

Social Media and Women

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Abstract: Social media is refers to computer-based technology that is used to share ideas and thoughts through social networking sites and virtual communities. Social media can prove to be a very effective tool in hands of the public in general, but especially for women. Women everywhere make use of social media very commonly, and for varied purposes. Social media can be used to voice their opinions and thoughts that might go unheard elsewhere. Hence, use of social media very significantly shows empowerment of women. But, social media has also made women very vulnerable to attacks from anti-social elements and those who want to suppress their voice and a growing cognizance of this has lead some to believe that women consider social media to be an unsafe space whereas some still believe that social media is considered to be a safe space by women. Women are also considered to be less aware of the security provisions provided by social networking sites by some while some consider women to be sufficiently aware of the security provisions provided by social networking sites. This paper is an effort to capture the relationship women share with social media at grassroots level

Keywords: Social media, women, security

I. INTRODUCTION

The term social media refers to a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks and communities. Social media is internet-based and gives users quick electronic communication of content, such as personal information, documents, videos, and photos. Users engage with social media via a computer, tablet, or smartphone via web-based software or applications. Some of the most popular social networking sites are Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn and YouTube among others. 74% of internet users are using social media, with women (76%) having a slight edge over men (72%). Behind every social media platform stand millions of women as users and developers.

With increasing popularity of social media, women all around use at least one of the social media platforms available at their disposal. They use it to share their thoughts, feelings, ideas, information, to remain connected with loved ones, for entertainment purposes as well as for business purposes. Social media usage by women displays their empowerment as well. Social media provides the platform, a voice for women who have been suppressed so far. Women have led movements on social media that have led to changes in the societal system we live in today. However, as it is said, 'In every seed of good, there is always a piece of bad', social media poses certain risks to safety of women too. There are instances of women receiving vulgar or unwelcome messages, inappropriate comments being made under their social media posts, trolling, sexual harassment and rumours being spread on social media. Thus, the aim for this study is to describe reasons articulated by women, on why they use social media. Also, how expressions channeled through its use impact them in general.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper makes use of mixed approaches of research, that is, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches are employed in the making of this research paper. The research design used is diagnostic design. Both primary and secondary types of data were used to procure data for this research paper. Primary data was collected through an online survey conducted through a questionnaire that was designed to describe reasons articulated by women, on why they use social media, their experiences and their relationship with social media. Secondary data was collected through verified websites for the purposes of providing further information on the subject at hand. The methods employed for data collection were survey and observation. Random sampling method was used for sampling

of data. The collected data was compiled and analyzed for study. Graph diagrams and charts have been used for the presentation of findings.

Objectives of Study

- To highlight the situation of women using social media.
- To study the impact of social media on women – positive or negative.
- To analyse the level of safety of women using social media.
- To analyse the measures / steps taken by women to deal with increased changes in the virtual sphere.
- Issues and challenges of women using social media.

Social media and women

Man is a social animal. All humans have the basic need of connecting with their surroundings and fellow humans, in one way or the other. Throughout human history, hundreds of ways have been used to connect and maintain contact with others. From smoke signals to letters, from telegraphs to telephones, myriads of ways have been used to maintain social connections with other humans. In today’s day and age, social media has been the most popular medium used by humans to maintain social connectivity.

As far as women are concerned, females find same-sex social interactions to be more rewarding than males, and females are more sensitive to the rewarding actions of oxytocin (OT) than males, according to a research study led by Georgia State University on the brain mechanisms that determine the rewarding properties of social interactions. Therefore, even though men and women have varying degrees of online activity across different sites. 74% of internet users use social media, with women (76%) having a slight edge over men (72%).

