

## **Social Media And Cyber Feminism: A Study On Perception Change Among Women In Kerala**

**Kripaja k Yadav<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr.Jigar Shah<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1\*</sup>PhD Scholar, Mass Communication, NUV, (kripakripaja@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Program Chair Journalism & Mass Communication, Ph.D. Supervisor & Associate Professor of Journalism & Mass Comm; Navrachana University, Vadodara, Gujarat

### **Abstract**

The advent of social media has been path-breaking in the information and communication revolution. The possibilities of social media have changed societies and the perspective of people in a tremendous way. Social networking, micro-blogging, photo sharing and video sharing features of social media have opened a new platform of communication. The introduction of ICTs, the internet, and mobile phones paved way for women to be part of this interactive media. Social media platforms gave women opportunities to raise their issues and bring solutions and establish their identity. The potential of this media is increasing among women in all sectors and all aspects of life. This study is conducted on the theoretical background of cyberfeminism, Cyber feminists assumed that empowerment for women could be achieved through women's increased use of new media, where tech-savvy women get greater opportunities to empower them to be active participants in society.

**Keywords:** Social media, women, empowerment, cyber feminism

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social media is an interactive media where people share ideas and information to virtual communities over internet. As social media has revolutionized the communication, interaction and connectivity. It has provided a huge platform giving global access to local issues, no individual is alone in context of social media. These digital tools which includes websites and apps helps in creating and sharing contents through computers or smartphones. Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, Tik Tok, QQ, Douyin, Sino Weibo are some of the most popular social media websites in the world. Social media plays a major role in modern societies in changing perceptions and attitude of individuals. "Women are very active on social media and they communicate naturally across them because they share similar communicative logic. By definition, they are very expressive and feel comfortable holding several conversations at a time," says Gabriela Oliván, expert in Corporate Communications.

The term cyberfeminism was coined by VNS Matrix, an Australian-based feminist group of media artists who are said to be the first to use the term 'cyber feminism' in the early 1990s. It is a thinking that deals on power differences between men and women in relationship to internet. There are gender distinctions with respect to access of technologies. This approach tries to understand the issues related to gender and power in online platforms. Cyber feminist thought is attributed to Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto", Sadie Plant (1997) and Donna Haraway (1998), considered Internet as a space that helps women from the social and physical constraints of the material world, offering new opportunities for more egalitarian gender relations. Cyber-feminism has tended to include mostly younger, technologically savvy women, and those from middle-class backgrounds. Scholars such as Jessie Daniels suggests that "Cyberfeminism is neither a single theory nor a feminist movement with a clearly articulated political agenda rather cyber feminism refers to a range of theories, debates and practices about the relationship between gender and digital culture." The explosion of social media and unprecedented use by women of new technologies represents important opportunities to bring gender equality and women's rights issues to the forefront of both policy making and media attention. Women are driving the social media revolution. This utopian concept gave new dreams to women to use social media as medium of empowerment. Soraya Fragueiro, Connect Americas Social Media Strategist, affirms that the increasing active participation of women and teens is in part due to an emotional component that prevails in each action that they carry out on social networks. Johanna Blakey, mass media and entertainment specialist, asserts that social networks imply the end of gender divisions, and image of women.

### **Significance**

Kerala state ranks number one in literacy and quality of life. The human index level and literacy level of the state Kerala signifies that women in Kerala are independent and have the freedom of speech and expression in all areas of their life. The high digital literacy level of the state index towards a technically skilled population. Women in Kerala are part of

this and have access to internet and afford to have smartphones that make them open to social media platforms. This study tries to see how Kerala women see social media as cyber space for empowerment and to fight for women's right .

