

**IS SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (SNS) A GATEWAY FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT (GENDER INEQUALITY ISSUES, DECISION MAKING AND LEADERSHIP & EXPOSING CRIME AND HARASSMENT) OF FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS? A STUDY**

**SYED UZMA KUBRAVI**

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Kashmir

Email: [syeduzmak11@gmail.com](mailto:syeduzmak11@gmail.com)

&

**MANZOOR HUSSAIN**

Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Kashmir

Email: [dr.manzoor\\_hussain@yahoo.co.in](mailto:dr.manzoor_hussain@yahoo.co.in)

**Abstract**

*Social networking sites (SNS) are a gateway of empowerment and have achieved an immense popularity among people all around the world. Though, social networking evolved to enhance communication through disseminating information and building interaction among people, yet its growing usage indicates a more viable potential to discuss issues and challenges through blogs, chats, online campaign, online discussion forums, and online communities. Eventually, it serve as a new effective platform for bringing people's rights, issues and problems to the attention of a wider public and challenging discrimination and stereotypes. In the light of this backdrop, the present study is based on a sample of 200 respondents and conducted to investigate the role of social networking sites in addressing gender inequality issues, decision making, exposing crime and harassment among female college students of Srinagar district of Kashmir.*

**Key Words:** Social Networking Sites, Empowerment, Gender, Decision Making, Crime, Harassment, Female College Students.

**1. Introduction**

Women constitute almost 50 percent of the world's population. Despite being the builders and teachers of the nation they have been exploited since long. At earlier times, they were treated at par with their counterparts but during post-vedic and epic ages they had to face many atrocities. They were ill-treated and neglected of many powers in various sectors. Today also, women across the globe face various kinds of discrimination by male-dominating society. This has led to the concept of women empowerment. Women empowerment has become a buzzword as it is the prerequisite of any progressive society. Women empowerment is essential for the development of any human generation because women have the calibre to change the destiny of a nation and is very much necessary in the nation's growth be it economically, politically or socially.<sup>1</sup>To achieve women empowerment there are various sources that can play a significant role. Social networking sites happen to be one. Social network sites are the web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. These sites are the online platforms where connections and interactions are established. The journey of social networking started with Six.Degrees.com in 1997, followed by others such as LiveJournal, Friendster, LinkedIn, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, and Facebook<sup>3</sup>. Now, there are special categories of SNSs dealing with different fields of life like business (LinkedIn), education (Classmates), research (ResearchGate), writers (MyCreativeCommunity), books (Shelfari), travel (TravBuddy), religious (MyChurch) and many more. Even there are content specific SNS also like Flickr (photo sharing), Twitter (text sharing), Last.FM (music listening habits) and YouTube (video sharing). People use social networking sites to connect with others in

many ways including creating and sustaining relationships, dating, connecting others with similar interests and sharing information.

With the growing dominance of the Internet, the use of social networking sites has already begun and consequently, communication is rapidly changing and becoming mobile, interactive, personalized and multi-channel. This extraordinary revolution is affecting the basic fabric of societies because it has the potential to cover large population. Its reach to common people has increased and has undoubtedly become a very powerful organ in virtually all spheres of life. It has the power to become an agent of social change and bring women's issues to the attention of a wider public and encouraging policy makers to step up commitments to gender equality. It has the capability like all social media to spread the healthy concepts of being woman, of what is the role of women in modern society, of good examples that women give us every day, of the results they have achieved and continue to reach out to women in many fields of economics and beyond, the social consideration of women, giving to young women good ideas and examples for their economic empowerment.<sup>5</sup> Since empowerment is very paramount for the bright future of the society, the subject for empowering the women has to be put on light. Today, social networking technology directly impacts women's growth and development by enabling their voice to reach out and be viewed globally. Kashmir is not an exception to this phenomenon. However, in context of Kashmir, very little is known about the impact of social networking sites on the women's empowerment. Thus, this study was an attempt to explore the role of social networking sites in enhancing women empowerment.