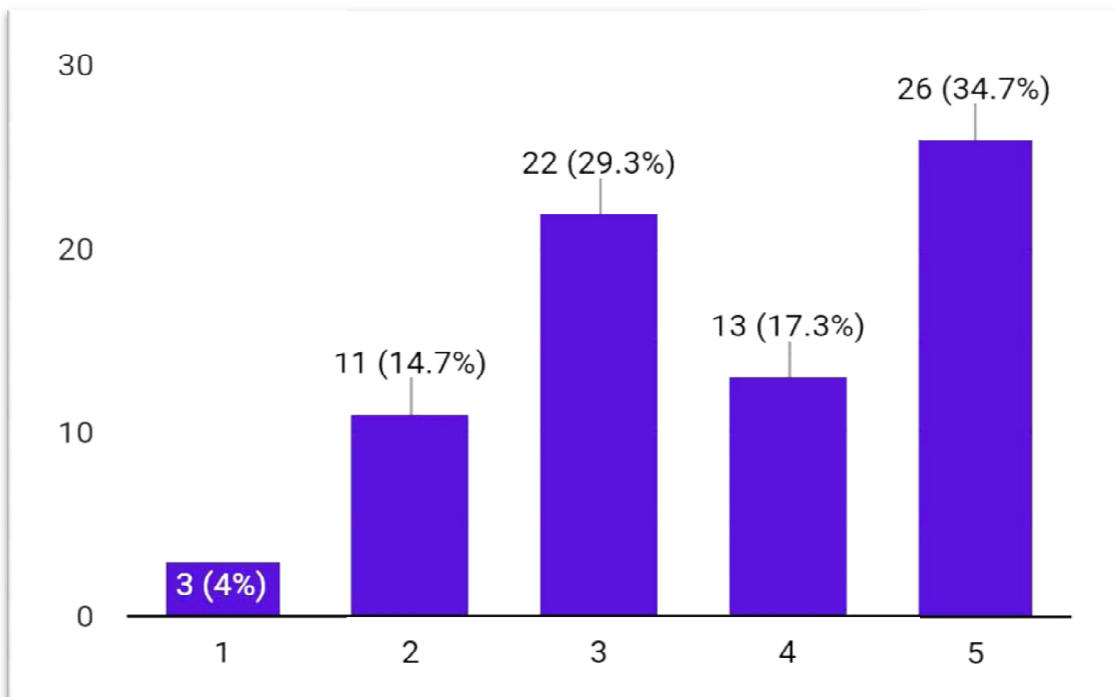


Figure 1 Use of social media by the women surveyed

Out of the women surveyed for this research paper, 100% women used social media. Figure 1 shows that around 52% women use social media very frequently, 29% women use it moderately and 19% women use social media rarely.

