

# The Role of Social Media in Combating Female Feticide in India: Legal and Ethical Perspectives

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63345/ijre.v14.i11.6>

Dr Pooja Khurana

Assistant Professor

[khuranapooja836@gmail.com](mailto:khuranapooja836@gmail.com)

Orcid Id 0009-0000-7767-3527

**Abstract**— Female feticide remains a critical gender justice challenge in India, despite the existence of strong legal frameworks such as the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act. While government-led communication programs and traditional media have contributed to awareness, recent studies indicate that social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for public engagement, legal literacy, and community-driven monitoring. However, existing research offers limited empirical evidence on the direct impact of social media activism on behavioural change, rule-of-law enforcement, and shifts in cultural norms surrounding son preference. Additionally, concerns regarding misinformation, privacy violations, sensationalism, and online harassment complicate the ethical legitimacy of digital advocacy efforts.

This research aims to examine the role of social media in combating female feticide in India by analysing how online campaigns influence public awareness, attitudes, and legal compliance at both urban and rural levels. The study will explore the effectiveness, opportunities, and ethical risks of digital activism while identifying governance mechanisms that protect rights and support responsible content dissemination. By bridging the gap between legal enforcement and participatory digital communication, the findings are expected to inform policy reforms, enhance social media-based preventive strategies, and strengthen India's ongoing efforts to eliminate sex-selective practices.

**Keywords**— Female Feticide, Social Media Activism, Legal Awareness, Digital Governance, Gender Justice

## I. INTRODUCTION

Female feticide represents one of the most alarming manifestations of gender discrimination in India, resulting in a persistent imbalance in the sex ratio and deep socio-economic consequences. Despite rapid advancements in education, healthcare, and technology, son preference continues to influence reproductive decisions, leading to selective abortion of female fetuses. National census trends and public health analyses consistently indicate that certain regions of India face severe disparities in the number of girls born compared to boys, reflecting systemic inequality rooted in cultural, economic, and patriarchal structures.



Fig. 1: Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao

To prevent the misuse of prenatal diagnostic technologies, the Government of India enacted the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, which prohibits sex determination and imposes strict penalties on violators. However, the effectiveness of legal mechanisms has been hindered by enforcement gaps, lack of community vigilance,

and limited awareness among citizens—particularly in rural and marginalized populations. Traditional communication channels have played a critical role in highlighting this issue, but their one-directional nature often restricts public participation and sustained engagement.



Fig. 2: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/7/6/female-foeticide-indias-ticking-bomb>

The rise of social media platforms offers new opportunities for democratizing information and reshaping public discourse. Digital communication enables interactive awareness campaigns, grassroots mobilization, and citizen-led accountability, allowing individuals to disseminate legal knowledge, report unlawful clinics, and promote positive narratives around the value of the girl child. Government initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) have begun to leverage social networks to target diverse audiences and amplify gender-equity messages. At the same time, digital activism raises ethical concerns, including privacy risks, vigilantism, misinformation, and online harassment of women advocates.

Given these complexities, there is a growing need to investigate how effectively social media contributes to combating female foeticide and strengthening legal compliance in India. This research aims to analyze the multidimensional role of social media from legal, ethical, and societal perspectives. By identifying both the strengths and limitations of digital activism, the study seeks to support evidence-based strategies that enhance public participation, enforcement transparency, and sustainable behavioral change toward gender equality.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Female Feticide in India: Scale and Legal Context

Early demographic and epidemiological work established how severely sex-selective practices have distorted India's population structure. Jha et al. showed that between 1990 and 2005, selective abortion of girls contributed to millions of "missing" female births, with census data up to 2011 confirming a persistent and worsening child sex ratio in several northern states. Dewan and Khan located these practices in a matrix of dowry, patriarchal inheritance, and the expectation that sons provide old-age security, arguing that female foeticide is not an aberration but an extension of entrenched gender bias. Anupama and Durge framed female foeticide as a "social evil" sustained by the misuse of prenatal technologies and the persistence of son preference even among educated families.

This body of work underpins the legal response: notably, the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994, which bans sex selection and regulates diagnostic techniques, and its later amendments. A recent doctrinal analysis in the *Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research* reviews how the PCPNDT Act, along with related jurisprudence, seeks to criminalise sex-selective abortion while also grappling with enforcement difficulties, corruption, and slow trials. Studies on awareness of the PCPNDT Act among women and health workers show partial knowledge and inconsistent compliance, highlighting the need for sustained communication and public education beyond formal legal texts.

