

## **THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN 2019**

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### **Abstract**

This study intended to investigate how social media has impacted on women's political participation, selecting the 2019 presidential election as a case study. The study used a mixed-method approach. The qualitative and quantitative data were gathered by using primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The sample size consisted of 80 respondents. Secondary data was collected from books, research reports, official reports, journal articles, newspapers, websites, etc. The SPSS was used to analyze quantitative data. The content analysis and thematic analysis were used to analyze the qualitative data, and they were presented using texts, narratives, tables, charts, and figures. The study found that as a result of social media, women are now able to speak for themselves and express their political opinions. A key role played by social media in enhancing political changes and women's literacy in using technological equipment was the reason behind these factors. The study also highlighted that, it is also important to ensure gender equality and establish networks, websites, and a pool of candidates on special platforms through appropriate policies. The study finally found that Sri Lanka can increase women's political participation by strengthening its cyber security law and advocating them.

**Keywords:** *Gender Equality, Political Participation, Presidential Election, social media, Women*

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## **Introduction**

Political participation is voluntary activities undertaken by the mass public to influence public policy either directly or by affecting the selection of persons who make policies (Longley, 2021). These activities include voting in elections, involvement in a political campaign, expressing political opinions, donating money to a candidate or political party, competing as a candidate, representing a particular political body, petitioning, protesting, and working with other people on issues, etc. All these activities have enhanced the political participation of the public, particularly women. Considering the contemporary world rather than utilizing voting, and political party organization, other platforms occur on behalf of political participation with the development of technology. Essentially it comes to “Social media Platforms” besides one of the most highlighted platforms utilized by the public, government to carry out its own political opinion. In addition to the influence made by traditional media, social media has become an alternative such as television, and radio. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Twitter would be the most famous social media in this context. Facebook, which revolutionized social networking, gives powerful platforms for women to express openly and bring to life their ideas on whatever topic they want, from fashion to human and civil rights, feminism to politics (Kaluarachchi, Nagahawatta an Warren, Matthew, 2020 and Mendis, 2019). This dimension has not been adequately studied by researchers in the field of political science. Thus, this study bridged the gap in the literature by investigating how social media has impacted on women’s political participation, selecting the 2019 presidential election as a case study. Within this broad objective of the study, the following specific objectives have been pursued: to identify how women’s participation can be improved in politics through social media and to identify effective ways of using social media to empower women in politics in Sri Lanka.

## **Material and Methods**

The study used a mixed-method approach. The study was carried out in the Hanwella divisional secretariat division in the Colombo district. The qualitative and quantitative data were gathered by using primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The sample size was consisted of 80 respondents. The researchers selected 70 women for the questionnaire survey by using a simple random sampling method and cluster sampling method, and 10 women were selected for semi-structured interviews by using a purposive sampling method. Secondary data was collected from books, research reports, official reports, journal articles, newspapers, websites, etc. The SPSS was used to analyze quantitative data. The content analysis and

thematic analysis were used to analyze the qualitative data, and they were presented using texts, narratives, tables, charts, and figures.

## **Results and Discussion**

Women in Sri Lanka play a significant role in politics. Social media has been able to bring together women's political opinions into the real context, especially in the electoral process. With this, the researchers conducted this study to identify the impact of social media on women's political participation during the 2019 presidential election. According to the data analysis, social media become a strong factor during the 2019 presidential election in increasing women's political participation. Accordingly, the Main findings of the study can be highlighted as follows;

- I. **Social Media Has Become a Platform for Women's Voice** - Women are now engaging on social media and express their ideas directly on social media. Facebook was the major platform used by them for the expression of their political opinion. The data analysis revealed that the majority of young women are now using social media, not only in urban areas but even in rural areas.
- II. **Social Media Enhances Women's Political Interest** - Women have become social media activists. It caused to strength of other women as well. The analyzed data revealed that 80% of women were influenced by politics through social media. Further, Twitter was also used as a medium to share their ideas at the international level. TikTok was not used well. but in the future, it will go over Facebook as a marketing platform in Sri Lanka.
- III. **Social Media Has Become Key Figure in Enhancing Political Changes** - social media is a platform that supports users and depends on their usage. The targeted audience determines social media marketing.
- IV. **Women Have Enough Literacy in Using Technological Equipment** - The analyzed data revealed that women are aware of the main things an individual should do while using the smart app. Uploading, promoting, commenting, making chat groups, making pages, and finding friends are the only things they know. In addition, the analyzed data revealed that education is a must to make them aware of using social media properly.

- V. **Social Media Has Become a Leading Marketing in Sri Lanka** - Traditional media are also utilizing social media platforms for promotions. As a result of their busy lives, most youngsters now use social media more often. It only has a finger point distance. In Sri Lanka, Facebook is the leading social media by 2022. With that TikTok platform also has become a leading marketing media. Next came YouTubers and Instagrammers. The future will experience sudden changes and revolutions more than ever thanks to social media.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study concluded that social media makes a positive impact on women's political participation throughout the presidential election in 2019. Women were able to speak freely by the support of social media. A significant factor that was successful in attracting more voters was the social media campaign. However, social media was able to modify public opinion and mold it. To overcome the problems related to women's political participation, the study recommends that enhancing rural-level women's literacy, advocating women's political participation, increasing political parties also an option to support women through social media, establishing the social media data privacy act under the cyber security law, making women's platforms and develop school level political participation.

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