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. **Carolyn M. Cunningham Heather M. Crandall (2014)** in the study *„Social Media for Social Justice: Cyberfeminism in the Digital Village* says cyber feminism is an umbrella term for the intersection of gender and the Internet. The Internet, also offer an avenue for feminist organizing. Cyber feminists assumed that empowerment for women could be achieved through women's increased use of new media. This utopian vision, has been criticized for being overly optimistic, ignoring the imbalance of power that exists when looking at how structures of power are embedded in technological systems

2. **Radhika Gujjala (December 1999)** in the article, *‘Third World’ perspectives on cyberfeminism* says ,that all cyber feminists share the belief that women should take control of and use the cyber technologies in an attempt to empower themselves. Cyber feminists seek to use internet technologies and to create spaces on-line that empower women. They believe that the Internet is a feminist issue and are interested in possibilities for activism and research on it. Cyber feminists are multimedia producers, e-mail list-administrators or moderators, programmers, web-page designers, and women who actively engage in all kinds of on-line synchronous and asynchronous spaces.

3 **Estelle Loiseau and Keiko Nowacka (2015 march)** in the article *„Can social media effectively include women's voices in decision-making processes?* Emphasise Social media has proven potential for mobilising attention and accountability to women's rights, and challenging discrimination and stereotypes. Women empowerment strategies include access to technology, participation in public life and media ,to bring attention of policy makers on issues of gender equality, social media also helps in bridging the gap between women activists and policy makers attention

4. **J. R. Mohanty1 & Swati (2007 may)** in the article *Cyber Feminism: Unleashing Women Power through Technology* argues, there are gender distinctions with respect to access of technologies. Technology is often viewed as masculine and for this reason the computer culture is found with less female internet users as compared to the male users Males are reported to spend more time online and have higher internet skills than females. He also substantiate that the reasons behind the gradual fall of women in India toward internet usage are cyber bullying, cyber teasing, cyber harassment and hence less security. Literacy skills are also important for women to read web pages and get information. Some women are technophobes and have fear of using computers

5. **Dr Mulyaningrum Abu Bakar Mohd Yusof Suraya Ahmad(November 2007)** in the study *Cyberfeminism: Changing Gender Inequality via Information Technology* explains that information technology has become more widespread and women are becoming liberated, from the traditional patriarchal setups. The information and communication technology allows women to escape the boundaries and categories that have constrained their activities and their identities in the past. Increasing number of internet user among women shows the narrowing gender gap on information technologies.

6. **Brittany , Davidson and Adam N. Joinson (2021 march)** in the article *Shape Shifting Across Social Media* says, Individuals change and adapt their behavior according to their social situation across social media platform . However, how does this shape shifting of self-presentations and identity translate into various online platforms? This exploratory study utilizes a novel and mixed methodological approach to better

7. Prof. (Dr.) Manish Verma, Dr. Faizal Haq, Gayatri Rai (2018 february) in their article *„Social media a tool of cyber feminism activism* says, The viral nature of social media has made it popular tool of communication and democratized this activism online. social media has revolutionized the communication, interaction and connectivity of communities that are built on the basis of aims, objectives, ideologies or interest.

Feminist organizations use these platforms to get connected with other feminist organizations. Social media helped feminists to be more visible and audible as compared to traditional media. women's empowerment refers to “Women's ability to make strategic life choices where that ability to make strategic life choices where that ability had been previously denied them.(Malhotra et al,2009)

8. **Sanjana Varghese (2019 september 27)** in the article *„why-internet-needs-cyber feminists-more-ever”* explains how cyber feminism began to grow as a movement out of its utopian concept. In the beginning women argued technology is not only for men. There has been a tremendous change in women who grew up with technology. Today's women argue they are creating technology, and cyber space should be more imaginative and optimistic. Cyber feminism should be about caring and healing of society and use technology as a liberating force.

