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Social Media As A Catalyst for Women's Economic Independence: A Case Study of Women in Assam

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Abstract

Technology plays an important role in development. Digital technology in communication and universal access of mobile connectivity have created a significant opportunity for women to think about update their life style within a flexible space and time. Towards the end of 20th century, the information and communication sectors have been booming with some digital media platforms and accordingly the market have been loaded with Smartphone which is an important tool for communication, business, entertainment and education. Easy access of mobile data for connectivity along with digital media platforms gives opportunities to women to use their skill and resource for economic independence.

The case study explores the role of social media as a catalyst for women's economic independence in Assam, India. In recent times, it has been noticed that women in Assam have increasingly engaged with social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, X, Instagram and WhatsApp to generate income, access markets and build entrepreneurial venture. To do the entire study the researcher adopt mixed methods approaches which combines in-depth interview with 10 women across rural and urban Assam, survey of 50 participants and analysis of social media usage data. The study examines how digital platforms help women to overcome geographical barriers, traditional gender roles and limited access to employment. Finding reveal that social media contributes to economic independence providing platforms where women can sell their resources and skills. Expanding market through online network can enter global market through E-commerce and facilitating skill development.

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Women, Economic Independence, Entrepreneurship.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent time, we have been experiencing rapid growth and development of communication technology. Digital technology is reshaping the socio-economic and cultural landscapes across the globe. Social media platforms transforming as most powerful tools for communication, networking, information and provides economic opportunities. For women in India as well as Assam avail an opportunity to connect with people across the globe to expand business and provides new avenues of advocacy and economic independence. Flexible time and space are the added advantages to make the social media platforms as effective tools for economic activities.

A powerful medium can guide and shape the society and its people by giving equal opportunities where women can also get same benefit to improve their lifestyle. The gap between rural and urban can be

reduced with connectivity. The Universal Access of mobile connectivity and easy access of mobile data reduces crisis of communication among people. The women have been usually experiencing economic hardship in various stages of life. After marriage, women have to look after her family where she has faced some obstacles to manage both home and jobs. The research paper examines how social media function as a catalyst for women's economic independence in Assam. The empirical case study has drawn a map of opportunities, barriers and outcomes to established hierarchies of power for economic empowerment of women in Assam.

Social media platforms to digital platforms that allow user to create, share, manage and interact with content in virtual mode and become a new avenue for social commerce. Many women use these platforms for entrepreneurship activities, networking and skill learning. As on January 2025, there was approximately 491 million social media user in India which is 33.7% of the total population. The percentage of female users 18 years above was 34.5% against male users of 65.5%. YouTube has highest numbers of users in India with 462 million users followed by Instagram 415 million, Facebook 384 million and WhatsApp was leading in messaging and social networking and approximately 83% of internet users use WhatApp for social networking.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Communication, networking, market place and peer group support are most essential factors for economic independence of women. The availability of smart phones in affordable prices and growing number social media platforms with easy access of data has opened up new opportunity for business, marketing and networking. The women can get opportunities and advantages through social media platforms and can learn skills to generate income and also can do entrepreneurship activities within the flexible time and space. The universal access of mobile connectivity and Digital India has given opportunities to women to connect rest of the world and reduces the communication gap between rural and urban. Women can now create virtual market and easily can do E commerce from any places of Assam.

3. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Although the constitution of India has given equal right to both men and women, still there have been some discrepancies of sharing the power. The first right always goes to men in some society in India as well as in Assam. The age old tradition and custom is one of the reason where women have deprived for financial right or property right. The gap between have and have not, gender biased and lack of opportunities, barriers in communication are also some major factors of women empowerment especially economic empowerment. Moreover, a market place is an essential tool for any business. Many women have usually facing problem to sell and promote their products due to non-availability market. To explore all the dynamics, the researcher will examine how social media plays a catalytic role by enhancing to reach global market, brand visibility. Collaboration and networking.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine how women of Assam are using social media platform to generate income for economic independence.
2. To explore the differences in outcomes of social media usage across rural and urban women of Assam.

3. To identify the barriers that affect the women while using social media platforms for economic purposes. (both rural and urban women).

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How women in Assam using social media as a tool for economic empowerment and entrepreneurship?
2. What kind of economic activities done by the women in Assam through social media platforms?
3. what are the impact of social media on women's financial decision making, independence and income.
4. What are the major challenges do women faces in utilizing the social media platforms.