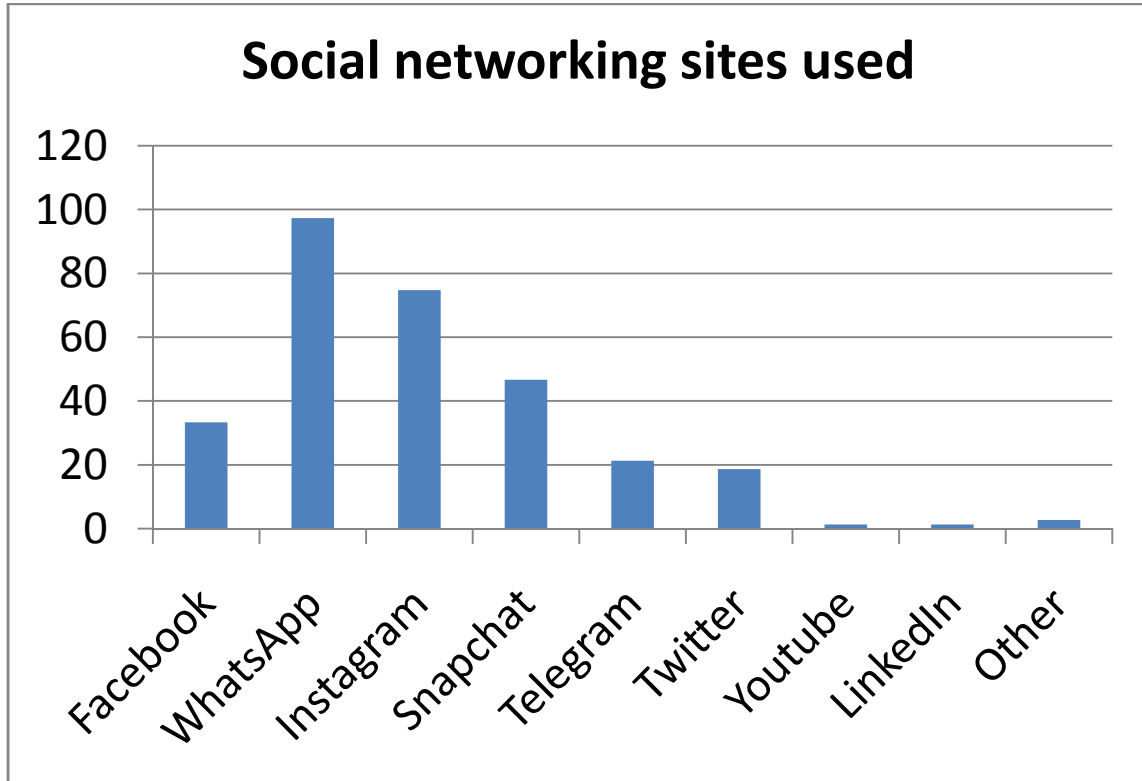


Figure 2.1 Social networking sites used by the women

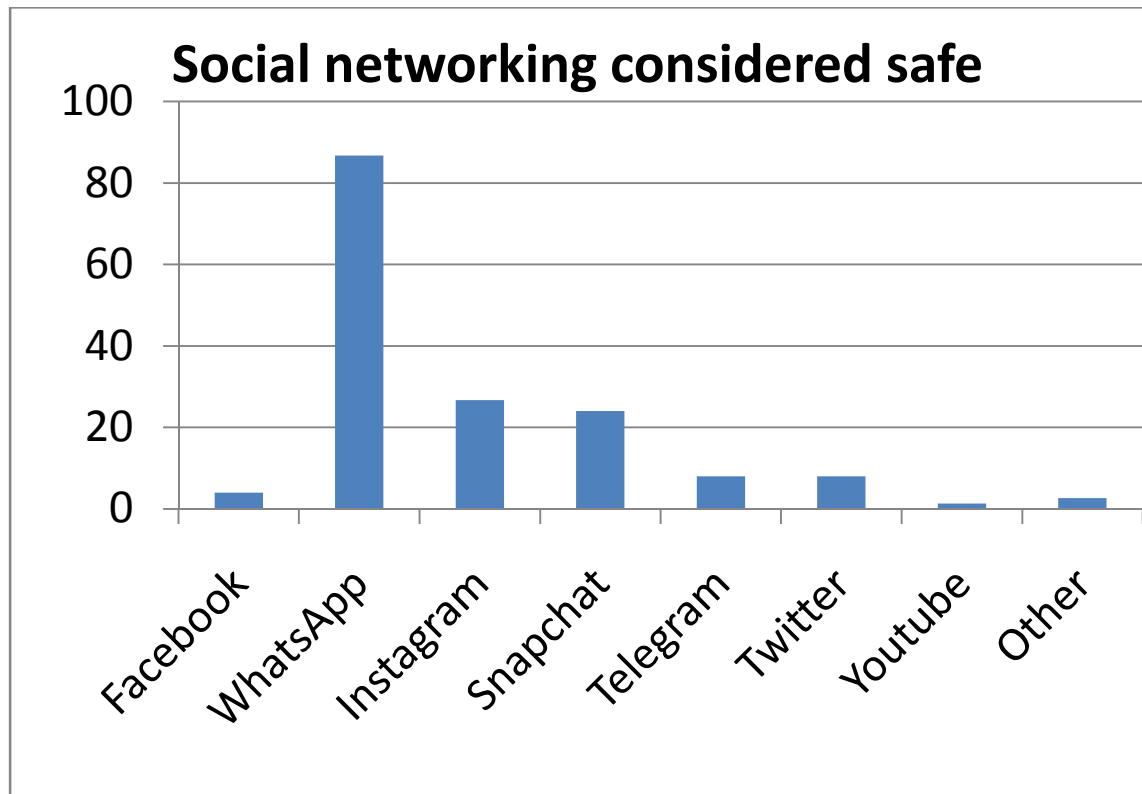


Figure 2.1 Social networking sites considered safe by the women surveyed

As shown in Fig 2.1, the most popular social networking sites used by the women surveyed were Facebook (33%), WhatsApp (97%), Instagram (75%), Snapchat (47%), Telegram (21%), Twitter (18%), YouTube (3%) and LinkedIn (3%), amongst others. Likewise as Fig 2.2 shows, when it came to social networking sites considered safe, WhatsApp proved to be the leading social networking site with 87% women considering it to be safe to use, followed by Instagram (27%), Snapchat (24%), Twitter (8%), Telegram (8%), Facebook (4%) and YouTube (1%). 1% women considered none of the social networking sites to be safe.

