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An Assessment of Social Media Usage Patterns and Influences among Tribal Naga Women of North East India

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Abstract: ***Social media platforms have been acclaimed as providing immense potential for the empowerment of diverse societal groups regardless of gender, caste, class or race. But studies on women's online experiences have authenticated the hindrances faced by women in access and engagement in social media discourses. This study aimed to assess the pattern of social media use, influences and hindrances faced by tribal Naga women of North East India in their engagement in social media public platforms. Data was collected through a questionnaire survey of 360 female respondents from the States of Nagaland and Manipur. The results showed that WhatsApp Messaging is the most popular platform (n=338) among Naga women, followed by YouTube (n=298) and Facebook (n=286). About seventy-four per cent (74.55%) of the respondents stated that they access social media several times daily. Using social media for news and information ranked the highest (95.93%) followed by social relationships (92.51%). It was observed that social media exposure and usage has positively increased Naga women's gender awareness (97.16%) as well as their awareness of political and civic issues (96.15 %). However it has not significantly increased their public opinion expression (20%) on socio-political and civic issues. The main hindrances in engagement on social media discussions were Lack of Knowledge about issues (73.98%), followed by a Lack of Interest (71.13%) and a Lack of Time (62.14%). Based in the findings, despite the hindrances and low level of engagement in social media public discourses, it was concluded that Naga women's information seeking behaviour being the main motivation behind social media could be a positive indicator for the development of their agency.***

Keywords: ***Social Media Engagement, Tribal Naga Women, Purpose of Social Media Use, Social Media Influences, Hindrances to Social Media Use.***

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has revolutionized the way individuals communicate, interact, and participate in public discourse, offering unprecedented opportunities for engagement and expression. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide users with tools to share views, mobilize communities, and advocate for social change, thus enhancing participatory potentials across diverse populations (Smith et al., 2012). This digital landscape has particularly empowered marginalized groups by giving them a voice in public arenas previously dominated by traditional media (Murthy, 2013). Social media's ability to democratize information dissemination and foster civic engagement highlights its significance in contemporary society (Kietzmann et al,, 2011).

The participatory potential of social media has significantly impacted women, offering new avenues for empowerment, advocacy, and community building. By providing platforms for opinion expression and networking, it has enabled women to challenge traditional gender norms, amplify their voices, and participate in social and political movements more effectively (Shirky, 2011).

Furthermore social media has offered women new avenues to promote their talents, build networks and access previously inaccessible resources (Bennett, 2012). But still, the impact of these participatory potentials has not been uniformly experienced, due to various social, cultural, and technological barriers limiting women's engagement, mainly in developing regions (Miller et al., 2016).

Women's public involvement, issue recognition, and vocal expression signify their initial steps towards empowerment. Social media serves as an affordable and convenient tool for women to engage in discussions, broadening their knowledge on topics such as health, education, and rights. Seeking information is a manifestation of personal agency and self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), women gain control over their knowledge acquisition by actively seeking news and information. Beyond personal growth, this proactive stance aims to expand to socio-political engagement. Women who are well-informed have higher tendency to get involved in social and political activities, including political debates, voting, and advocating for policy changes (Inglehart & Norris, 2003) which are indicative of decision-making processes in the society. Participating in decision-making significantly promotes gender equality (Fraser, 2013).

Although social media offers numerous advantages, there has been increasingly distinct challenges that are disproportionately faced by women and girls compared to men. These include sexist stereotyping in online content, negative body image caused by idealised images, misogyny and abuses, coercive control through technology, marginalization in economic and political aspects, and degrading impacts of misogynistic pornography.

The Nagas of North East India have embraced the social media as a powerful tool to voice out their stories, generate public opinion and contribute to nation-building (Ranganathan, 2010; Longvah, 2014) and the social media has been hailed as giving a megaphone to the erstwhile voiceless Nagas (Tsukru.2017). While there has been growing academic contribution in the area of social media and women, the perspective of tribal women particularly the tribal Naga women in relation to the social media is still an inadequately researched area.

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The aim of this study is to gather an initial understanding of social media usage among tribal Naga women of North East India within a patrilineal and patriarchal cultural context. It seeks to examine the patterns, purposes, influences and hindrances of social media use among Naga women. It hopes to present the current scenario of the proliferation and influences of social media on the tribal women population situated at the margins.