9. **Orsiah Abdul Hamid, Mohd Szahobhi Ishak Norhafazah Yusuf(2016 )** in the article *„Assessing validity and reliability of social media as an empowerment tool for a group at risk in Malaysia* ,observes that , empowerment of a group at risk via social media gives different dimensions in understanding the issues of social media usage in Malaysia. When women are exposed to social media, they use beneficial things, women and girls referred to as ‘a group at risk’ benefits and get empowerment opportunities, in terms of entrepreneurship, strengthening relationship and network, career development . when exposed to social media there are more online risks and threats as compared to men and boys. In

terms of legal dimension in the usage of social media, the movement to spread women’s awareness on political and legal activism including women’s rights, tackling violence against women and public accountability towards gender equality through social media tools have also been highlighted in this study.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- 1.To learn how cyber feminism contributes to social change among women
- 2.To understand how cyberfeminism have made women feel about gender discrimination
- 3.To learn if women actually trust cyber spaces for raising their issues and challenges in society

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.**

Descriptive survey method is used when variables adopted for the study varies, and the study intends to identify the degree to which it varies. Descriptive survey method refers to collect the information about the variables through first-hand information usually through a structured questionnaire (Calmorin&Calmorin, 2008). For this research data was collected with the help of structured questionnaire directly from individual investors. Both Primary and Secondary sources are applied for data collection. The Primary Sources of data are collected through Questionnaire. The Secondary Sources of Information are from flyers, editorials, Internet resources, books, magazines, guides, and Journals. Based on Morgan’s table, minimum required sample size was determined as 384. Data were collected from 500 respondents, in which 28 responses were removed due to incomplete and poor responses. Hence final sample size was arrived as 472.Descriptive analysis and multiple regression are used for analysis the collected data.

**DATA DISCUSSION AND RESULT**

**RELATION BETWEEN CYBER FEMINISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA SPACE FOR FEMINIST ACTIVISM**

**Hypothesis-I**

- H0: Social media space for feminist activism has no positive influence on cyber feminism.  
 H1: Social media space for feminist activism has positive influence on cyber feminism.

**Table No.1 LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS WITH CYBER FEMINISM AS DEPENDENT VARIABLE AND SOCIAL MEDIA SPACE FOR FEMINIST ACTIVISM AS INDEPENDENT VARIABLE**

Dependent Variable	F(R <sup>2</sup> )	Independent Variable	β-value	t-value	p-value
Cyber feminism	.525	Social media space for feminist activism	.725	23.461	0.000
***= Significant at the 0.01 level					

From the above Table 1, the analysis shows the independent variable Social media space for feminist activism explain 52.5% (R Square = .525) of the variance in Cyber feminism. The probability value of p was found significant at 0.01 level (p<0.01). Hence the null hypothesis is rejected, which implies the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis.

**Inference**

The hypothesis **H1 is accepted** which implies that Social media space for feminist activism has positive influence on Cyber feminism.

**RELATION BETWEEN CYBER FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENTS IN SOCIAL MEDIA.**

**Hypothesis-II**

- H0: Women's rights movements in social media has no positive cyber feminism.  
 H1: Women's rights movements in social media has positive cyber feminism

**Table No. 2 LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS WITH CYBER FEMINISM AS DEPENDENT VARIABLE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENTS IN SOCIAL MEDIA AS INDEPENDENT VARIABLE**

Dependent Variable	F(R <sup>2</sup> )	Independent Variable	β-value	t-value	p-value
Cyber feminism	.226	Women's rights movements in social media	.475	12.043	.000
***= Significant at the 0.01 level					

From the above Table No. 4.77, the analysis shows the independent variable Women's rights movements in social media explain 22.6% (R Square = .226) of the variance in Cyber feminism. The probability value of p was found significant at 0.01 level ( $p < 0.01$ ). Hence the null hypothesis is rejected, which implies the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis.

**Inference**

The hypothesis **H1 is accepted** which implies that Women's rights movements in social media has positive influence on Cyber feminism

**RELATION BETWEEN CYBER FEMINISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN PROTECTING THE DIGNITY AND RIGHTS OF WOMEN**

**Hypothesis-III**

H0: Social media protect the dignity and rights of women have no positive influence on cyber feminism.