The most popular reason for the use of social media was entertainment (72%), connecting with others (69%), business and work purposes (16%), news and current affairs (6%), education (3%) and other purposes (1.3 %)

III. SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS PERILS

Social media has many important, undeniable benefits. It can be a very important and powerful tools in the hands of a person when used responsibly and correctly. However, social media, as beneficial as it is, has certain perils as well. It can prove to be a platform for cyberbullying, sexual harassment, trolling and so much more.

Cyberbullying, also known as online bullying, refers to harassment or bullying that takes place through electronic means, such as online gaming or social media. It is more prevalent amongst teenagers, but age is no barrier. Cyberbullying includes sending someone vulgar, inappropriate and/or mean texts or comments on one's posts, hacking someone's account, spreading rumours and sexual harassment through social media.

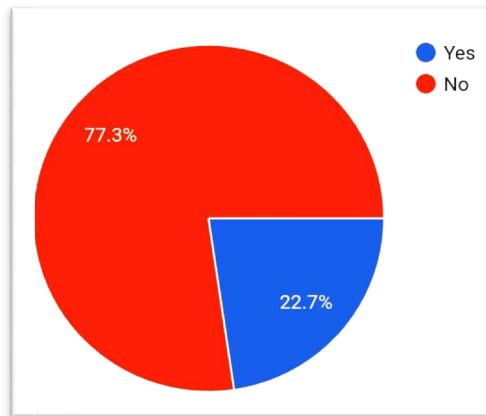


Figure 3.1 Vulgar or unwelcome messages received by the women surveyed

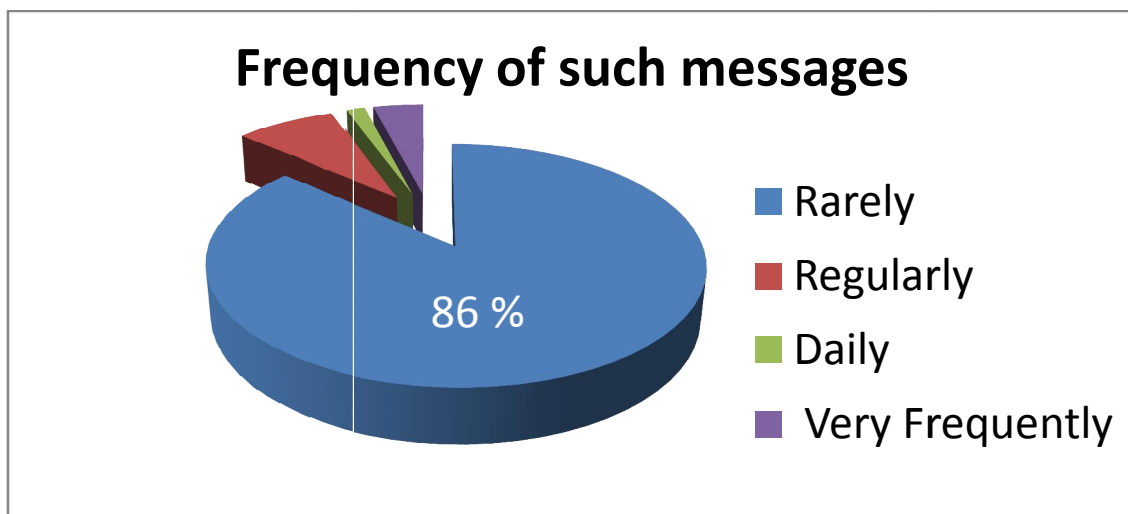


Figure 3.2 Frequency of vulgar or unwelcome messages received by the women surveyed

As Fig 3.1 shows, out of the women surveyed, 77.3% women did not receive vulgar, inappropriate or mean messages, directly, while 22.7% women did receive unwelcome messages. However, Fig 3.2 shows that even out of the women who did receive inappropriate messages, 86% women received them rarely, while 8% women received them regularly (once or twice every few days), 4% received them daily (once or twice on an everyday basis) and 1.5% women received such messages very frequently (many times a day).