## **2. Operational Definitions**

### **a) Social networking sites**

Social network sites are the online services that allow to connect, communicate, and form and exchange content with others.

**b) Empowerment**

The World Bank defines empowerment as "the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process is action which both builds individual and collective assets and improves the efficiency and fairness of the organization and institutional context which govern the use of these assets".

**c) Indicators of Empowerment**

- Participation in crucial decision-making processes.
- Increase in self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Awareness of her social and political rights.
- The degree to which the media take heed of women's issues.
- Feeling and expression of pride and value in her work.

**d) Facilitating factors**

- Education and awareness
- Existence of women's organisations availability of support systems for women
- Feminist leadership
- Networking; promising media coverage.

**e) Constraining factors**

- Illiteracy
- Orthodox views that limit women's participation no funds
- Discriminatory policy environment
- Negative and sensational coverage of media.
- Heavy work load.

**f) Women Empowerment**

The concept of women's empowerment was introduced at the International Women's Conference in Nairobi in 1985 where Empowerment was stated to be 'a

distribution of social power and centre of resources in favour of women'. The term "empowerment of women" could also be understood as the process of providing equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and power positions to women so that they are able to play a role on par with men in society.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

The main objective of the study was to explore the role of social networking sites (SNs) as gateway for women empowerment. Specific objectives were to analyse the role of SNs in addressing the gender inequality issues, decision making and exposing crime and harassment of female college students of Srinagar district of Kashmir.

The data were collected through both quantitative as well as qualitative research techniques, enabling researchers to get a complete picture of the problem under study. For this purpose, techniques like online questionnaire and focus group discussions were employed. Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted to gather subjective data in order to illuminate the perceptions and gain greater insight and knowledge of the problem under study. The universe of the study constituted the Srinagar district, Jammu & Kashmir, India. The study employed a random sampling method. 200 participants were selected for the study. However, only 170 (85 percent) responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was created using Google forms and distributed in various social media groups created by college authorities. The online survey used for gathering quantitative data was completed in three months, that is, from April 2018 to July 2018. After that, 4 focus group discussions were employed, one in each zone of Srinagar district. One focus group consisted of six participants. Participants from different backgrounds were included. In total, 24 participants took part in the focus group discussions. Willingness to participate was the focal point to select participants. The background of the topic and the purpose of the focus group discussion were briefed to the participants.

At every moment, researchers focused on the participants' rights, ensured them to keep their information confidential. On average, each FGD lasted for 70 minutes. FGDs were audio-recorded with the prior consent of the participants. All recorded FGDs were conducted in the Urdu language, later translated into the English language.

The researchers carefully analysed each audio-recording before they could initiate the process of transcription. After careful analysis of data, transcription was completed followed by a careful reading of the text. Then the text was divided into numerous segments besides labels with codes. The codes were then collapsed into major themes. Finally, the researcher came with seven themes that covered the study's core areas.

#### **4. Age, Residence, Marital Status and Educational Status of Participants**

Table 1 displays the necessary information about the sample women of Srinagar district in Kashmir. Information about age, residence, marital status, educational status and occupational status of 170 participants was covered. It was revealed that 54.11 percent of the participants belonged to 18-45 years of age group and 45.89 percent to the age group of 46 and above. Coming to residence it was found that 10.00 percent belonged to rural areas and 90 percent belonged to urban areas. While revealing marital status, it was revealed that a majority of 75.29 percent were married, followed by unmarried with 23.52 percent. While 1.19 percent reported to be widows, none reported to be divorced and deserted. Education-wise, it was reported that 98.82 percent were literate and 1.18 percent were illiterate. Occupation wise, table 1 reveals that majority (50.59 percent) of the participants were students followed by participants doing private jobs (18.23 percent), engaged in self-help groups (14.70 percent), govt service (10.59 percent). Least (5.89 percent) reported as house-wives.

