Changing Perceptions and Meaning of Cyberfeminism

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Introduction
Communication is the basis for the existence of social life. As per history of humans’ evolution the patterns of communication, modes of communication, sources of communications, ways to disseminate the information were a major part and reason of Human growth. Communication by signs, by sounds, by signals, by words, face to face communication, communication in groups, communication in masses were the chapters in history. With the advent of written words, printing press and books a revolution of thought was observed in the world. With the newspaper and television, radio, new modes of societal life, development emerge. The industrial development demanded the public interaction beyond personal circle catering the needs of new emerging societal structures. The birth of new inventions brought new methods of communication facilities that were able to attend and affect and involve large number of people that too in different locations. World Wide Web was a revolution still surprising the world with its strength and hidden aspects
Mass media plays a very important role in shaping the ideology of the society and thereby generating consciousness among the masses. Social media can be defined as an instrument that helps to communicate and interact. Traditional media like radio, newspaper, TV etc are the tools uses for communication and dissemination of information, for long time. Social media refers to the use of web based and mobile based technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. Andreas Kapla and Micheal Haenlein define social media as “Group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allows the creation and exchange of user generated content.” Social media are media for social interaction, as a superset beyond social communication. Kietzmann et al. (2011) argue that social media introduce substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals enabled by ubiquitously accessible and scalable communication techniques.
The definition of social media in Web 2. Terms, would be a website that doesn’t just give information, but interacts with the users while providing this information. This interaction can be as simple as asking for your comments or letting you vote on an article, or it can be as complex as recommending movies to you based on the ratings of other people of similar interests.
Social media is best understood as a group of new kinds of online media, which share most or all of the following characteristics
1. Participation- It encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested. It blurs the line between media and audience.
2. Openness – Most social media services are open to feedback and participation. They encourage voting, comments and the sharing of information. There are rarely any barriers
to accessing and making use of content. Password protected content is usually frowned on.

3. Conversation – while traditional media is about broadcasting, social media is better seen as a two-way conversation.

4. Community – social media allows communities to shape up quickly and communicate successfully. Communities share common interests, such as a photography, music etc.

5. Connectedness – Most of the social media flourish in their connectedness making use of links to other sites, resources and people.

Blogs (online journals), Wikis (content addition or edit), podcasts (audio, video files), forums (online discussions). Content communities (organizing and share particular content), microblogging (bite sized blogging), Facebook, LinkedIn, Bebo, Twitter, Orkut are examples of few social networking sites.

From the beginning, Sadie Plant, has argued that women are naturally suited to using the internet, because they are similar in nature. She argued that internet should be used as places for women and to engage women in new forms of work and play. On internet women are freed from traditional constraints and are able to experiment with identity and find new avenues for claiming the power and authority. According to Sadie plant, Cyberspace is a welcoming, familiar space for women, where they can and must seize opportunities to advance themselves and to challenge male authority. Another branch of Cyberfeminism argues that the idea of women gaining power and authority merely through greater use of new media technologies is overly simplistic or reductive. Susan Luckman, University of Queensland and Anna Munster, University of New South Wales, believe that not by advocating more women using internet will help but by becoming more critically aware of the perils as well as promises that new technologies offer.

When the women population is little more than the half of world’s population, its quality and their rights and empowerments is must to be considered as important for sustainable development and have been recognized as having an impact on a range of development outcomes including national economic growth and poverty reduction (United Nations, n.d., 20120. This is further confirmed by the fact that one of the eight Millennium Development Goals adopted by the international community is explicitly to promote gender equality and empower women. With this in mind, Luthra (2003) argued that communicative empowerment specifically of the world’s most impoverished women is an “urgent necessity” for a sustainable future.

Women’s right to communicate, specifically through representations in and access to the media has been seen as central to women’s advancement. In 1975, first world conference on the status of women held in Mexico, leaders acknowledge the power of mass media to influence views about women’s roles in society and created programs to increase women’s access (Byerly & Ross, 2006). This was further confirmed at the 4th world conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, which called attention to the role of media in perpetuating women’s in equality (Byerly & Ross, 2006). These calls reflect long standing issues with women’s access to and representation within media.
The internet, cyberspace provides women both individually and collectively, with a new means for the production and distribution of news and activism. Women and girls dominate top social media site including Facebook and Twitter (Taylor, 2012) AND are more likely than men to create blogs (Jones, Johnson-Yalem Millermair, & Perez, 2009). They have used these sites and resources to connect to the outside world, gain greater knowledge, increase their social status, organize on social causes and challenges perceived injustices (Hafkin & Huyer, 2006, Hafkin & Ertl, & Dryburgh, 2005).