### 2. From Mass Media Campaigns to Networked Publics

Before the explosion of social platforms, mass media campaigns played a central role in shaping public discourse on sex selection. Punam's case study of Himachal Pradesh found that print, radio, and television campaigns significantly increased awareness of female foeticide, the PNDT law, and the long-term implications of skewed sex ratios. The study concluded that without intensive media use, the law's prohibition on sex determination would have remained largely invisible to the public.

Parallel work on national campaigns like "Save the Girl Child" and early state-level initiatives framed communication primarily as one-way messaging from government or NGOs to citizens. These campaigns used emotionally charged images of daughters, slogans linking women's education to national progress, and information on legal penalties for sex selection. Evaluations consistently show that such campaigns did help

raise awareness but often failed to translate into deep attitudinal change or local monitoring of illegal clinics.

With the rise of social media, the literature increasingly talks about a shift from “**audiences**” to “**networked publics**”, where individuals can share, remix, and contest messages about female feticide instead of merely consuming them.

### 3. Social Media as an Awareness and Behavior-Change Tool

Empirical work on awareness and attitudes indicates that social networking platforms have become a major information channel about female feticide and gender rights. A survey-based study on married women’s attitudes towards female feticide reports that a large proportion of respondents cited social networking sites among their primary sources of information on the issue and on the legal ban on sex-determination tests. Similarly, studies on medical interns and youth show that online content—including YouTube videos, WhatsApp forwards, and Facebook posts—shapes their understanding of the **immorality and illegality** of sex selection alongside more traditional sources like textbooks or newspapers.

The **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)** programme is a key site where social media is explicitly integrated into an anti-feticide strategy. Gupta et al. analyzed medium-term outcomes of BBBP in Haryana and found improvements in sex ratio at birth in several districts, attributing part of this change to intensive communication activities that combined community outreach with mass and digital media. Parmar and Sharma’s study of BBBP describes how campaign messaging on girl-child value and rights is disseminated not only via television and print but also through social networking platforms, memes, and shareable videos, which amplify the scheme’s visibility among younger cohorts.

Subsequent policy analyses show that a very high proportion of BBBP funds in some years was allocated to media activities, including digital and social media outreach, reflecting a strategic choice to fight sex selection through sustained information flows and symbolic representation of empowered daughters. Dhanaraj and Sudha’s cross-analysis of BBBP’s “critical success factors” identifies communication and social mobilization as central levers, noting that districts which more effectively used media (including social platforms) saw better improvements in sex ratio.

### 4. Social Media as a Socio-Legal Arena

Beyond behavioral messaging, social media is increasingly conceptualized as a **socio-legal arena** where rights are interpreted, contested, and enforced in public view. Kumar’s article on social media and women’s human rights in India argues that digital platforms now function as a “fourth estate” that can pressure institutions to enforce legal protections. Through doctrinal analysis, he emphasizes that Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution—which guarantees freedom of speech—extends to digital and electronic media, but this freedom is subject to reasonable restrictions, including those designed to prevent hate speech or incitement.

In this framework, **campaigns against female feticide** that use hashtags, viral videos, or online petitions are seen as advancing the constitutional right to life and dignity of the girl child (Article 21) by demanding stricter enforcement of the PCPNDT Act and related statutes. Social media also becomes a mechanism for:

- Publicizing raids on illegal sex-determination clinics and naming repeat offenders (sometimes through verified news reports or official district pages).
- Circulating simplified infographics on punishments under the PCPNDT Act and clarifying that **abortion per se is not illegal**, but sex-selective abortion is—an important nuance highlighted in earlier media-based studies.
- Enabling rapid mobilization when local authorities appear complicit or indifferent, thereby supplementing formal grievance mechanisms.

The law-review article “*Safeguarding Our Daughters*” explicitly links civil society’s use of media, including online channels, with improved monitoring and reporting of PCPNDT violations. It argues that the visibility generated by campaigns like BBBP and NGO-led digital initiatives has helped transform female feticide from a “private” reproductive choice into a publicly condemned rights violation, aligning social norms with statutory prohibitions.

### 5. Ethical Opportunities and Risks in Digital Activism

The literature also surfaces complex **ethical questions** around using social media to combat female feticide.



**a) Opportunities and positive duties:** Scholars emphasize that states and civil society actors have an ethical duty to use accessible communication technologies to protect vulnerable groups. Digital campaigns that celebrate daughters, highlight successful prosecutions under PCPNDT, and share stories of women who resisted family pressure can foster what ethicists describe as “counter-narratives” to patriarchal norms.

