The Role of Social Media in Empowering Tribal Women to Combat Human Trafficking: A Sociological Study of North Gujarat Tribal Region

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Human trafficking remains a severe socio-economic challenge in India, disproportionately affecting tribal women due to systemic marginalization, poverty, and lack of awareness. This study examines the transformative role of social media in empowering tribal women in the North Gujarat tribal region—particularly in districts like Banaskantha, Sabarkantha, and Aravalli—to resist and combat human trafficking. Through a sociological lens, the research explores how platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube are not only spreading awareness but also enabling collective action, reporting mechanisms, and access to legal aid and support networks. The study employs qualitative and quantitative methodologies including interviews, focus group discussions, and digital ethnography with tribal women, NGOs, and local authorities. It highlights that digital literacy and online networks are gradually fostering a sense of agency and resistance among tribal women. Social media, when supported by grassroots initiatives and state policy, emerges as a potential weapon in the fight against trafficking (Kaur, 2020; George & Sreelekha, 2022). This study offers insights for policymakers, social workers, and digital rights activists seeking to utilize technology for social justice and gender empowerment in tribal areas.

Keywords: social media, tribal women, human trafficking

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1. Introduction

Human trafficking is one of the most serious human rights violations in India, particularly affecting vulnerable populations such as tribal women. The tribal communities of North Gujarat—including districts like Banaskantha, Sabarkantha, and Aravalli—face compounded socio-economic challenges such as poverty, low literacy rates, gender-based discrimination, and limited access to institutional support. These factors make tribal women especially susceptible to exploitation and trafficking (Sen, 2018). Traffickers often target women under the guise of employment, marriage, or education, exploiting their marginal status and lack of awareness.

In recent years, the rapid penetration of digital technologies and social media platforms in rural and tribal areas has opened new pathways for awareness, empowerment, and resistance. Mobile phones, along with apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, are increasingly accessible even in remote regions due to improved connectivity and government digital inclusion programs. These platforms are now being utilized not just for entertainment but also for mobilizing community support, spreading information, and accessing legal and emergency services (Kaur, 2020).

This research focuses on understanding the role of social media in enabling tribal women of North Gujarat to become active agents in resisting human trafficking. It aims to analyze the ways in which digital tools empower women by enhancing their access to information, networks of solidarity, and institutional resources. Using a sociological lens, the study will assess the socio-cultural, economic, and technological dynamics that shape the digital engagement of tribal women and its impact on combating human trafficking.

2. Literature Review

The intersection of gender, technology, and marginalization has gained scholarly attention in recent decades. Several researchers have documented how digital technologies can act as tools of empowerment for marginalized communities. According to Kaur (2020), access to social media allows marginalized women to break the silence around issues like trafficking, domestic violence, and exploitation by creating virtual platforms for discussion and activism. These platforms serve not only as sources of information but also as support networks that challenge patriarchal norms and create collective identities among oppressed women.

George and Sreelekha (2022) argue that technology can significantly aid in the prevention and reporting of human trafficking by enabling faster communication, community surveillance, and direct contact with NGOs and government authorities. Their study highlights the importance of digital literacy and the need for region-specific technological solutions, especially in high-risk areas. Social media is increasingly being recognized by stakeholders—including law enforcement, NGOs, and grassroots organizations—as a tool for both advocacy and intervention.

Sen (2018) conducted an extensive study on trafficking in tribal areas and observed that while traditional mechanisms of community control have weakened, digital platforms have the potential to fill that void. However, Sen also noted that the effectiveness of social media in these regions depends on digital accessibility, literacy levels, and the presence of local organizations that can mediate digital communication for community use.

Despite the growing body of work on digital empowerment, there remains a significant gap in literature regarding tribal women in Gujarat. Most existing studies are either national in scope or focus on urban or semi-urban areas. There is a lack of empirical data that explores how tribal women in the North Gujarat region specifically engage with digital platforms to resist trafficking and protect themselves and others. This research intends to fill this gap by employing both qualitative and quantitative methods to capture the lived experiences of tribal women, local NGOs, social workers, and law enforcement agencies. The study will also examine the role of digital campaigns, social influencers, and local content creators in raising awareness and building resilience against trafficking in tribal societies.