Individuals have also used social media to challenge the misrepresentations of women and girls, as seen in the case of 14-year-old girl sparking a protest movement against the altered images in teen magazines through an online petition she created (Italie, 2012)

The purpose of this study is to analyze and illuminate the role of the social media as a tool for gender equality. Previous studies have found evidence of a relationship between online content creation and empowerment (Leung, 2009, Stravositu & Sunder, 2012) but have yet to explore how the social media is actually contributes to gender equality.

**Gender Equality** - Gender equality is achieved when women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic participation and decision-making, and when the different behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favored.

**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. It also 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

**Social Media** – social media is the collective of online communications and channels dedicated to community based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation and wikis are among the different types of social media. Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. It is interactive in nature.

**Feminism** - In simple words it the safeguarding, establishing or advocating the women’s rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes. Feminism means that women should be given the same rights as equal to men and should be treated in the same way.

**Feminist** - Any person male or female who supports feminism is called feminist.

**Activism** - A doctrine or practice of vigorous action or involvement as a means of achieving political, social or other goals.

**Cyberactivism** - activism done on internet is Cyberactivism, It is also called online activism, web activism, e-activism. It is the use of electronic communication, technologies such as social media, especially Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, e-mail etc.

**Social Networking** – Social networking is the grouping of individuals into specific groups like small rural communities. Social networking is possible in person, at workplace, in academic institutes, it is most popular online. Because e the virtual world is filled with millions of
individuals who are looking to meet other people, to gather and share first hand information and experiences about cooking, golfing, gardening, developing friendships, professional alliances, finding employment, business to business marketing and so on. The topics and interests are as varied as universe itself. Social networking websites function like an online community of internet users.

**Impact of Social media** – According to IAMAI, 2015, the number of Internet users in India of expected to reach 402 million by December. It is 49% more than last year. 39% of total users are female. Studies have proven that a positive correlation exists between online product reviews ad sales (Hu, Liu & Zhang, 2008). In 2008, Hu, Liu and Zhang did a study and tested the idea the products with favorable reviews sell better than products with unfavorable reviews. In 2009, Rosss Orr, Sisic, Arseneult, Simmering explored the personalities and motivations of individuals who used the social media site Facebook. Researchers found that individuals who exhibited higher levels of extroversion were more likely to belong to more Facebook groups. The personality trait of openness to new experience was found in individuals who were sociable through Facebook. A study conducted by Hllegard, Oglem Yan and Reits (2011) sought to understand student’s motivation in using Facebook or liking particular brand on social networking site. The researchers found students use the site to establish personal connections with others an use the site to create affiliations with brands that define who they are and help them to establish a sense of self.

Studies on use of social media, Impact of social media, users of social media cites the results that social media has an impact on the users and users affect social media and so on. Many studies have done to find the communities, groups, shared interest groups, caste community based groups, knowledge based groups etc. Studies also done to compare the users as male and female. There are studies who tried to count the number of females and males on social media.

In the study researcher wish to analyze how social media is helping in gender equality and women empowerment. How social media are contributing in raising the public and media attention towards feminist’ issues. How it gathers public accountability towards feminist issues. Study wish to explore how social media helps the women to spread their messages globally. How social media helps in amplifying their messages. Is Social media helping remote and global feminist forums to spread their mission. This research will explore and analyze how feminist community is using the social media networking site Facebook, twitter and blogs as to tool for bring feminist issues in the media and public attention. How feminist communists use Facebook, twitter and blogs for social change as a tool for activism. In what situations and conditions these communities are working on social media, What hurdles, problems or support they are facing. The study wish to analyze the impact social media could bring online and offline. The study also wish to look at the other side of coin, that is all the feminist issues, campaigns, debates done on or with the help of Social media was a success or it failed. If failed, what were the reasons?

**Cyberfeminism** - Cyberfeminism is a term coined in 1994 by Sadie Plant, director of Cybernetic culture Research unit at the university of Warwick in Britain, to describe the work of feminists interested in theorizing, critiquing and exploiting the internet, cyberspace and new
The term cyberfeminism was coined by VNS Matrix (read Venus Matrix), an Australian artist collective active between 1991 and 1997, who, inspired by Donna Haraway’s Cyborg Manifesto, wrote the Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century. Their art was a “mission to hijack the toys from techno cowboys and remap cyber culture with a feminist bent” (Schaffer 1999:150) and as such was concerned with subverting the perceived androcentrism of new technologies, for instance by re-imagining “the clitoris [as] a direct line to the matrix“.