H1: Social media protect the dignity and rights of women has positive influence on cyber feminism

**Table No. 3 LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS WITH CYBER FEMINISM AS DEPENDENT VARIABLE AND SOCIAL MEDIA PROTECT THE DIGNITY AND RIGHTS OF WOMEN AS INDEPENDENT VARIABLE**

Dependent Variable	F(R <sup>2</sup> )	Independent Variable	β-value	t-value	p-value
Cyber feminism	.123	Social media protect the dignity and rights of women	.351	8.369	.000
**= Significant at the 0.01 level					

From the above Table No.4.78, the analysis shows the independent variable Social media protect the dignity and rights of women explain 12.3% (R Square = .123) of the variance in Cyber feminism. The probability value of p was found significant at 0.01 level ( $p < 0.01$ ). Hence the null hypothesis is rejected, which implies the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis.

**Inference**

The hypothesis **H1 is accepted** which implies Social media protect the dignity and rights of women has positive influence on Cyber feminism

**RELATION BETWEEN CYBER FEMINISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA HAS GIVEN SELF-CONFIDENCE**

**Hypothesis-IV**

H0: Social media has given self-confidence has no positive influence on cyber feminism.

H1: Social media has given self-confidence has positive influence on cyber feminism..

**Table No. 4 LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS WITH CYBER FEMINISM AS DEPENDENT VARIABLE AND SOCIAL MEDIA HAS GIVEN SELF-CONFIDENCE AS INDEPENDENT VARIABLE**

Dependent Variable	F(R <sup>2</sup> )	Independent Variable	β-value	t-value	p-value
Cyber feminism	.015	Social media has given self-confidence	.123	2.764	.006
**= Significant at the 0.01 level					

From the above Table No. 4.79, the analysis shows the independent variable Social media has given self-confidence explain 1.5% (R Square = .015) of the variance in Cyber feminism. The probability value of p was found significant at 0.01 level ( $p < 0.01$ ). Hence the null hypothesis is rejected, which implies the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis.

**Inference**

The hypothesis **H1 is accepted** which implies Social media has given self-confidence has positive influence on Cyber feminism

**RELATION BETWEEN CYBER FEMINISM AND CYBERSPACE AS MEANS OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND EXPRESSION**

**Hypothesis -V**

H0: Cyberspace as means of freedom of speech and expression has no positive influence on cyber feminism.

H1: Cyberspace as means of freedom of speech and expression has positive influence on cyber feminism.

**Table No. 5 LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS WITH CYBER FEMINISM AS DEPENDENT VARIABLE AND CYBERSPACE AS MEANS OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND EXPRESSION AS INDEPENDENT VARIABLE**

Dependent Variable	F(R <sup>2</sup> )	Independent Variable	β-value	t-value	p-value
Cyber feminism	.006	Cyberspace as means of freedom of speech and expression	0.078	1.736	0.083
**= Significant at the 0.01 level					

From the above Table 4.80, the analysis shows the independent variable Cyberspace as means of freedom of speech and expression explain .6% (R Square = .006) of the variance in Cyber feminism. The probability value of p was found significant at 0.01 level (p>0.01). Hence the null hypothesis is accepted, which implies the rejection of the alternate hypothesis.

**Inference**

The hypothesis **H0 is accepted** which implies Cyberspace as means of freedom of speech and expression has no positive influence on Cyber feminism

**RELATION BETWEEN CYBER FEMINISM AND CYBERSPACES PROVIDE PUBLIC SUPPORT AND LEGAL REMEDIES**

**Hypothesis-VI**

H0: Cyberspaces provide public support and legal remedies has no positive influence on cyber feminism.

H1: Cyberspaces provide public support and legal remedies has positive influence on cyber feminism..

**Table No. 6 LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS WITH CYBER FEMINISM AS DEPENDENT VARIABLE AND CYBERSPACES PROVIDE PUBLIC SUPPORT AND LEGAL REMEDIES AS INDEPENDENT VARIABLE**

Dependent Variable	F(R <sup>2</sup> )	Independent Variable	β-value	t-value	p-value
Cyber feminism	0.010	Cyberspaces provide public support and legal remedies	0.099	2.218	0.027
**= Significant at the 0.01 level					

From the above Table 4.81, the analysis shows the independent variable Cyberspaces provide public support and legal remedies explain 1% (R Square = .010) of the variance in Cyber feminism. The probability value of p was found significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05). Hence the null hypothesis is rejected, which implies the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis.