6. METHODOLOGY

To do the entire study the researcher adopt mixed methods approaches which combines in-depth interview with 10 women across rural and urban Assam, survey of 50 participants selected through purposive and snowball sampling and analysis of social media usage data to understand the impact social media in women's economic independence.

Population: Women who uses social media platforms for economic activities.

Data Collection Tools: Survey, Questionnaire and personal observation.

Data analysis comprises descriptive and inferential statistic for quantitative data. Thematic analysis has done for qualitative data. To ensure the validity and reliability, pilot testing, triangulation and population checking is done in systemic way.

7. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The result from survey reveals insight into how women utilize social media platforms to generate income within the flexible time and space. A total of 50 respondents participated from urban and rural areas of Assam who use actively social media platform for entrepreneurship. The survey measured social media frequency, types and percentage, benefits and challenges faced by the women on social media platforms.

Table 1: Social media platforms uses for Entrepreneurship activities:

Platforms	Number of user	Percentage 0f users
YouTube	40	80%
Facebook	50	100%
Instagram	30	60%
X	5	10%
WhatApp	50	100%
LinkedIn	5	10%

From the survey, it has been found that the respondents prefer mostly Facebook and WhatsApp as a tool for economic and promotional activities followed by YouTube, Instagram, X and LinkedIn. It has been also found X has been uses to create contents and LinkedIn is preferred for business communication.

Table 2: Frequency of Social media user:

Frequency	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Daily	25	50%
Many times in a week	15	30%
Less than 6 days	8	16%
Once in a week	2	4%

The respondents who uses social media on daily basis is 50%. Many time user's percentage is 30% while 16% respondents use social media for economic activities is less than 6 days. 4% respondents use social media once in a week.

7.1Findings from in depth Interview

From the semi structured interview of 10 respondents from rural and urban provided qualitative insight about the social media and its effectiveness to generate income for financial empowerment of women and its barrier while using the social media platforms. Participants revealed the experiences, benefits and democracies of social media platforms. Furthermore, the respondents highlighted how they shifted their carrier from Job to business that to using social media platforms within flexible time and space. The respondents also highlighted several benefit of Social media which included minimum investment**,** can promote their own skills and products that too without support of mediator directly to customer, can create virtual market. Most of the respondents said that social media platforms enable them to connect globally which is cost effective and also platforms are effective for collaboration, networking and connect with peer group as and when needed.

It has been found that in initial stage, many women faced to handled social media platforms due to lack of digital literacy. The respondent from rural area experienced difficulties to manage online transaction due to slow internet and mobile data. They had also faced problem to courier their product to customer due to non-availability of courier service in their village. From the interview it has also been found that both rural and urban women faced algorithms biased which affect content visibility, audience reach and monetization facility.

7.2Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis explored the key themes which emerges how social media can empower the women economically. The major four key themes arise from the thematic analysis interviews are:

1. **Entrepreneurship and micro business Development :** YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp play catalytic role and enabled women to start business with minimum capital. Work from home women or mothers doing clothing and home based business using Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp. Women weavers and artisans selling their homemade product using social media platforms. Women can now handle finance independently.
2. **Flexibility of space and time :** Social media entrepreneurship allows women to work from home which is not possible in traditional cultures which restricts women's mobility.
3. **Networking and Community Building :** Social media helps women to connect like-minded people with same interest, investors, collaborators and mentors. To share skills and knowledge social media often build networks and act as support system.

4. **Advocacy and Challenging Norms:** Many women breaks gender norms and advocate for economic right and also inspire others by sharing success stories of their business journey and the barriers they have been facing during their business journey.

8. CONCLUSION

The case study focused how social media could be a tool for economic uplift of women in Assam by providing platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and WhatsApp. All these platforms provide low cost marketplaces where women can sell their home based products, can build network to promote their brand and can create a global market in where social media platforms play a catalytic role for the women in Assam.

Social media serves as a transformative tool for women's economic independence by providing platforms for entrepreneurship, community building, advocacy and also democratizing skills, market place and peer group support. Despite the challenges on social media platforms like online harassment, digital literacy, algorimathic bias, the scope and potential for social media to serve as a catalyst for women's economic independence remains significant and challenging to grow with fast growing communication technologies.

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