The Cyberfeminism is an extended branch of Feminism only. It is often said as marriage of technology and feminism, it embraces technology and its ability to reach so many people in fraction of seconds. In Cyberfeminism the change of Medium has brought many changes in the dissemination, impact, viral in effect, immediacy and a major boost to the number of people participating. It is a very vast field, although Feminism, the issues of women freedom, empowerment is omnipresent but the meaning and perception are different. It depends on various factors. Cyberfeminism is an ideology created by users on virtual world, it is a movement raised and managed by users of virtual media with a bend of feminism. It is an art developed by feminists on Virtual platforms, it is a philosophy discusses and written by scholars shared by them n Internet. Cyberfeminism is a technology invented, advanced, projected, used my millions, billions as per their feminist approach, knowledge. Many schools of thoughts prevail in Cyberfeminism simultaneously allowing the free exchange of ideas in words and art. It is very interesting to note that Cyberfeminism is more about the dissemination of messages rather than message itself. In Cyberfeminism women themselves make content, raise viewers and participants, channelize discussion and this virtual world gives them a tool to give and take their own definitions of Cyberfeminism. As it was stated in the first Cyberfeminism International organized by OBN, in their 100 Anti-theses Cyberfeminism, said that, Cyberfeminism is not a fragrance, It reads, not boring.. not a single woman. Not a picnic…not an artificial intelligence…not lady like…not an artificial intelligence…not lady like, not mythical.” It raised many voices, who were not in agreement with these definitions. Faith Wilding said in the Cyberfeminism International in Kassal that, “Net is not a utopia of nongender,”. She further wrote, Cyberfeminism had failed to actively interrogate the biases entrenched in cyberspace. “Being bad girls on the internet is not by itself going to challenge the status quo. Cyberfeminism presents itself as inclusive, but the cyberfeminism writings assume an educated, white, upper middle class, English speaking, culturally sophisticated readership.” In the book, Domain Errors: Cyberfeminism Practices.

Technology has given a limitless platform and a tool to reach people who were otherwise left, unapproachable. It is giving great help to approach these always left behind groups, communities, sections, regions. This technology put any barrier of time, space, color, skin, race, language, region, size, looks, economic status, even sex, anybody from anywhere anytime can be a part of cyberfeminism if he can use the technology. It also broke the assumption, perception that women are technophobic.
The first wave of feminism took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, emerging out of an environment of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics. The goal of this wave was to open up opportunities for women, with a focus on suffrage. The wave formally began at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, when 300 men and women rallied to the cause of equality for women. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (d.1902) drafted the Seneca Falls Declaration outlining the new movement's ideology and political strategies.

In its early stages, feminism was interrelated with the temperance and abolitionist movements and gave voice to now-famous activists like the African-American Sojourner Truth (d.1883), who demanded, "Ain't I a woman?" Victorian America saw women acting in very "un-ladylike" ways (public speaking, demonstrating, stints in jail), which challenged the "cult of domesticity." Discussions about the vote and women's participation in politics led to an examination of the differences between men and women as they were then viewed. Some claimed that women were morally superior to men, and so their presence in the civic sphere would improve public behavior and the political process.

The second wave began in the 1960s and continued into the 1990s. This wave unfolded in the context of the anti-Vietnam War and civil rights movements and the growing self-consciousness of a variety of minority groups around the world. The New Left was on the rise, and the voice of the second wave was increasingly radical. In this phase, sexuality and reproductive rights were dominant issues, and much of the movement's energy was focused on passing the Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution guaranteeing social equality regardless of sex.

This phase began with protests against the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in 1968 and 1969. Feminists parodied what they held to be a degrading "cattle parade" that reduced women to objects of beauty dominated by a patriarchy that sought to keep them in the home or in dull, low-paying jobs. The radical New York group called the Redstockings staged a counter pageant, in which they crowned a sheep as Miss America and threw "oppressive" feminine artifacts such as bras, girdles, high-heels, makeup and false eyelashes into the trashcan.