**Table:1.**  
**Age, Residence, Marital status, educational status and Occupational status of Participants**

Age in Years	Value	Total	Percentage
	18-45	92	54.11
	46 and above	78	45.89
Residence	Rural	17	10.00
	Urban	153	90.00
Marital Status	Married	128	75.29
	Unmarried	40	23.52
	Divorced	0	0.00
	Deserted	0	0.00
	Widow	2	1.19
Educational Status	Literate	168	98.82
	Illiterate	2	1.18
Occupational Status	House wife	10	5.89
	Govt Service	18	10.59
	Student	86	50.59
	Self-help group	25	14.70
	Private Job	31	18.23

Source: Field work carried out in 2018.

## 5. Data Analysis

### 5.1: Membership and Usage level of SNS among Participants

Tables 2 and 3 below display the data about the membership and usage level of SNS respectively among participants:

**Table: 2.**  
**Use and Membership on SNS**

Use and Member		
Response	Number	Percentage
<b>YES</b>	144	84.71
<b>NO</b>	26	15.29

Source: Field work carried out in 2018.

As can be observed from table 2, a majority; 144 sample participants (84.71 percent) use social networking sites. However, some participants (15.29 percent) reported that they are not the members of social networking services.

**Table:3.**  
**Frequency of Use of SNS**

<b>Frequency of using SNS</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	Very often	62	36.49
	Sometimes	26	15.29
	Occasionally	38	22.35
	Rarely	18	10.58
	Never	26	15.29
	<b>Total</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*Source: Field work carried out in 2018.*

The data from table 3 reveals that out of 170 participants, the majority i.e., 62 (36.49 percent) participants use SNS very often, 26 participants (15.29 percent) use it sometimes, 38 participants (22.35 percent) use it occasionally and 18 participants (10.58 percent) use rarely. 26 percent (15.29 percent) reported that they never use SNS.

## **5.2: Social Networking Sites and Women Empowerment**

Empowerment of women is essential for the development and prosperity of the women, family, society and country. Social networking sites can play a vital role in the empowerment of women by providing education, information, awareness, economic empowerment and self-decision making. Online presence on social networking sites is providing women with new freedom, independence and control, liberty, and empowerment like never before. It helps them to try



things that were impossible in the real scenario. They help women in accessing resources for their development by means of exposure, knowledge and information. Awareness and education can enrich the inner strength of women. Social networking sites with their coverage have the capacity to boost self-usage, confidence and collective strength.<sup>7</sup> In order to examine the role of social networking sites in women empowerment in Srinagar district of Kashmir, the researchers' classified seven themes. A five-point Likert scale was used as: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Later such themes were also recognised in focus group discussions.

### **5.3: Highlighting the gender inequality issues**

Gender inequality is found almost all over the world. Women are not enjoying social, mental, educational, and professional rights equal to their male counterparts. Women in both organized and unorganized sector face gender discrimination by way of physical and mental harassment of women at work. It should not be forgotten that gender inequality is not just a women's issue. It is an issue of the nation. Social networking sites play a vital role by bringing these issues ahead. Hashtags identifying women's issues that are being used on social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram play a tremendous role in mobilising public attention on women's rights, increasing the visibility of issues that are under-reported in mainstream media. In order to see whether social networking sites play a role in highlighting the issues of gender inequality, the researcher asked the question related to it. The responses are shown in table 4.

**Table 4:**  
**Gender Inequality Issues**

Theme	Responses					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
SNS help you to highlight the gender inequality issues						
<b>Number</b>	36	46	36	32	20	170
<b>Percentage</b>	21.18	27.05	21.18	18.84	11.75	100.00

Source: Field work carried out in 2018.