2. RELATED WORKS

While social media platforms have been considered instrumental in empowering women by providing them with a voice and platform to express their opinions and advocate for change, the purposes of women's use of social media are multifaceted. One of the most mentioned reasons of women's social media use is maintaining relationships with friends and family and in expanding their social connections (Barker, 2009; McAndrew & Jeong, 2012; Chen, 2011; Park & Lee, 2014). The Pew Research Center's report (2018) show that women are more socially active on Facebook and Instagram for interacting with others and maintaining their relationships.

Women also use social media for informational purposes. Hargittai and Litt (2011) point out that women are more inclined to seek information on social media for health, education, and lifestyle information dissemination than men. Women's information-seeking behavior is most evident on Pinterest and health-related Facebook groups, where they exchange tips, resources and advices with one another. Other findings show the prevalence of social media use primarily for entertainment such as video viewing, celebrity following, relaxation and humour (Alhabash & Ma, 2017).

Social media also serves as a medium for individuals to express themselves and strengthen their identities. A study by Manago and colleagues (2008) examine how women use social media for self-expression and life documentation through sharing personal stories, photos, and opinions. Social media provides women with feedback and peer validation to shape and strengthen their self-perceptions.

Regarding impact, social media has greatly enhanced women's access to opportunities for information and professional networks, which are vital for their empowerment. Moreover, professional networking sites like such as LinkedIn offer women with opportunities to connect with industry professionals, experts, mentorship, and explore job opportunities (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). . In male-dominated fields, these connections are especially valuable due to the restricted availability in conventional networking. Online professional networking enables women to advance their careers and secure economic independence (Hargittai & Shaw, 2015).

Social media has also served as an effective platform for advocacy and social activism. The numerous examples of women's use of social networking platforms for activism and advocacy such as hashtag (#) activism show how social media has been instrumental in raising gender awareness. It is widely accepted that social media has become an indispensable tool for advocacy and women empowerment activities that are working towards social change (Khamis et al., 2012).

In the Indian context, Patel and Sharma (2020) note that social media has contributed to Indian women's empowerment and advocacy by enabling Indian women to connect, share experiences and access information. Gupta (2018) claims that platforms like Facebook and Twitter (now X) have

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become crucial tools for women's advocacy and activism, particularly in raising awareness about gender equality and women's rights. These platforms empower women to express their views, arrange gatherings, and form groups based on common concerns.

Women's increased access to news and information enhances their knowledge of issues like health, education and rights. For example, access to legal information will empower them and provide guidance to make informed decisions and confront discriminatory practices (World Health Organisation, 2019; United Nations, 2020).

But the degree of these functions (purpose), influences and engagement practices on social media are likely to differ depending on factors like age, education, income (Penni, 2015) gender awareness, region and culture (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2017).

Despite the empowerment potential of social media, Indian women are confronted with substantial cultural and social barriers in using social media. Kumar and Patnaik (2018) argue that patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles hinder women's engagement in public discourse on social media. Sarkar (2020) points out the factor of family restrictions in limiting women's use of social media due to perceived risks and societal disapproval.

The digital divide continues to prevail as a barrier for many women in rural India. Joshi and Malhotra (2019) note how women's restricted access to technology, affordability issues, and insufficient digital skills hinder the usage and engagement of social media. Chaudhary's (2021) research similarly sheds light on women's lack of technical skills hindering their efficient use of these platforms.

There are also psychological factors that significantly limit women's engagement in social media. Fear of online harassment such as trolling, cyberstalking, and bullying discourage many women from being active participants according to Banerjee and Patil (2017). The lack of adequate legal protections against these practices is another crucial factor limiting women's social media engagement.

Mukherjee (2018) argues that inadequate legal frameworks for women's online protection result in an unsafe digital environment, discouraging online engagement. Rao's work (2019) examines the role of government censorship and surveillance in discouraging women from engaging in discussions on sensitive or controversial topics online. Historical and cultural influences, such as social norms and the competing burdens of domestic roles have been found to be barriers to women's full professional engagement (Lindawati, 2015).

3. METHODOLOGY

Tools and Methods of Data Collection: The research adopted a quantitative descriptive approach for data collection and analysis. Data was collected through a questionnaire-based survey created on Google Forms and sent out online to Naga women Facebook users belonging to Manipur and Nagaland. The survey questionnaires were sent via WhatsApp Messaging, Messenger, and Email and posted on She-Naga, a Naga women-only-Facebook Group targeting Naga women social media users who were 21 years and above who use social media. A section of the survey was administered physically on paper among 20 respondents.