**Inference**

The hypothesis **H1 is accepted** which implies Cyberspaces provide public support and legal remedies has positive influence on Cyber feminism.

**Findings**

- ❖ Cyberspaces provide public support and legal remedies in e-Government system has positive influence on Cyber feminism.
- ❖ Cyberspace as means of freedom of speech and expression has no positive influence on Cyber feminism
- ❖ Social media has given self-confidence has positive influence on Cyber feminism
- ❖ Women's rights movements in social media has positive influence on Cyber feminism
- ❖ Social media space for feminist activism has positive influence on Cyber feminism.

**SUGGESTIONS**

- ❖ Explore how cyber feminism manifests in digital activism. Investigate how women in Kerala utilize online platforms for mobilizing support, organizing campaigns, and advocating for gender equality.
- ❖ Examine the construction of online identities by women in Kerala within the context of cyber feminism. How do women use social media to represent themselves, challenge stereotypes, and contribute to a more diverse representation of femininity?

- ❖ Investigate the prevalence of online harassment faced by women in Kerala engaging in cyber feminism. Explore how these women and their allies respond, resist, and organize counter-movements to combat online abuse.
- ❖ Analyze the language and narratives employed in cyber feminist discussions. Explore how linguistic choices contribute to shaping perceptions, creating solidarity, and challenging patriarchal norms.
- ❖ Focus on the role of feminist bloggers and vloggers in Kerala. Study how these individuals use their online platforms to share stories, opinions, and information, contributing to the broader feminist discourse.
- ❖ Examine the educational aspect of cyber feminism. How are online platforms utilized for educating women in Kerala about feminist ideologies, gender issues, and rights? Assess the effectiveness of these educational initiatives.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the impact of social media on cyber feminism is profound and multi facet, significantly shaping the landscape of feminist discourse, activism, and empowerment. Through various platforms, women in Kerala and beyond have found powerful tools to challenge traditional norms, amplify their voices, and foster a sense of community. The transformative effects can be summarized in several key aspects:

Social media provides a global stage for women in Kerala to share their stories, experiences, and perspectives. It amplifies voices that were historically marginalized, allowing diverse narratives to emerge and challenging the dominant discourse. Cyber feminism has harnessed the power of social media for activism and advocacy. Women in Kerala use platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to mobilize support, raise awareness about gender issues, and organize movements that transcend geographical boundaries. Online spaces foster the creation of virtual communities where women can connect, share resources, and offer support. These communities transcend physical constraints, providing a sense of solidarity and belonging for women engaging in cyber feminism. Social media enables women to challenge and deconstruct traditional gender stereotypes. Through visual and textual content, women in Kerala are reshaping societal perceptions, contributing to a more inclusive understanding of femininity and gender roles. Cyber feminism leverages social media as a powerful educational tool. Women in Kerala use online platforms to disseminate information about feminist ideologies, gender equality, and women's rights, contributing to a broader understanding of these issues. The global nature of social media allows women in Kerala to connect with and draw inspiration from feminist movements worldwide. This interconnectedness fosters a sense of global solidarity, reinforcing the idea that gender issues are universal and require collective efforts. While social media has been a catalyst for positive change, it also brings challenges such as online harassment and trolling. Women engaging in cyber feminism in Kerala face resistance, but they often respond with resilience, creating counter-narratives and building alliances to combat misogynistic behavior. The continuous dialogue on social media contributes to changing societal perceptions and norms surrounding gender. It challenges ingrained biases and fosters a more inclusive and progressive outlook on issues related to women's rights and gender equality.

In essence, social media has become a dynamic force in the evolution of cyber feminism, empowering women in Kerala to challenge, question, and reshape societal norms. As these platforms continue to evolve, their impact on feminist movements is likely to grow, providing new opportunities for advocacy, awareness, and transformative social change. However, it is crucial to navigate the challenges responsibly, ensuring the continued safety and inclusivity of women in these digital spaces.

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