Table 4 reveals it clearly that the majority of the participants, 46 women (27.05 percent) agreed with the statement that “SNS help you to highlight the gender inequality issues” while 36 women (21.18 percent) strongly agreed and 36 (21.18 percent) were neutral about the statement. However, more than 18 percent disagreed (32; 18.84 percent) and strongly disagreed (20 women (0.65 percent) with the statement. The results have been substantiated from focus group discussions as well where majority of the women affirmed that SNS have become important platforms for them to highlight the issues of gender inequality issues. The perceptions of some of the women have been highlighted as under:

*“I believe that SNS serve as vital platforms where women can bring gender issues to the attention of a wider public. The hashtag campaigns do help in bringing the gender discrimination and gender stereotypes into the spotlight.”*

*“Being on SNS help you not only to connect with anyone but to create the content as well.....whenever I face any sort of gender discrimination, I share it with my friends on social networking sites. Access to these sites can help in removing gender inequality by addressing the gender related issues.”*

*“I write blogs on these virtual sites to sensitise women about gender related issues. These sites have the capability to address and challenge the gender-based inequalities.”*

From the quantitative data and perceptions quoted above, it becomes clear that most of women consider SNS a vital platform to bring gender issues and gender stereotypes to the attention of a wider public. They use these sites to make women aware about the gender related issues all over the world.

#### **5.4: Participation in decision making and leadership**

Social networking sites are such platforms that can increase women’s capacity to participate in decision-making processes and help the success of online advocacy campaigns focusing on women’s rights. Women are more visible on online platforms now than they have been at any other point in modern history. Based on this premise, the researchers sought to investigate whether SNS play a role in enhancing participation in decision making and leadership among participants.

The majority of the participants with 32.36 percent (55 women) agreed with the statement that “SNS help you to participate in decision making and leadership” while 24 women (14.12 percent) strongly agreed; 34women (20.00 percent) were neutral about the statement. However, a good number of women (38; 22.36 percent)

disagreed and strongly disagreed (19 women (11.16 percent) with the statement (Table 5).

**Table 5:**  
**Decision Making and Leadership**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Responses</b>					
SNS help you to participate in decision making and leadership	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
<b>Number</b>	24	55	34	38	19	170
<b>Percentage</b>	14.12	32.36	20.00	22.36	11.16	100.00

Source: Field work carried out in 2018.

Concerning this, the perceptions and opinions of women were also obtained during focus group discussions, some of which are quoted as under:

*“SNS has increased my capacity to participate in decision making and leadership”*

*“I think SNS help women in decision making when they establish more connections to get information and opinions. It is a fact that social networking has influenced our living and thinking process as well. It is positively enabling us to learn new things and giving us chances to make decisions for ourselves.”*

*“I use SNS everyday.....these are powerful platforms to seek the attention of wider public and motivate and encourage women in making self-decisions and enhancing their leadership qualities.”*

*“SNS invites us to participate in the discussion and encourages us to express views on the burning issues...this gives a feeling of being equal.”*

The findings and perceptions shared by women clearly reveal that SNS help majority of the women to

participate in decision making and leadership. They see these online platforms as useful means to seek the attention of wider public and to motivate and encourage women in making self-decisions and enhancing their leadership qualities.

### 5.5: Awareness about social and political rights

Social networking sites empower women on social and political front also. These sites have the potential to make women about the social and political rights. Hashtag activism on social networking sites act as a tool to share voices of women in each and every protest. In order to see whether social networking sites make participants aware about the social and political rights, data was gathered which is shown in table 6.

**Table 6:**  
**Social and Political Rights**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Responses</b>					
SNS make you aware about social and political rights	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
<b>Number</b>	41	74	26	16	13	170
<b>Percentage</b>	24.13	43.53	15.29	9.41	7.64	100.00

*Source: Field work carried out in 2018.*

Table 6 highlights that majority of the sample participants (43.53 percent) agreed that SNS make them aware about social and political rights. This was followed by 41 women (24.13 percent) who strongly agreed and 26 (15.29 percent) were neutral about the statement. A small chunk of women strongly disagreed or disagreed as 16 women (9.41 percent) disagreed and 13 women (7.64 percent) strongly agreed with the

statement. Some of the perceptions, opinions and experiences shared by the women are quoted as below:

