues on Facebook (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Social networking on social media websites involves the use of the internet to connect users with their friends, family and acquaintances. Social media websites are not necessarily about meeting new people online only, although this does happen, instead, they are primarily about connecting with friends, family and acquaintances (Chen and Kim, 2013). Social media should not be seen primarily as the platforms upon which people post but rather as the contents that are posted on these platforms. A major effect of social media is that human communication has become more visual at the expense of oral and textual modes.

## **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

Women Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society (Churchyard, 2009). Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as:

- a. Freedom to live their lives with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity
- b. Have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace
- c. To make their own choices and decisions
- d. Have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities
- e. Have equal social status in the society
- f. Have equal rights for social and economic justice
- g. Determine financial and economic choices
- h. Get equal opportunity for education
- i. Get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias
- j. Get safe and comfortable working environment.

Empowerment is a process. Through the process, an individual becomes an agent of change. More simply put, it is the “can do” factor, going from “I can’t” to “I can” (Creedon, 1989). The growing access of the web in the late 20th century has allowed women to empower themselves by using various tools on the Internet. With the introduction of the World Wide Web, women have begun to use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter for online activism (Nussbaum, 2000). The main advantage of Women Empowerment is that there will be an overall development of the society as women empowerment leads to decrease in domestic violence. Uneducated women are at higher risk for domestic violence than educated women (Sutton and Pollock, 2000).

## **THE POWER OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media can empower young women socially and emotionally through uplifting articles shared through blogs by various bloggers specifically aimed at women where matters of the heart are being discussed. Blogs are used as public diaries where women discuss personal and public issues in their lives. Storytelling used by women in blogs to introduce their thoughts has been proven to have its major effect (Ayish, 2011). Empowering girls and women is powerful. Here are some powerful quotes establishing the benefits of women empowerment: *When women succeed, nations are safer, secure and prosperous* (Barack Obama, 44th US President), *There is*

*no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women* (Kofi Annan, 7th UN Secretary General), *Empowering women is key to building a future we want* (Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics) (Morahan-Martin, 2000).

Psychological power is expressed as an individual sense of potency demonstrated in self-confidence behaviour, self-reliance and increased self-esteem. Friedman explains empowerment as social power, which can be translated into political power. Social networking enhances one's position and power, which consequently expedites and strengthens the process of psychological, social and political empowerment (Behr, 1980). Social networking offers more of an opportunity to network and get to know people and places. Women can no more be lost nor will they have to depend on others to carry out their requirements (Castronovo, 2012).

Social Media answers questions that could raise and suggests solutions to enquiries made by them. Social Media can really turnout to be a friend indeed that gives young women both intellectual and emotional company without them having to lose their identities. The more women use social media, the more they will benefit from it as well (Shirky, 2011). Social media helps women to master with friends, followers and connections all over the country or even the world. Women may start to like, tweet, share, follow and be linked to a new sort of technological empowerment and dynamism (Wagner, 2015).

Social media has brought the age criteria down as technology learning starts happening at a very early age among generation Y. In a study conducted in the Arab world, it was reported that more men (65%) than women (62%) believed that social media can be used for the political empowerment of women i.e. women empowerment through technology and social media (Dubai School of Government Report, 2011). This could mean that in a community where 70% has something to say, the social media could serve as the perfect platform to fulfill the need to express oneself.

## **DISCUSSION**

It has been observed, perhaps from reports too, that most women, particularly young ladies spend more time on their mobile phones than their male counterparts. It is no news that that some young women are obsessed with their smart phones the way some men are crazy about luxury cars. This alone makes social media platforms particularly attractive to them. According to a report, Facebook is the most frequently patronized social media website, the availability and ease of use of affordable smart phones have also contributed their own quota to these young women frequently visiting the site. A smart phone has also become an essential accessory to a lady's personal items and the availability of mobile data network has also ensured surfing the internet on the go.

Women, often portrayed as the weaker sex, have now seen the need to change this notion. Their strength lies more on the power of their emotions and this could explain why they tend to engage in frequent chats, socialize and depend on group support. Blogs, particularly those aimed at women, on social media offer this advantage of educating women on different issues, some, like *Mammalette* (a Nigerian-managed blogging platform) on Facebook, provides women the platform where they can share and post personal issues, learn skills on motherhood and good parenting, seek advice from experts and non-experts alike, discuss trendy issues, help women

overcome domestic violence and gender discrimination, refer victimized women for professional advice or therapy or even share videos where women can pick up some trade while being taught to be self-reliant and economically useful etc. As they say, 'Knowledge is power,' so, the need to know and the knowledge acquired will liberate women from mental and emotional slavery. In this modern world where technology has taken over and communication is important, the social media is hugely gaining popularity as a platform for women empowerment, even politically too!

## CONCLUSION


The influential power of social media cannot be over emphasized. As "ladies love to gist," the social media, particularly Facebook, provides young women with the opportunity to share and teach or demonstrate useful enlightening or entrepreneurial tips, seek or give advice on burdensome personal issues, encourage and emotionally uplift one another, improve and enhance their inter-personal skills and a whole lot of other stuffs through popular posts from different blogs. The role of the social media is very important to accelerate women empowerment which could lead to the social, economic and emotional empowerment of women.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

More women should be empowered by enhancing their skills, knowledge and access to information technology. Most young women, especially in the rural areas in developing countries are not able to access effectively the expanding electronic information highways and therefore cannot establish networks that will provide them with alternative sources of information. It is therefore important to provide electronic gadgets at affordable prices and educate this category of women on how to make use of the social media to be able to also partake in the immense benefits it offer. Young women should see the social media not only as a platform for socializing but also interacting thereby being their 'brother's keeper.'

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