Cyberbullying also takes place in the form of rumours being spread on social media. Out of the women surveyed for this research paper, 82.7% women said that they haven't faced rumours being spread about them on social media or via social media, while 17.3% women said that they have faced rumours being spread about them on or via social media. Those who did face rumours being spread about them on social media were asked if it was frequent occurrence, 93% women said that it wasn't a frequent occurrence, while 7% women said that it was a frequent occurrence.

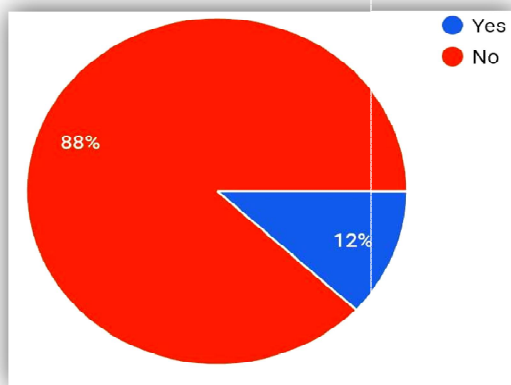


Figure 3.1 Trolling or sexual harassment faced by the women surveyed

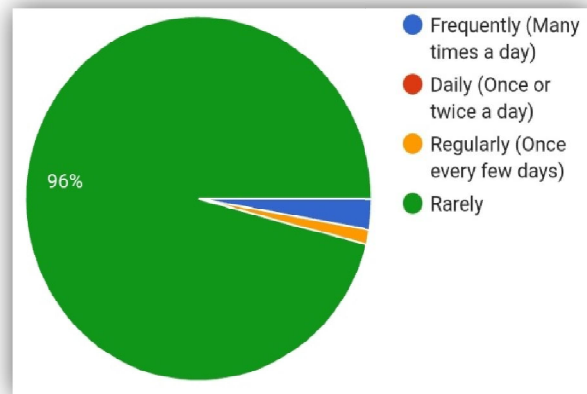


Figure 3.1 Frequency of trolling or sexual harassment faced by the women surveyed

As far as, trolling and sexual harassment is concerned, as Fig 4.1 shows, 88% women say that they have not faced trolling or sexual harassment. While, in contrast, 12% women said that they have faced trolling and sexual harassment, in one form or the other. However, when those who faced trolling and/or sexual harassment on social media were asked about the frequency of such incidents taking place, Fig 4.2 shows that 96% women faced trolling or sexual harassment rarely, 1% face it regularly (once every few days) and 3% said that they face it frequently (many times a day).

However, it must be noted that out of the women surveyed, 47% women have private profiles (private profiles refer to those social media accounts that can be viewed only by the people following a person on social media), 29% women are extremely cautious as to whose friend requests they accept on social media, 7% women block suspicious people right away, and 11% women have stepped up their security and privacy on social media. These factors can play a huge role in the less number of incidents of vulgar and unwelcome messages received, rumours being spread on social media, facing of trolling and sexual harassment.

IV. SUGGESTIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS DERIVED

- Efforts should be made by all of us to maintain the etiquettes of using social media.
- Social media has great positive as well as negative impact on women. One should try not to get affected by negative impact.
- The message should reach the young generation, specifically, the college students about the proper use of social media – positive and negative aspects both through proper education at home, school or college.
- Value based education required.
- Women should be made more aware about the steps they can take to protect themselves digitally.
- Social media platforms should step up their security provisions.

V. CONCLUSION

After data analysis and interpretation it is proved that social media is considered to be a safe space by women and they are adequately of the security provisions provided by social media platforms. Social media can be a very useful tool if used mindfully and women are becoming more and more aware about it. They have taken measures to deal with the challenges posed by social media mindfully. With women becoming more cautious, the dangers they faced have reduced greatly. They have managed to curb the inappropriate advances made and harassment faced via social media. Women plan to continue using social media mindfully to connect with loved ones, entertain themselves and for work purposes.

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