

Women empowerment through media

Keshari Nandan Mishra

Associate Professor, Department of History, HNB. Government Degree College, Naini, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

Today, the media constitute a big part of our lives. Almost everyone benefits from the mass media. Actually, it's a really big power to announce our thoughts and our goals about empowering women's economy. Why do not we bring up the ideas about media efforts for women's economic empowerment? What is the role of the mass media in the creation of women's social roles to reinforce them? How can we benefit from mass media for gender equality and women's economic empowerment? How can be improved women's visibility and effect in the decision making process in the media sector? In this paper the powerful and positive role that the media can play in the empowerment of women and gender equality has been analyzed and identified.

Keywords: women, media, women empowerment, economic empowerment, women socialization

Introduction

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 emancipation by focusing on the neglect and marginalization of the position of the women in society. Communication is extremely important for women's development and mass media play significant role. It is to be distinguished that growth of women's education and their entry into this business through employment has contributed to the growth of media.

Women and their contribution to the society have always been overshadowed by the news of their hardships and atrocities inflicted upon them. It is indispensable that the print and electronic media present a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world. As media has huge influence on people, it should act with more responsibility before reporting and publishing any news. Portrayal of women which is derogatory to their image by media is an evidence of lack of gender sensitivity and has called for making them accountable for such representation of women. Such instances had led the National Commission for Women to recommend amendment in the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition Act) 1986.

The government in a move to strengthen the legal machinery protecting the dignity of women, approved amendments to the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 in 2012. The aim was to include new technologies like MMS and the electronic media and some which were left outside the ambit of the Act like posters and TV serials which perpetuate stereotypes of women. Promoting a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media is very important to use it in a progressive way and avoiding the ill effects of any such medium of Media. Women's knowledge about media and access to and control over the various forms of conventional and modern media is still limited in most societies.

The increase in the participation and access of women to self-expression and decision-making through the media and new technologies of communication is in a way empowering women. The powerful and positive role that the media can play in the empowerment of women and gender equality should be supported and further explored.

Women and the Media

During the past decade, advances in information technology have facilitated a global communications network that transcends national boundaries and has an impact on public policy, private attitudes and behavior, especially of children and young adults. Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women.

More women are involved in careers in the communications sector, but few have attained positions at the decision-making level or serve on governing boards and bodies that influence media policy. The lack of gender sensitivity in the media is evidenced by the failure to eliminate the gender-based stereotyping that can be found in public and private local, national and international media organizations.

The continued projection of negative and degrading images of women in media communications - electronic, print, visual and audio - must be changed. Print and electronic media in most countries do not provide a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world. In addition, violent and degrading or pornographic media products are also negatively affecting women and their participation in society. Programming that reinforces women's traditional roles can be equally limiting. The world-wide trend towards consumerism has created a climate in which advertisements and commercial messages often portray women primarily as consumers and target girls and women of all ages inappropriately.

Women should be empowered by enhancing their skills, knowledge and access to information technology. This will

strengthen their ability to combat negative portrayals of women internationally and to challenge instances of abuse of the power of an increasingly important industry. Self-regulatory mechanisms for the media need to be created and strengthened and approaches developed to eliminate gender-biased programming. Most women, especially 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. Women therefore need to be involved in decision-making regarding the development of the new technologies in order to participate fully in their growth and impact.

In addressing the issue of the mobilization of the media, Governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and programmes.

Objective-1

Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication

Actions to be taken

By Governments

- a) Support women's education, training and employment to promote and ensure women's equal access to all areas and levels of the media;
- b) Support research into all aspects of women and the media so as to define areas needing attention and action and review existing media policies with a view to integrating a gender perspective;
- c) Promote women's full and equal participation in the media, including management, programming, education, training and research;
- d) Aim at gender balance in the appointment of women and men to all advisory, management, regulatory or monitoring bodies, including those connected to the private and State or public media;
- e) Encourage, to the extent consistent with freedom of expression, these bodies to increase the number of programmes for and by women to see to it that women's needs and concerns are properly addressed;
- f) Encourage and recognize women's media networks, including electronic networks and other new technologies of communication, as a means for the dissemination of information and the exchange of views, including at the international level, and support women's groups active in all media work and systems of communications to that end;
- g) Encourage and provide the means or incentives for the creative use of programmes in the national media for the dissemination of information on various cultural forms of indigenous people and the development of social and educational issues in this regard within the framework of national law;
- h) Guarantee the freedom of the media and its subsequent protection within the framework of national law and encourage, consistent with freedom of expression, the

positive involvement of the media in development and social issues.

By national and international media systems

Develop, consistent with freedom of expression, regulatory mechanisms, including voluntary ones, that promote balanced and diverse portrayals of women by the media and international communication systems and that promote increased participation by women and men in production and decision-making.

By Governments, as appropriate or national machinery for the advancement of women

- a) Encourage the development of educational and training programmes for women in order to produce information for the mass media, including funding of experimental efforts, and the use of the new technologies of communication, cybernetics space and satellite, whether public or private;
- b) Encourage the use of communication systems, including new technologies, as a means of strengthening women's participation in democratic processes;
- c) Facilitate the compilation of a directory of women media experts;
- d) Encourage the participation of women in the development of professional guidelines and codes of conduct or other appropriate self-regulatory mechanisms to promote balanced and non-stereotyped portrayals of women by the media.