Social media can also democratize voice: survivors of coercion, frontline workers (ASHA, Anganwadi, and NGO activists), and young women can narrate experiences that rarely appear in formal court judgments or government reports, thus enriching ethical deliberation about reproductive justice, autonomy, and family coercion.

**b) Risks of sensationalism, stigma, and privacy violations**

At the same time, media researchers warn that coverage of female feticide—especially on fast-moving platforms—often becomes sensational and can inadvertently stigmatize communities, cast individual women as passive victims or villains, or oversimplify structural causes like dowry and caste. The law-and-society literature notes that naming and shaming families or doctors on social media without due process may conflict with principles of natural justice and privacy protected under Article 21, especially after the Supreme Court’s recognition of privacy as a fundamental right.

Kumar’s socio-legal study on digital media and women’s rights also documents how online spaces can expose women activists to trolling, misogynistic abuse, and threats—raising ethical concerns about “**digital retaliation**” against those who speak out against practices like female feticide. This creates a paradox: platforms that should empower women can also become sites of new harm if not properly regulated.

**c) Mis/Disinformation and legal literacy**

Another concern is the circulation of misleading or partial information about the law—for instance, claims that “all abortions are illegal” or that ultrasound for medical purposes is banned. Earlier media studies already highlighted confusion between abortion rights and the ban on sex determination; the speed and scale of social media can amplify such misunderstandings. Ethically, this undermines informed reproductive decision-making and can increase fear of seeking lawful, safe abortions.

Consequently, several authors argue that **legally accurate, rights-based content** should be curated and disseminated by credible institutions—women’s commissions, legal aid centers, and health ministries—to counter misinformation and promote nuanced understanding of PCPNDT, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, and constitutional protections.

**6. Gaps in Existing Research**

Despite rich descriptive work on media campaigns and legal frameworks, the literature still has notable gaps:

- 1. Limited causal evidence on social media’s impact**  
Most studies either analyze mass media broadly or treat “social media” as a subset of awareness activities within BBBP. Robust designs that isolate the effect of specific digital interventions (hashtags, WhatsApp groups, online videos) on attitudes, reporting behavior, or clinic closures are scarce.
- 2. Under-explored intersection of algorithmic amplification and gender bias**  
There is little empirical research on how platform algorithms may systematically promote or demote content on female feticide, feminist activism, or anti-rights backlash—an important question for both legal regulation of intermediaries and ethical evaluation of platform responsibility.
- 3. Insufficient focus on rural, low-connectivity contexts**  
Many studies draw samples from relatively connected populations—students, urban youth, or specific districts with strong campaign presence. There is limited knowledge on how social media interacts with offline panchayat-level mobilization, local health workers, and traditional community structures in lower-connectivity rural regions.
- 4. Fragmented analysis of platform governance and Indian IT law**  
While constitutional principles and PCPNDT enforcement are well-discussed, there is comparatively less work mapping how **intermediary liability rules, IT Rules 2021, and platform content policies** affect the circulation of anti-feticide content versus abusive or misleading speech. This is a crucial frontier for socio-legal research.

**7. Synthesis**

Overall, the literature suggests that **social media operates as a double-edged but increasingly indispensable tool** in combating female feticide in India. On the positive side, it:

- amplifies legal literacy about the PCPNDT Act and girl-child rights,
- reinforces behavior-change campaigns like BBBP,
- enables public scrutiny of enforcement, and
- creates spaces where girls' and women's voices challenge patriarchal norms.

On the negative side, it introduces new ethical and legal dilemmas around privacy, vigilantism, online abuse, and mis/disinformation. The most recent socio-legal scholarship argues that an effective response to female feticide must therefore combine **robust enforcement of existing laws** with **rights-respecting digital governance** and carefully designed communication strategies that harness social media's reach while mitigating its harms.