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Population of the Study: This study's population consisted of Naga women aged 21 years and above. As all the individuals in the population cannot be included in data collection and doing so leads to over-consumption of time and resources, a study population is sampled by predetermining the size. Though the area of study is defined as Nagaland and Naga districts in Manipur, the study population is not confined to these two States because many Naga women live in other cities and countries.

Sampling Unit and Method: For the questionnaire-based survey, the purposive sample unit comprised of i) Naga women aged 21 years and above ii) who use social media and iii) belonging to Nagaland and Manipur. This age limit was kept open with the assumption that older, educated women were more likely to express opinions on social media.
Sample Size: A minimum of 385, according to Cochran's formula (Cochran, 1977), is suggested for determining sample size for unknown or infinite populations, taking a 95% confidence level and ±5% precision assuming p=.5 (maximum variability) (Cochran, 1997; Israel, 1992). A section of participants participated offline. Out of the target size of 385 Naga women social media users, 360 women participated in the survey from October 2020- February 2021. From a heuristic point of view, the sample size of 360 was considered sufficient and found to have reached a kind of saturation; therefore, the online survey was closed in February 2021.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria for the Survey: The inclusion and exclusion criteria identify who can be included or excluded in the study sample. For this study, the criteria for inclusion in the survey were only the Naga women social media users belonging to Manipur and Nagaland States above 21 years of age. Naga men and Naga women below 21 were excluded. Naga women who do not use social media or Internet-based communication channels were not included. Naga women from Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Myanmar have been excluded.

Ethical Considerations: The research attempted to follow the ethical principles of research by obtaining full informed consent and maintaining confidentiality of the individuals concerned. Participation in the research for Questionnaires was voluntary and they have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage. No coercion or pressure will be used to gather information from the participants. Survey participants' privacy has been taken into careful consideration by keeping their identity anonymous.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Demographic profile of survey respondents

First, the demographic profiles of the survey respondents are illustrated below based on Age, Education, Monthly Income, Marital Status, Place of Residence and State of Origin with regard to their social media exposure.

1. **Age:** The table below highlights the age distribution of Naga women social media users.

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Table 1. Social Media Exposure by Age Group

Age groups	Frequency	Percentage
21-30	140	41.92
31-40	137	41.02
41-50	52	15.57
Above 50	5	1.50

From the figures, it can be summarised that exposure to social media is higher among the 21-30 age group and 31-40 age groups i.e., 41.92% and 41.02%, respectively. 15.57% of the respondents are between the age group of 41-50 years who use social media. But, only 1.50% of Naga women respondents above 50 years are found to be using social media.

2. **Education:** An overview of the level of education of the survey participants (N=357) is shown in below:

Table 2. Social Media Exposure by Educational Level

Education groups	Frequency	Percentage
Schooling (completed)	22	6.59
Graduate	134	40.12
Post Graduate	161	48.20
Doctorate (earned)	17	5.09

It can be seen that the highest group of respondents using social media are Postgraduates (48.20 %), followed by those are at the graduate level (40.12%). On the other hand, 6.59% of the respondents have done their schooling (secondary and higher secondary level), whereas only 5.09 % of respondents had a doctoral degree.

3. **Monthly Income:** Table 3 shows that the majority of the Naga women social media users belong to the lower income groups earning below Rs 40,000 (i.e. Below Rs. 20,000 income and Below Rs. 40,000 groups).

Table 3. Social Media Exposure by Income Groups

Income groups (Monthly)	Frequency	Percentage
Below Rs. 20000	101	30.24
Rs. 20000-40000	87	26.05
Above Rs. 40000	59	17.66
No income	87	26.05

However, this data had overlooked the respondents' family income and other irregular and supplementary incomes as several identified themselves to be housewives.

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4. **Marital Status:** The following figures show the social media exposure of Naga women based on the demographic factor of marital status. A significant higher social media usage (60.18 %) is reflected among single Naga women in comparison to married women (39.82%).

Table 4. Social Media Exposure by Marital status

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	133	39.82
Single	201	60.18

5. **Place of Residence:** The study also attempted to identify social media access or exposure depending on place of residence. Those residing in urban areas were found to have higher exposure to social media (55.39%) than those living in rural areas (44.61%).