By non-governmental organizations and media professional associations

- a) Encourage the establishment of media watch groups that can monitor the media and consult with the media to ensure that women's needs and concerns are properly reflected;
- b) Train women to make greater use of information technology for communication and the media, including at the international level;
- c) Create networks among and develop information programmes for non-governmental organizations, women's organizations and professional media organizations in order to recognize the specific needs of women in the media, and facilitate the increased participation of women in communication, in particular at the international level, in support of South-South and North-South dialogue among and between these organizations, inter alia, to promote the human rights of women and equality between women and men;
- d) Encourage the media industry and education and media training institutions to develop, in appropriate languages, traditional, indigenous and other ethnic forms of media, such as story-telling, drama, poetry and song, reflecting their cultures, and utilize these forms of communication to disseminate information on development and social issues.

Objective-2

Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media

Actions to be taken

By Governments and international organizations, to the extent consistent with freedom of expression

- a) Promote research and implementation of a strategy of information, education and communication aimed at promoting a balanced portrayal of women and girls and their multiple roles;
- b) Encourage the media and advertising agencies to develop specific programmes to raise awareness of the Platform for Action;
- c) Encourage gender-sensitive training for media professionals, including media owners and managers, to encourage the creation and use of non-stereotyped, balanced and diverse images of women in the media;
- d) Encourage the media to refrain from presenting women as inferior beings and exploiting them as sexual objects and commodities, rather than presenting them as creative human beings, key actors and contributors to and beneficiaries of the process of development;
- e) Promote the concept that the sexist stereotypes displayed in the media are gender discriminatory, degrading in nature and offensive;
- f) Take effective measures or institute such measures, including appropriate legislation against pornography and the projection of violence against women and children in the media.

By the mass media and advertising organizations

- a) Develop, consistent with freedom of expression, professional guidelines and codes of conduct and other forms of self-regulation to promote the presentation of non-stereotyped images of women;
- b) Establish, consistent with freedom of expression, professional guidelines and codes of conduct that address violent, degrading or pornographic materials concerning women in the media, including advertising;
- c) Develop a gender perspective on all issues of concern to communities, consumers and civil society;
- d) Increase women's participation in decision-making at all levels of the media.

By the media, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, in collaboration, as appropriate, with national machinery for the advancement of women:

- a) Promote the equal sharing of family responsibilities through media campaigns that emphasize gender equality and non-stereotyped gender roles of women and men within the family and that disseminate information aimed at eliminating spousal and child abuse and all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence;
- b) Produce and/or disseminate media materials on women leaders, as leaders who bring to their positions of leadership many different life experiences, including but not limited to their experiences in balancing work and family responsibilities, as mothers, as professionals, as managers and as entrepreneurs, to provide role models, particularly to young women;
- c) Promote extensive campaigns, making use of public and private educational programmes, to disseminate information about and increase awareness of the human

rights of women;

- d) Support the development of and finance, as appropriate, alternative media and the use of all means of communication to disseminate information to and about women and their concerns;
- e) Develop approaches and train experts to apply gender analysis with regard to media programmes.

Suggestions & Recommendations

Media have a huge potential for the empowerment of women, however the overall use of this media by women is very low. Media has played an important role in empowering the women. The way media has played its part in portraying about the atrocities faced by the women and empowering the women, no other sector has done.

The urban educated women need information mainly on the following things:

- Employment /Job Prospects in India and Abroad
- Research and Information
- Educational opportunities
- Career advancement facilities
- Beauty and Fashion, Hair care, Health & Lifestyle, Apparel and accessories Matrimonial ads
- Art and Entertainment, Music videos and films
- Social Support system for working women

The urban lower middle class women need information mainly on the following topics:

- Employment /Job Prospects in India /self locality
- Inexpensive childcare & Healthcare
- Educational facilities at their doorstep
- Dowry system, other legal rights like self help, violence etc.
- Information about NGO's
- Legal provisions against Sexual harassment, Domestic Violence and Social injustice

Conclusion

Mass Media could also make a strong contribution, with the implementation of media campaigns, to the dissemination of the concept of gender equality. If people see in the media the overcome of the differences between men and women will bring him back into everyday life. The Mass Media have always unconsciously affected and influenced the thinking and behavior of society. Media should focus success stories of established, successful & renowned women inspite of indecent representation of women. As an important agent of socialization shaping of gender roles, its mechanisms for checks and balances with respect to gender need to be strengthened. The media should enable projection of women in a decent and dignified way and promote respect and dignity to women avoiding negative portrayal of women.

The media professionals need to be sensitized on gender issues and a system of rewards may be developed for those who are able to portray women in positive manner. Likewise, stringent punitive action should be taken against those who defy the norms. New innovative decent presentation of women, based on Indian culture and society through media must be introduced. A strong legislative effort coupled with a wide spread social awareness with morality and ethics is

needed to fight this menace so that women are not perceived as a commodity but as individual with right and dignity.

References

1. The SAGE Handbook of Gender and Communication – Bonnie. J. W & Julia T. Wood (Chapter 19: Gender & New Media)
2. Philo G. News Content Studies, Media Group Methods and Discourse Analysis, 2007.
3. Comparison of Approaches, in E. Devereux (ed.), Media Studies: Key Issues and Debates, London: Sage, 101-33.
4. Najam Sethi. New Media: Prospects & Problems.
5. Beher Helen. Women and Media-Pergamon Press, 1980.
6. Carter Cynthia, Gill Banston, Stiert Allan. (ed) News, Gender and Power, 1998.
7. Creedon, Pamela J. Women in Mass Communication Challenging Gender Values. Sage Publication, 1989.
8. SWAYAM-Ending Violence against women, <http://www.swayam.info>.
9. Women Empowerment in India, www.womenempowermentindia.com.
10. Women for sustainable cities, <http://womenforsustainablecities.org>
11. Enhancing Women Empowerment through Information and Communication Technology.