*“I use many social networking outlets (WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram) to raise awareness about gender-based issues. Not only I educate others but also get to learn about various social and political rights granted to women through educational posts on these sites.”*

*“I follow many academicians, leaders and social activists on SNS. They upload posts, images and videos which eventually make me aware about several social and political happenings in the world. I get enlightened about various rights.....thanks to SNS that has brought a kind of revolution.”*

*“I share stories, narratives and photos and videos that help to create awareness about social, political and economic rights and problems among women.”*

The data in the table and opinions shared by women as quoted above clearly reveal that majority of the women agreed that SNS help in keeping them abreast of the social and political rights and activities concerned with women.

### **5.6: Awareness about wage discrimination**

Social networking sites are serving as an important source where women can speak out against the oppression and economic exploitation at the grass root levels. Table 7 reveals the responses of the participants with regard to this context.

Concerning the role of SNS in making women aware about the wage discrimination, 49 women participants (28.83 percent) agreed that “SNs make them aware about the wage discrimination”; while a good number of women (24.70percent) were neutral about the statement, 21 women (12.36 percent) strongly agreed to it.

**Table 7:**  
**Wage Discrimination**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Responses</b>					
SNS make you aware about the wage discrimination	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
<b>Number</b>	21	49	42	24	34	170
<b>Percentage</b>	12.36	28.83	24.70	14.11	20.00	100.00

Source: Field work carried out in 2018.

The negative options came from 34 women (20.00 percent) who strongly disagreed and 24 women (14.11 percent) who disagreed with the statement that SNS make them aware about the wage discrimination (Table 7).

During focus group discussions also, a mixed bag of opinions was received. Some of the perceptions expressed by the women are highlighted as under:

*“One of the biggest advantages of SNS is that it helps in redressing the issues and sharing them publicly. Similarly, it has helped me to highlight the issue of wage discrimination.”*

*“Yes, I believe SNS can bring into spotlight various forms of discrimination including wage discrimination.”*

*“I don’t perceive SNS as best place to address the issue of wage discrimination”*

*“Yes, SNS has made me aware about wage discrimination and eventually I joined a hashtag campaign “EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK”.*

Thus, through responses and opinions of women, it can be argued that while some women consider social networking sites as the important source and access to speak out against the oppression and economic exploitation of women at the grass root levels, some don't perceive SNS as best place to address the issue of wage discrimination.

### 5.7: Exposing crime and harassment among women

Social networking sites can function as important tools to expose the women harassment. Women can write blogs and articles on women harassment. They can discuss subjects related to sexual and mental harassment online and provide information related to the women's rights. In order to see whether participants use SNS to expose crime and harassment, question was asked, the responses of which are presented in table 8.

**Table 8:**  
**Crime and Harassment**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Responses</b>					
SNS help you to expose crime and harassment	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
<b>Number</b>	12	26	68	42	22	170
<b>Percentage</b>	7.05	15.29	40.00	24.71	12.95	100.00

*Source: Field work carried out in 2018.*

As can be observed from the table, the majority of the participants, and 68 women (40.00 percent) were neutral that SNS help them to expose crime and



harassment. This was followed by 42 women (24.71 percent) who disagreed to it. While some women, 26 women (15.29 percent) agreed, some 22 women (12.95 percent) strongly disagreed with the statement. Only 12 women (7.05 percent) strongly agreed the statement that “SNS help them to expose crime and harassment”. In response to the question whether SNS help you to expose crime and harassment, focus group discussions revealed a mixed bag of responses. While some women agreed with the statement, some did not agree to it. Some of the opinions shared by women are quoted as below:

*“On SNS, we can share the experiences of violence (in any form) with other victims”.*

*“SNS is the best place to inform victims of crime and harassment about the rights, legal processes and welfare services”.*

*“Many hashtag campaigns like #MeToo movement on these online vehicles enable us to share experiences of violence and break stereotypical attitude of the society and inspire change.”*