Table 5. Social Media Exposure Place of Residence

Residence	Frequency	Percentage
Rural	149	44.61
Urban	185	55.39

6. **State of Origin (State Respondents Belong):** The figures below present an overall view of the respondents' demography regarding the State they belong to. 54.79% of the respondents originally belonged to Manipur, and 45.21% belonging to Nagaland participated in the survey.

Table 6. Social Media Exposure by Home State/ State of Origin

State	Frequency	Percentage
Manipur	183	54.79
Nagaland	151	45.21

However this data could not conclude that women who belong to Nagaland have lesser access to social media than the Naga women in Manipur but this could be indicative of the number of respondents in the survey.

7. **Occupation:** The occupation of the respondents as presented in Table 7 showed that the survey covered a wide range of Naga women working in different occupations. 25.75 % of the respondents indicated they were students; 16.47% in teaching occupations; 15.27% stated they were in Government services; whereas the remaining respondents were in Private enterprises (9.59%) or self-employed (8.68%), homemakers (6.69%), social worker (6.29%), Religious enterprise or ministry (5.69%) and (5.69%) stated being unemployed.

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Table 7. Social Media Exposure by Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Govt. employee	51	15.27
Private employee	32	9.58
Teacher/Lecturer	55	16.47
Social worker	21	6.29
Self-employed	29	8.68
Homemaker	22	6.59
Religious enterprise/ministry	19	5.69
Student	86	25.75
Unemployed	19	5.69

B. Usage Patterns and Perception Regarding Social Media Use

1. Social Media Platforms

The survey participants were asked to indicate the social media platforms or sites they frequently use. The most commonly used platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, were presented in the questionnaire. The chart below shows the sites that are the most popular platforms among Naga women.

WhatsApp Messaging is the most popular platform among Naga women (n=338), followed by YouTube and Facebook as the second most popular platforms with 298 and 296 users respectively, out of 360 respondents. Two hundred forty-five respondents stated that they use Instagram. X (formerly Twitter) is not found to be popular site among the Naga women, as only 64 respondents reported to be using this platform.

Table 8. Popular Platforms among Naga Women

Social Media Platform	No. of Users (N=360)
WhatsApp	338
Facebook	296
YouTube	298
Instagram	245
X (Twitter)	64

2. Time Spent on Social Media

About seventy-four per cent (74.55%) of the respondents (N=358) replied that they check into social media applications several times in a day while 11.98% of Naga women open social media platforms once daily, and 10.18% of Naga women use social media several times a week, and only 3.29% of Naga women stated they use it very often. So, it can be observed that majority of the Naga women have a high exposure to social media, and most are habitual social media users.

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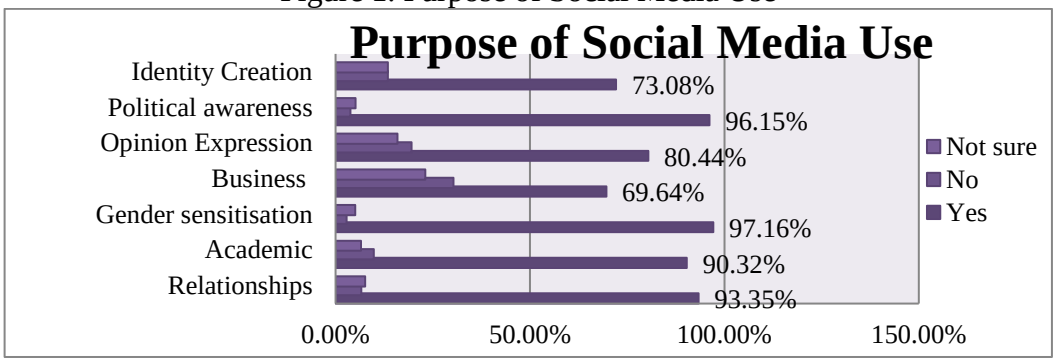
Table 9. Time Spent on Social Media

Time	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Several times a day	249	74.55
Once everyday	40	11.98
Several times a week	34	10.18
Not very often	11	3.29

3. Purpose of Social Media Use

Using social media for news and information ranked the highest (95.93%) followed by social relationships (92.51%) for the Naga women survey respondents (N= 334). Entertainment and relaxation (84.73%) is the third major function of social media use among Naga women. The use of social media for socio-political discussion and civic issues ranked the lowest among all the purpose of social media use provided in the survey. 51.50% responded that they hardly use social media for discursive purposes.