3. Research Objective

To examine whether social media significantly influences the ability of tribal women in the North Gujarat region to resist and combat human trafficking by analyzing the distribution of their,

responses and testing for statistically significant differences in perceived empowerment through social media platforms.

4. Research Methodology

The study employs a mixed-method research design to explore how social media empowers tribal women in North Gujarat—specifically in Banaskantha, Sabarkantha etcs districts—to combat human trafficking. On 400 tribal women who access social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, or YouTube will be surveyed. Primary data will be collected through structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and digital ethnography. Secondary data will include government reports, NGO documentation, and academic literature. Quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS (frequency distribution, cross-tabulation, chi-square), while qualitative data will undergo thematic analysis. Ethical safeguards such as informed consent, anonymity, and sensitivity toward trafficking survivors will be strictly maintained. The study may face limitations due to low digital literacy, device access, and stigma. Nonetheless, it aims to contribute significantly to sociological understanding and policy discourse around digital empowerment and anti-trafficking efforts in tribal communities.

5. Data Analysis

Social media enable the tribal women to fight against human trafficking			
Sr. No.	Ans	Response	Percentage
1	Yes	339	84.75
2	No	61	15.25
	Total	400	100

Source: Primary data collected
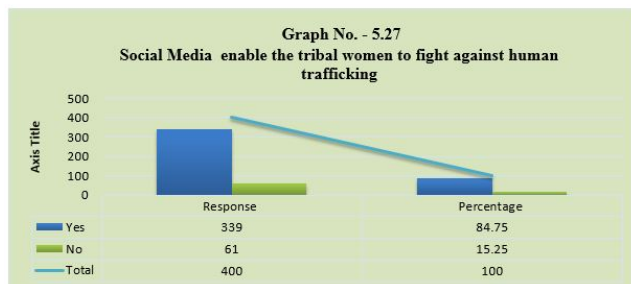
Source: Primary data collected

6. Chi-Square Test: Explained Analysis

To assess whether there is a statistically significant difference in the responses of tribal women regarding the role of social media in combating human trafficking, a Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test was conducted.

The research included 400 respondents from the North Gujarat tribal region. Out of these, 339 women (84.75%) responded "Yes," affirming that social media helps them in fighting human trafficking. The remaining 61 women (15.25%) responded "No."

Hypothesis Framing

- Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant difference in the responses; i.e., both "Yes" and "No" responses are equally likely (expected frequency = 200 each).

- Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant difference in the distribution of responses; social media significantly influences their ability to resist trafficking.

Observed vs Expected Frequencies

Response	Observed	Expected
Yes	339	200.0
No	61	200.0

Chi-Square Test Results

- Chi-Square Statistic (χ^2): 193.21

- Degrees of Freedom (df): 1

- p-value: 6.33×10^{-44}

Interpretation

The p-value obtained from the test is extremely small (6.33×10^{-44}), which is much less than the conventional alpha level of 0.05. This means we reject the null hypothesis. The results show a highly significant difference between those who believe in the enabling power of social media and those who do not. The observed frequency of "Yes" responses (339) is much higher than what would be expected under the assumption of equal likelihood (200). This analysis strongly supports the view that social media is playing a vital and empowering role in helping tribal women in North Gujarat become more aware, connected, and resistant to the threats of human trafficking.

The statistical evidence confirms that this difference is not due to chance and is significantly meaningful in the sociological context of digital empowerment.

7. Conclusion

The study set out to investigate whether social media significantly empowers tribal women in the North Gujarat region to fight against human trafficking. Based on responses from 400 participants, an overwhelming majority (84.75%) affirmed that social media plays a vital role in increasing awareness, enabling reporting, and connecting them to support networks.

A chi-square test was conducted to statistically validate this claim. The results revealed a chi-square value of 193.21 with a p-value of 6.33×10^{-44}, which is far below the standard significance level of 0.05. This allowed for the rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming that the observed difference in responses is not due to chance but reflects a significant impact of social media. Therefore, the study concludes that social media is a powerful tool of empowerment for tribal women, facilitating resistance against human trafficking through information dissemination, community awareness, and digital solidarity. These findings emphasize the need for policies and initiatives that enhance digital literacy and access among tribal populations to strengthen their fight against exploitation and marginalization.

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