Because the second wave of feminism found voice amid so many other social movements, it was easily marginalized and viewed as less pressing than, for example, Black Power or the effort to end the war in Vietnam. Feminists reacted by forming women-only organizations (such as NOW) and "consciousness raising" groups. In publications like "The BITCH Manifesto" and "Sisterhood is Powerful," feminists advocated for their place in the sun. The second wave was increasingly theoretical, based on a fusion of neo-Marxism and psycho-analytic theory and began to associate the subjugation of women with broader critiques of patriarchy, capitalism, normative heterosexuality, and the woman's role as wife and mother. Sex and gender were differentiated — the former being biological, and the later a social construct that varies culture-to-culture and over time.

Whereas the first wave of feminism was generally propelled by middle class white women, the second phase drew in women of color and developing nations, seeking sisterhood and solidarity and claiming, "Women's struggle is class struggle." Feminists spoke of women as a social class and coined phrases such as "the personal is political" and "identity politics" in an effort to demonstrate that race, class and gender oppression are all related. They initiated a concentrated
effort to rid society top-to-bottom of sexism, from children's cartoons to the highest levels of government.

The third phase of feminism began in the mid-1990s and is informed by post-colonial and post-modern thinking. In this phase, many constructs have been destabilized, including the notions of "universal womanhood," body, gender, sexuality and heteronormativity. An aspect of third wave feminism that mystifies the mothers of the earlier feminist movement is the readoption by young feminists of the very lipstick, high heels and cleavage proudly exposed by low cut necklines that the first two phases of the movement identified with male oppression. Pink floor expressed this new position when she said; "It's possible to have a push-up bra and a brain at the same time."  

(Martha Rampton, Pacific Magazine 2008)

The "girls" of the third wave have stepped onto the stage as strong and empowered, eschewing victimization and defining feminine beauty for themselves as subjects, not as objects of a sexist patriarchy. They have developed rhetoric of mimicry, which reappropriates derogatory terms like "slut" and "bitch" in order to subvert sexist culture and deprive it of verbal weapons. The web is an important aspect of the new "girlie feminism." E-zines have provided "cybergirls" and "netgrrls" another kind of women-only space. At the same time — rife with the irony of third-wave feminism because cyberspace is disembodied — it permits all users the opportunity to cross gender boundaries and so the very notion of gender has been challenged.


Jennifer writes that Cyberfeminism has expanded the feminism activism and this journal itself is a live example of how Cyberfeminism kept the African Feminism attached to global Cyberfeminism. She further said the ICT (Information Communication technology) was biased on gender basis, geography, cultural, economic, political, cultural, racial and power. The most ubiquitous digital tool is mobile phone. Men still higher in users but female number using internet is increasing rapidly. Although all tools and means to be online matters in the Cyberfeminism. But it made possible to discuss and for asking accountability and justice online which was earlier not possible offline. There are many case studies across the globe to affirm this that internet made possible for demanding action, justice and accountability on women issues with the help of online discussion in masses. Not only this, Caroline Tagnay and Jac SM Kee;s explain in EROTICA (Exploratory Research on Sexuality & ICTs) project, focuses on marginalized groups. These groups write about sexual expression, sexualities and sexual health practices, moral and cultural attitudes online. The new generations born in digital age, avid users of technology discuss Cyberactivism and involve the students from all sectors belonging to different languages, economic sectors or geography. In fact, this generation is making efforts to involve those who are not sound in using technology.

Scholars like Susan Luckman, University of Queensland, Australia and Anna Munster, University of New South Wales, believe that this idea of revolutionary changes in feminist thinking, ideology and activism, is overly simplistic or reductive. This is not a deep approach towards cyberfeminism and deviate masses from the historical contexts of production and use of
new technologies and new digital tools. The focus is only on the cyberfeminism, rather focus should be on ensuring the making of women as integral users and producers of these new technologies, irrespective of their ways and motive to use. World should ensure that women are part of the future. Many critiques are of opinion that in the race of increasing the number of technology using women is giving half or wrong information about the reality.
Technology revolution should not give a fantasy effect that it will bring a revolution in women empowerment. Sticking to the reality it can be used in that direction, but it will need lots of other changes ad requirement. Women can be empowered by access to internet, by being comfortable fluent in using new technologies. Scholars of all phases agree on one thing that Cyberfeminism, Cyberactivism will bring a big positive change towards women empowerment and feminist activism. But just not by counting the number of women but by focusing on the content, information being shared, by making efforts to provide this technology to al, by making rigorous efforts to include the marginalized groups and by continuous discussion, analysis of feminist ideology, thinking, updating this knowledge will bring the expected results. It is changing every day so should be its analysis and updating, modification.

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