

Role of Social Media in Reinforcing Gender Stereotypes

Outline

1. Introduction

Contending objectification of women, disproportionate cyberbullying of girls, gender roles in advertisements and confirming female as ideal of beauty using filters, it is true ^{to say} that social media reinforces gender stereotypes. Some concrete measures are necessary to address the biased role of social media.

2. A brief overview of relation between social media and gender stereotypes

- European Institute for Gender Equality report (2023)

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References: (a) Filters and photo editing

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The disproportionate role of social media spaces like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or Twitter is the key factor behind perpetuating gender stereotypes in society. According to a recently published survey of American Psychological Association, "60 percent of content available on social media related to gender fosters gender stereotypes." The report further expresses that "75 percent of young men aged 18 to 30 years are pressurized to conform to these masculine stereotypes after consuming content from male influencer YouTubers." The survey clearly indicates that social media reinforces gender stereotypes. Girls suffer more cyber bullying than boys. Similarly, social media platforms are main sources of gendered advertisements, spreading of unrealistic beauty standards, mushrooming influential gender norms and objectification of women are some of the manifestations of social media's role in fostering

gender stereotypes. Misogynist pornography, coupled with targeted hate campaigns against female professionals is also reinforced by social media forums. However, social media has also challenged gender stereotypes. It is one of the biggest tools of feminist movements. Representation of binary relations, along with campaigns against unrealistic beauty standards is another triumph of social media. Some concrete measures including diverse representation of women, guaranteeing content moderation and regulation of media spaces, and others are necessary to address the role of social media in perpetuating gender stereotypes. Contending objectification of women, disproportionate cyberbullying of girls, gender roles in advertisements and confirming females as ideal of beauty, it is true to say that social media is reinforcing gender stereotypes. Some remedies are necessary to address the biased role of social media.

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There is a deep linkage between social media and gender stereotypes. Social media platforms are the biggest sources of spreading information and fostering ideologies. Similarly, reinforcement of gender roles and identities is also an offshoot of social media spaces.

According to European Institute of Gender Equality report (2023), more than 70 percent of stereotypes can be eliminated if social media play its impartial role.

Despite it has challenged gender disparities and norms, it is also one of the key drivers of gender stereotypes across the world.

Verily, there is a strong interconnection between social media forums and gender stereotypes.

There are multiple manifestations of social media's role in reinforcing gender stereotypes and disproportionate cyber bullying of girls is one of them. Harassment of women

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and girls through social media is common across the globe.

In every society, girls are suffering more online bullying than boys. Almost every woman is the victim of cyber bully throughout her life. In OECD countries, 12 percent of 15 years old girls reported having been cyber bullied compared to 8 percent boys.

Hence, it is an established truth that social media is reinforcing gender roles and identities.

In the same manner, gendered advertisement is another manifestation of social media's role in fostering gender stereotypes. Almost all the advertisements on the social media spaces contain a kind of gender role or identity. They represent role of women in soft skills and areas like home chores. Resultantly, girls consume such roles and a vicious cycle of

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gender's special functionalization gets fraction. For instance, lipstick advertisements represent the social identities of women and girls. Similarly, women are given traditional gender roles in digital advertisements like representation of females in detergent advertisements. Hence, social media is the key driver of social stereotypes.

On the same pattern, unrealistic beauty standards in digital advertisements also indicates the role of social media in perpetuating gender stereotypes. Confirming female an ideal of beauty using filters is the common practise of social media spaces for increasing views. Social media's representation of unrealistic beauty standards enroots gender identities and norms in society. Usage of filters and photoshops to make pictures and videos attractive is the key feature of digital spaces.

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Moreover, representation of women in skin advertisements of skin lightening products also creates identities and defines roles to the genders. Thus, digital media perpetuate gender norms and roles in society.

In addition to above, social media also spreads influential culture and gender norms. Consumption of gender roles by citizens has increased due to social media. It is because the content of social media platforms is not gender-inclusive. Segmented spreading of masculine and feminine roles and norms through digital media has fostered gendered culture. For instance, social media emphasizes on toxic masculinity, physical strength and six packs for male genders. However, it represents women in emotional roles. Thus, it can safely be argued that social

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media plays a major role in justifying gender stereotypes.

In the same vein, objectification and sexualization of women through social media platforms shows the biased role of social spaces in reinforcing gender stereotypes. It refers to the treating women as objects, often for the purpose of sexual gratification via social media. No doubt, social media portrays women in sexually explicit or provocative manner. Most of the social media's advertisements ignores the self-respect, independence and autonomy of women. For instance # Me Too movement's major slogan was the ending of objectification of women in digital advertisements. Ergo, social media plays a key role in perpetuating gender roles.

Similarly, degradation of women through misogynist pornography

is also an other manifestation of social media's role in fostering gender stereotypes. Social media content contains sexist pictures and porn videos. Pornography vividly shows that sex is the norm of females. This perception of women further maligns their self respect and identification. Moreover, assigning sex roles to women is key cause of women oppression and dependence. According to recently published UNESCO report, 32 percent of teenage girls said that, when they felt bad about their bodies, porn data on Instagram made them feel worse. Hence, it is true to contend that social media is reinforcing gender identities.

Additionally, social media is also playing role in targeted hate campaigns against female professionals. Social media is the major tool of people targeting women journalists,

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authors and other professionals. According to some estimates, there are only 17 percent women authors across the world. Sherry Rehman says in her books: 'Women planning that social media is affecting gender norms as it fosters masculinity in society. However, women are not represented in roles like authors. Thus, social media is the main platform for perpetuating gender stereotypes.