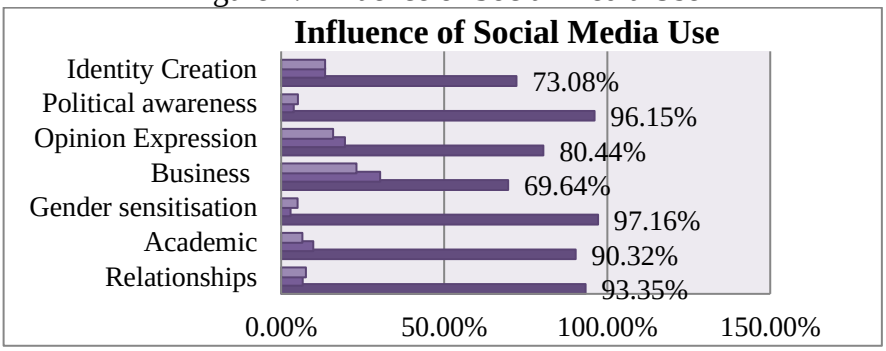
Figure 1. Purpose of Social Media Use



4. Influence of Social Media Use

Social media use has been found to have influenced Naga women of Manipur and Nagaland States to a great extent.

Figure 2. Influence of Social Media Use



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Among the variables provided Gender sensitisation has been found to be the major impact of social media use for Naga women (97.16 %) It is observable that the highest influence of social media exposure and usage on the Naga women respondents has been found in making them aware of women's rights and the need for gender equality.
The next highest influence (96.15 %) is political awareness which indicates social media use has helped them increase their awareness of socio-political issues (n=229). Next, social media is found to have a greater influence in helping users academically (87.05% positive responses) and widening social relationships (93.35 %). In measuring influencing speaking out on various socio-political issues, 69.37% affirmed that social media use had increased their opinion expression on socio-political and civic discussions while twenty percent (20 %) stated that social media use had not increased their public opinion expression on socio-political and civic discussions.

5. Hindrance to Social Media Use

The factors hindering social media use and engagement in social media discussions among Naga women were also examined by providing options such as Lack of Time, Lack of Awareness/ knowledge, Lack of Interest in Issues, Cannot afford smart phones, Poor Internet, Language Problems, and Unfamiliarity with New Technologies as probable factors. The respondents were given the choices to choose the intensity by indicating Very Much, Somewhat, Not at all or Not sure to the variables presented.

Table 10. Hindrancing Factors to Social Media Use and Engagement

Hindrances to taking part in social media discussions	Very Much	Somewhat	Not at all	Not Sure	Total responses
Lack of Time	68 (20.12%)	142 (42.02%)	86 (25.45%)	42 (12.43%)	338
Lack of knowledge about an issue	90 26.32%	163 47.66%	52 15.21%	37 10.82%	342
Lack of Interest in an issue	75 22.32%	164 48.81%	49 14.58%	48 14.28%	336
Affordability issues (smart phones, Internet data etc.)	20 5.97%	92 27.46%	150 44.77%	73 21.79%	335
Poor Internet	54 16.12%	141 42.08%	100 29.85%	40 11.94%	335
Language Problem	48 14.24%	138 40.95%	111 32.94%	40 11.86%	337
Unfamiliarity with new technologies	44 13.06%	115 34.12%	122 36.21%	56 16.62%	337

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It can be deduced that Lack of Awareness or Knowledge about issues (73.98%) was the highest hindrance to engaging in social media discussions among the respondents. This was followed by a Lack of Interest (71.13%) and a Lack of Time (62.14%). Poor Internet Connectivity (58.2%), Language Problems (55.19%), and Unfamiliarity with new technologies (47.18%) were also found to be significant hindrances for the respondents. The inability to afford smart phones or Internet Data ranked the lowest among the hindrances to engaging in social media discussions. However, a significant percentage of respondents (33.43%) considered it a hindrance to their social media engagement.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of social media use among Naga women, its influences and hindrances faced in using social media have been discussed in this paper. Despite the hindrances, increased news consumption, gender sensitisation, awareness of socio-political issues and opinion expression can be considered a positive reflection of social media use for tribal Naga women empowerment. If garnered, this can extend to increased agency and socio-political participation. Further research can gather case studies of whether social media has helped develop tribal women's agency and socio-political engagement at individual and organisational levels.

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