

OPINION EDITORIAL

The Rising Global Impact of Social Media on Women's Health and Empowerment

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INTRODUCTION

We often hear that social media is a negative space that can have detrimental impacts on one's mental well-being. Existing literature and our personal experiences have demonstrated how increased usage can poorly affect one's self esteem. What if we instead told you that social media can be a powerful tool to share knowledge and drive equitable opportunities across the world?

Globally, women hold just 24% of senior leadership positions [1]. While gender equity has been on the map for global organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO), COVID-19 has slowed progress on these efforts. The role of education and gender equality is a core tenant of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are currently set forward by the UN. However, SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) are not promoted on the digital landscape for women striving to make change [2]. The lack of female representation among resources for activism and empowerment calls for a deeper look into the current landscape of digital communication.

As female social media users, we constantly see the highlight-reel of our role models' achievements. While their content is inspiring, we believe that promoting knowledge sharing and mentorship online would make our scrolling time more purposeful. This editorial will delve into the impact of digital technology on young women's health, a background on the health of young women within a global context and share an inspiring case study of

digital technology being used to advance equitable opportunities worldwide.

BACKGROUND

The landscape of digital technology has revolutionized the way in which information is shared across large populations. Due to the widespread use and accessibility of online global platforms (e.g. Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook), social media has also been a key driver for advancing the agenda of various social causes, particularly the push for gender equity and women's empowerment.

However, our observation of the current landscape of content sharing via social media, particularly by women, reveals an increased focus on achievement-oriented posts, rather than knowledge sharing. That is, posts are more results-oriented than process-oriented. We believe that when women on social media emphasize purposeful knowledge sharing, a young female audience will be able to access a wealth of resources that can be used to reach their goals.

THE WHO'S GLOBAL STRATEGY ON DIGITAL HEALTH 2020-2025

The WHO's Digital Strategy for the next 5 years aims to promote digital technology solutions to improve health for all [3]. One of the strategic objectives is to use technology to advocate for people-centered health systems through addressing digital health literacy, gender equality and women's empowerment [3]. With the rate of technological

advancement we are seeing today, this global digital strategy can be used to reframe our intentions as young social media users and promote evidence-based information on accessible platforms. If we work towards improving the conversation and resources available, we can transform the landscape of social media into an accessible educational tool that may be used globally.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND FEMALE ADOLESCENT HEALTH EDUCATION

Currently, there is a notable lack of positive female representation on social media as it pertains to women's advocacy and empowerment. Research in female health reveals that positive self-esteem is crucial to mental and social well-being, as it influences aspirations, personal goals, and interactions with others [4]. The presence of positive role models and mentors in one's life course is promotive to their self-esteem and perception. Self-esteem is not only a fundamental component of one's mental health, but also a protective factor that contributes to better health and positive social behavior through its role as a buffer against the impact of negative influences [4]. In our personal experiences, the outcome of poor self-esteem is such that women are less empowered to pursue opportunities and less likely to be proactive in taking care of their overall well-being. As more women choose to use social media as a platform to empower and educate others, we anticipate an emergence of female leaders in positions that have been previously dominated by males.

GLOBAL HEALTH AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The empowerment of women is intrinsically tied to global health. Varkey et al. conducted a global assessment to explore the association between women empowerment and the health of the community [5]. The study found that due to the crucial role women play within the family dynamic, their empowerment was associated with improvements in health indicators, such as decreases in infant and under-5 mortality [5]. As a tool that has tremendous power to empower millions, social media may be used as a tool to

empower women through improved health literacy and health outcomes across the globe.

CASE STUDY: THE STORY OF TWINS FROM PAKISTAN WHO HAVE HARNESSSED DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUITY

Let us take a look at Maryam and Vinaal Rehma, co-founders of The World with MNR and global activists for gender equality and female adolescent empowerment. Their mission is focused on purposeful knowledge sharing by providing tangible and accessible means of taking action. The twins launched "Feminae Carta", a revolutionary digital advocacy tool that brought together individuals from 23 countries and over 30 global universities together [6]. The World with MNR's 2020 impact report is a testament to the power of digital technology in bringing together youth separated by thousands of miles to create an inclusive and empowering space for women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increased research on the impact of social media use on women and girls. Despite evidence to support the benefits of empowering women, little has been done to synthesize this research and create tangible resources. Various observational studies indicate that girls face disproportionate negative consequences as a result of social media usage, including increased depressive symptoms and high rates of suicidality [7,8]. We propose increased research on the gender-based impact of digital communication technologies on women. A potential avenue for exploration is the patriarchal beliefs that continue to manifest in modern society, resulting in women feeling inferior to men. As the body of evidence on gender equity grows, there will be an increased need for tools that can help women and girls build their social media presence in a meaningful way and maximize their impact.
2. Increased mentorship opportunities and strategic training on digital communication technology for women and girls. Providing gender-specific training for girls will ensure that they continue to have equal access to new technologies and resources that may

be leveraged to empower them and take action.

3. Increased targeted investment in small businesses and organizations founded by women and girls.

According to a 2013 report, women-led businesses receive less financial support than male-led businesses [9]. We propose increased investment in women-led enterprises in order to promote equitable representation and opportunities.

CONCLUSION

As the world becomes increasingly connected via social media, it is important to foster a purposeful environment that will help to empower and educate women and youth. The evidence that has been provided in this editorial supports the need for greater research and investment into gender equity in global health. When young women are provided with equal access to resources and opportunities, they will be empowered to pursue their goals. Social media should be a tool to support them in this fight.

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