*“Whenever I face any form of harassment, I don’t share it on SNS because of the society’s stereotypical attitude.”*

*“No, I don’t like exposing any sort of harassment on these SNS.”*

### **5.8: Women Economic Empowerment**

Women’s economic empowerment is critical to achieving gender equality and sustainable development of a nation. Social networking sites have the potential to make women economically interdependent. They provide women the tools needed to reach out and make business connections and find new jobs. Social networking sites encourage women to establish business by opening online shopping stores. Online

presence in social networking sites is providing women with new freedom, independence and control, liberty, and empowerment like never before. It helps them to try things that were impossible in the real scenario. Kashmir is witnessing the same phenomenon. To see, whether SNS help participants economically, responses were collected which are highlighted in following table:

**Table 9:**  
**Economic Empowerment of Women**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Responses</b>					
SNS help you to be economically independent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
<b>Number</b>	40	61	26	28	15	170
<b>Percentage</b>	23.53	35.89	15.29	16.47	8.82	100.00

*Source: Field work carried out in 2018.*

From the data, it was found that the majority of the women, 61 participants (35.89 percent) agreed that SNS help them to grow economically independent. This was followed by 40 women (23.53 percent) who strongly agreed to it. A good number of women with 15.29 percent were neutral. 28 women (16.47 percent) disagreed and 15 women (8.82 percent) strongly disagreed the statement that “SNS help you to be economically independent”. Similar results were drawn from focus group discussion where majority of the participants affirmed that SNS play a role in making women economically independent.

*“I strongly believe that SNS allow us to grow economically. It serves as a powerful platform where we can start new business and contact with customers*

directly. I too started a Home Cooking channel on YouTube.”

“I created a page on Instagram for my online shopping store and this helped me to reach out to customers easily.”

“I have relied on SNS to promote my cakes, bakery and many more. I firmly believe that my success is largely due to these virtual platforms.”

“SNS have provided me an opportunity to be self-reliant as I run an online shopping store”.

Majority of the women agreed with the statement that “SNS help you to be economically independent.” They believe that SNS help them to establish the start-up business and to reach to the customers directly.

### 5.9: Health, Hygiene and Nutrition for women

One of the important areas of women’s development is that of health and nutrition (including maternity). To see whether SNS play a role in developing health, hygiene and nutrition among the participants, responses were solicited. Table 10 reveals the responses.

**Table 10:**  
**Health, Hygiene and Nutrition**

Theme	Responses					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
SNS help you to develop health, hygiene and nutrition						
<b>Number</b>	30	43	39	35	23	170
<b>Percentage</b>	17.66	25.29	22.95	20.58	13.52	100.00

Source: Field work carried out in 2018.

As per the above table, it is found that majority of the women with 25.29 percent agreed that SNS help them to develop health, hygiene and nutrition. A good number of women (30; 17.66 percent) strongly agreed. 22.95 percent of the participants were neutral which was followed by 35 women (20.58 percent) who disagreed and 23 women (13.52 percent) strongly disagreed that SNS help them developing health, hygiene and nutrition. In response to the question whether SNS help in developing health, hygiene and nutrition among women, focus group discussions revealed that while majority of women agreed that they make use of SNS for maintaining health and hygiene, few did not agree to it. Some of the opinions shared by participants are quoted as below:

*“I agree that SNS are very important tools to promote and improve health care. These sites provide us with information about health behaviours among women and educate us about the ways to potentially improve health outcomes.”*

*“Last year I was diagnosed with PCOD. Though I consulted a doctor, yet I also made use of SNS to make a healthcare related search about PCOD. I found these sites (especially Facebook and Instagram) as an easy way to educate myself on this disease and these sites made it possible for me to promote healthy lifestyle.”*

*“I find social networking sites very useful because many health tips are provided in the pages of these sites. I search pages, videos and posts to get information on losing weight and nutrition diet charts”.*

*“I do use SNS but I don't follow health related pages and posts because of bogus remedies, myths and fake news about diseases.”*

While majority of the women perceive social networking sites as important tools to promote and improve health,

hygiene and nutrition, few don't trust the information related to health behaviours on these sites.