Similarly, development of gender roles via social spaces indicates biased role of digital media in this context. In ancient times, women were working in crops and farms. Since the emergence of social media, males have been given roles in agriculture. However, rapidly circulating online content has limited the movement of females. Owing to consumption of gender roles,

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women have assumed roles like feeding of children, making food, washing clothes and so on. For instance, women are encouraged in fashion industry and cosmetic industry but not in sports and education. All and above, social media reinforces gender stereotypes.

Social media is also challenging the gender stereotypes as it is the major tool of feminist movements. It is an undeniable fact that social media has been the voice of women during the three feminist waves. All the campaigns against gender inequality have access of digital platforms like facebook and twitter. As a result, some of the socio-economic and political rights have been guaranteed to women and girls. United Nation started online effort "He for She Campaign" to integrate men for gender

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equality. Resultantly, there were uncountable men participated in third wave of feminism. Hence, social media is playing robust role in addressing gender stereotypes.

Additionally, media has also played key role in representation of non-binary identities. Feminist activists are using digital forums to spread the transgender identities. They are also speaking volumes against binary identities via social media spaces. As a result, various countries have passed transgender bills for ensuring their autonomy, representation, independence and self-respect. For instance, Shahzadi Rai is the big voice for transgenders in Pakistan. She speaks for transgender rights, youth and disable persons. Verily, social media has challenged gender stereotypes.

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In the same way, online campaigns against unrealistic beauty standards shows positive role of social media in addressing gender stereotypes. Social media is a biggest platform for voicing against the confirmation of women as an ideal of beauty. Various digital movements have condemned the sale of women in cosmetic and skin lightening production industries. For example, the blacks in India started a campaign named "# Unfair and lovely" for ending the functionalization of gender roles in e-advertisements. Therefore, social media is playing positive role to address the prevailing gender identities.

On the same pattern, social media is also fostering gender equality through educational content. There are some algorithms in social media spaces which

are generating information to ensure gender equality. Similarly, algorithms are continuously showing movements speaking for gender equity. For example #MeToo debate fostered content on gender rights. It spoke for elimination of sexual content from digital spaces. Hence, social media is challenging gender stereotypes.

Some concrete measures are necessary to address the gender stereotypes and first measure in this regard is diverse representation of women in media spaces. More representation of women in digital platforms can bring a big change for gender equality. Women in social media can raise voices against sexual advertisements and objectification of women. Betty Frieden writes in her books 'Feminine mystique' that "increased representation of women in all

spheres of life can end gender inequality within one century. Thus, representation of females in digital platforms is essential for addressing gender roles and identities.

Secondly, ensuring content moderation and regulation of social media spaces is essential. Biased content on gender stereotypes should be deleted from digital forums. Moreover, gender-inclusive algorithms should be installed in social media platforms. Regulation of data on digital spaces by the governments should be guaranteed for gender equality. The case study of filters to eliminate the negative content on gender is in focus. Thus, content moderation and regulation of social media is one of the key remedies for discouraging gender stereotypes.

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Thirdly, ensuring media literacy and critical thinking of masses is necessary to address the gender stereotypes. To avoid the consumption of content on social forums, masses should be aware about the origin and truthness of data. Similarly, masses must check the authenticity of deepfakes and advertisements. For example, Norway has started media literacy program in her educational institutions to evade the deepfakes and false information. Verily, media literacy of individuals can keep them away from promptly consuming gender stereotypes.

Fourthly, ascertaining gender-inclusive advertisement on social media is one of the key measures to address the digital media's role in reinforcing gender roles and identities. Consensus should be developed among all social platforms about

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gender-sensitive advertisements. Moreover, strict laws must be implemented to limit the negative role of social media in fostering gender stereotypes. All the sexual advertisements must be stopped immediately. Similarly, objectification of women via advertisements must be discouraged. For instance, # End SAs movement started on twitter and went on to create real legislative change on gender norms in Nigeria. Hence, gender-inclusivity in online advertisements is indispensable to suppress the gender stereotypes.

Last but not least, installation of gender-neutral algorithms on social media forums is also one of the crucial steps to address gender stereotypes. Gender-neutral algorithms encourage gender equality as they create data which is gendered inclusive. Moreover, there are also some algorithms that hinder the

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Content spreading gender roles and identities. A famous activist and writer, Rebecca Walker, says in her book: "To be Real" that "gender-neutral algorithms can bring real shift in gender-debates. It is because, functional specialization of gender roles can be eliminated through social media". Thus, installation of gender-neutral algorithms can address the perpetuation of gender stereotypes via digital media spaces.

To conclude, media especially social media is reinforcing gender stereotypes. There are host of the manifestations of biased role of social media forums in this context. Disproportionate cyber bullying, unrealistic beauty standards in e-advertisements, and spreading of influential culture and norms show negative role of media in reinforcing gender roles and identities. Objectification

and sexualization of women in social media's advertisements also indicates biased role of social media spaces in this context. However, it social media has also challenged gender stereotypes. Social media as a tool of feminist movements, representation of non-binary genders and others are some of key roles of social media in guaranteeing gender equality. Some remedies including ensuring media literacy in masses, ascertaining diverse representation of women in digital spaces and content regulation are the major steps in this regard. Similarly, gender-inclusive advertising is equally important in this context. If above measures are not implemented then gender inequality cannot be eliminated in future.