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Q7(b)

Feminist scholars argue that 'New media' is masculine and hence reinforces structural hierarchies rather than reconfiguring them. Comment

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- Feminist scholars argue that 'New media' is masculine and hence reinforces structural hierarchies rather than reconfiguring them. Comment
- Keep the comment within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

New media can be masculine in ownership, design culture, and violence.

Walby, Connell, and Collins travel to platforms.

Harassment and the gaze reinforce old honour.

SHG groups and protest naming show partial reconfiguration.

- **Comment:** hierarchies are rebuilt more than dissolved; struggle continues.

Digital divides by sex and rural location remain.

Introduction

New media names platforms, phones, and user-generated networks. Feminist scholars argue that design, ownership, and online violence remain masculine, so hierarchies of gender, and often caste and class, are rebuilt in code. The claim is strong. It is not the whole of every chat group.

Body

Why "masculine"

- **R. W. Connell's masculinities and Sylvia Walby's cultural structure travel online:** who codes, who funds, whose body is the joke.
- Early internet cultures prized a hacker-bro style. Platform firms remain male-heavy in power, if not in user counts.
- Donna Haraway's cyborg was a hope of reconfiguration. Much Web 2.0 practice looks more like Laura Mulvey's gaze in a new machine.

Reinforcement of hierarchies

- Trolling, non-consensual images, and rape threats police women's speech. That is old honour in a new feed.

- Algorithms amplify sensational harm. Informal women workers on phones still face unpaid care, as time-use shows.
- Caste and racial hate pages use the same tools. Patricia Hill Collins's matrix fits the comments section.
- Attention markets commodify intimacy, which Marxist feminists read as another extraction.

Reconfiguration that the sentence underplays

- SHG WhatsApp groups, Dalit women's writing, and #MeToo-style naming opened publics that print gatekeepers shut.
- **Ann Oakley's point that the interview is a relation also fits:** users are not only victims; they are co-authors.
- **Access gaps remain:** **Census** digital divides by sex and rural location.

Comment

- The argument is right about ownership, design default, and violence.
- It over-claims if it says no reconfiguration occurs. Struggle is the better word than freeze.
- New media is masculine as a structure of power, not as a biological user majority.

Flow diagram

New media -> Masculine ownership design
Masculine ownership design -> Gender caste class
Counterpublics -> Partial reconfiguration
Gender caste class -> Policing of speech

Conclusion

Feminist scholars are right that new media often reproduces masculine and other hierarchies through design, firms, and harassment. **Haraway's** reconfiguration remains a project, not a delivery. Indian SHG and protest uses show cracks. Comment: structure holds; it is not sealed.

Facts & figures

Haraway

Cyborg manifesto: a hope that technology might scramble gendered dualisms.

Mulvey

Male gaze: looking as power; a template for image cultures online.

Walby

Culture as a patriarchal structure, now including platform culture.

Census / NFHS

Gendered phone and internet access that shapes who speaks on new media.

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