## **6: Discussion**

The present study confirms that majority of the women use social networking sites and is members of SNS. Concerning the frequency of using SNS among women, the finding reveals that the majority of the women use SNS very often followed by the women who it occasionally. Very less women reported that they rarely use SNS. This indicates that most of the women are active users of social networking sites. Social networking sites have swiftly and widely spread apprehension about different fields because it has the potential to cover large population. It has also played a vital role in spreading awareness to empower women in society. The majority of the women agreed and strongly agreed that SNS help them to highlight the gender related issues. They consider SNS a vital platform to bring gender issues and gender stereotypes to the attention of a wider public. They use these sites to make awareness about the gender related issues all over the world. They write blogs and articles on women harassment. They discuss subjects related to sexual and mental harassment online and provide information related to the women's rights. Women perceive SNS as powerful means to encourage them in making self-decisions and enhancing their leadership qualities. Besides, the majority of the women agreed and strongly agreed that SNS help in keeping them aware about the social and political rights and activities concerned with women. They see these online platforms as a medium to create awareness about social, political and economic rights and problems among women. The study also revealed that while some women consider social

networking sites as the important source and access to speak out against the oppression and economic exploitation of women at the grass root levels, some don't perceive SNS as best place to address the issue of wage discrimination. Similarly, some women agreed with the statement that SNS help them to expose crime and harassment, some did not agree to it. It was also that while most of the women see SNS as important tools to promote and improve health, hygiene and nutrition, some don't because of bogus remedies, myths and fake news about diseases. However, it was found that majority of the women agreed and strongly agreed with the statement that "SNS help you to be economically independent." They believe that SNS help them to establish the start-up business and to reach the customers directly.

## **7: Conclusion and Recommendation**

Women's empowerment is being considered as a very important ingredient for the development of every nation. Empowering women to participate in all sectors of life is necessary to build a stronger nation. It aims to emancipate women from the chains of legal, social and political restrictions that have traditionally kept women suppressed and unable to see their beauty and power. Social networking sites serve as a crucial platform for empowering women and assist them in using resources for their development by means of exposure, knowledge and information. The use of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn has helped women by encouraging the civic participation among women in Western, Middle East and Asian countries. Social networking sites play an important role for bringing women's rights issues and problems to the attention of a wider public and challenging

discrimination and stereotypes. It is a deep-rooted fact that human progress is incomplete unless women empowerment is accomplished in any society. Social networking sites for empowerment programs aim to eliminate gender disparities as well as shift locally determined attitudes and changing behaviours towards women and girls that lead to inequalities.

The present study investigated the role of social networking sites in women empowerment in district Srinagar of Kashmir. The study concluded that the majority of the women see social networking sites as powerful tools to address the gender related issues, to be abreast of social and political rights, to enhance the decision making and leadership qualities. They also agreed that social networking sites help them to grow independently. However, some women reported that they don't perceive social networking sites as more important vehicles to expose crime and harassment and to develop health, hygiene and nutrition behaviour among them. Over all, it was found that social networking is a huge platform which could accelerate the process of women empowerment. It plays an important role to empower women in different fields as now it is very easy, to search anything related to empowerment through internet. Hashtags and online campaigns have given women around the world a voice. It has shed light on women's issues not covered by mainstream media. Thus, it has a great calibre for the empowerment of women. Therefore, no other sector can match the efforts that it plays to empower women. Based on conclusion, it is recommended that more action oriented programmes and policies concerned with inculcating in comprehending the various technicalities and prospects of social networking sites keeping into consideration women's empowerment

should be implemented. Additionally, social networking sites should provide political and legal and economic and health awareness to educate the women so that women can reap more benefits from it.

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