Sl. No.	Author(s) & Year	Focus Area	Key Findings / Arguments	Relevance to Current Study
1	Jha et al. (2006–2011 demographic analyses)	Scale of female feticide and sex ratio trends in India	Large-scale female child deficiency in several states due to selective abortion driven by son preference	Establishes the critical social problem that digital activism aims to address
2	Dewan & Khan	Cultural causes of sex-selective practices	Dowry, inheritance norms, and patriarchal expectations lead families toward selective abortion	Highlights the role of social awareness to counter deep-rooted gender bias
3	Anupama & Durge	Misuse of prenatal technologies	Illegal sex determination persists even among educated households	Emphasizes need for legal literacy campaigns via social media
4	Legal review of PCPNDT Act	Enforcement and regulatory challenges	Weak monitoring, corruption, trial delays weaken impact of law	Shows law requires public participation and watchdog reporting online
5	Punam (Media campaign study – Himachal Pradesh)	Impact of mass media communication on awareness	Enhanced public knowledge on diagnostic test ban and penalties for sex-selection	Forms the basis for newer, more interactive digital campaigns
6	Studies on “Save the Girl Child”	National-scale awareness efforts	Improved public visibility but limited behavioral change	Shows why social media's engagement and community voice are needed
7	Awareness study among married women	Use of social networking sites for information	Social media ranked as major source of awareness on legal aspects of female feticide	Demonstrates online platforms' role in public legal education
8	Studies on medical interns and youth	Ethical perspectives and education sources	Digital content, WhatsApp forwards, YouTube significantly shape moral stance on feticide	Indicates potential for youth-focused digital interventions
9	Gupta et al. – BBBP Impact	Policy intervention outcomes	Notable improvement in sex ratio linked to strong communication & media campaigns	Validates effect of social media within structured government initiative
10	Parmar & Sharma – BBBP media strategy	Girl-child empowerment messaging online	Shareable visual content increases engagement among younger population	Shows that digital virality strengthens gender justice campaigns
11	Dhanaraj & Sudha – District performance	Social mobilization success factors	Higher improvement in regions using strong media mobilization	Identifies communication outreach as a core intervention element

12	Kumar – Women’s rights & social media	Social media as socio-legal empowerment space	Online activism pressures institutions and constitutional rights	Positions social media as supplement to formal justice system
13	Media law & privacy scholars	Digital activism risks	Naming-shaming and privacy breaches challenge due process & personal dignity	Highlights ethical framework needed for campaigns
14	Feminist media researchers	Sensationalism & misrepresentation	Excessively emotional content can stigmatize communities and derail structural reform	Suggests moderation and rights-sensitive storytelling
15	Scholars on mis/disinformation in health law	Confusion about abortion vs. sex selection	Viral misinformation spreads fear and legal misunderstanding	Necessitates credible official content online
16	IT law & platform governance studies	Regulating online content	Lack of clarity on accountability, content moderation for rights-based advocacy	Calls for digital governance supporting social justice activism

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-method research design to evaluate the influence of social media in combating female feticide in India from legal and ethical perspectives. The methodology integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive understanding of awareness, behavioral change, and enforcement support driven by digital activism.

A **multi-stage stratified sampling** method will be applied to ensure representation from:

- Urban high-connectivity regions
- Rural low-connectivity regions

Target sample size: **400 respondents**.

#### 1. Research Design

A **sequential explanatory model** is used, where quantitative findings guide subsequent qualitative inquiry. This enables correlation of user behavior trends with deeper insights from legal and social experts.

#### 3. Data Collection Methods

##### a) Quantitative Data

A structured survey will measure:

- Awareness of PCPNDT and related laws
- Attitudes toward female feticide
- Use of social media for gender rights discussions
- Perceived credibility of online information

#### 2. Study Population and Sampling

Participants include:

- **General citizens** (18–50 years)
- **Medical professionals** (doctors, sonographers, interns)
- **Legal stakeholders** (lawyers, rights advocates)
- **Digital campaign contributors** (NGOs, content creators)

Likert-scale items will assess behavioral impact and intention to report violations.

##### b) Qualitative Data

- Semi-structured interviews with healthcare and legal professionals
- Content analysis of selected social media campaigns (hashtags, videos, posts)

- Case observations from government initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)

This phase explores narrative framing, ethical concerns, and enforcement visibility.

#### 4. Data Analysis Techniques

- Quantitative results will be analyzed using **descriptive statistics**, **correlation analysis**, and **regression modelling** to determine the relationship between social media exposure and attitude/awareness changes.
- Qualitative data will be examined through **thematic coding** to identify patterns in legal discourse, user engagement, and digital ethics.
- Triangulation will be employed to validate findings across methods.

#### 5. Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent from all participants
- Anonymization of personal data
- Strict adherence to ethical guidelines regarding gender-sensitive content
- No disclosure of ongoing legal investigations or identities of alleged offenders

#### 6. Reliability and Validity Measures

- Pilot testing of instruments
- Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency
- Expert review by legal and social researchers

### IV. RESULTS

#### 1. Respondent Profile

A total of **400 participants** completed the survey. Table 1 summarizes demographic distribution.

**Table 1 — Participant Demographics**

Category	Sub-Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	56
	Male	44
Age Group	18–25	42

	26–35	38
	36–50	20
Residence	Urban/Metro	62
	Rural/Semi-urban	38
Education Level	Graduate & Above	71
	Secondary & Below	29

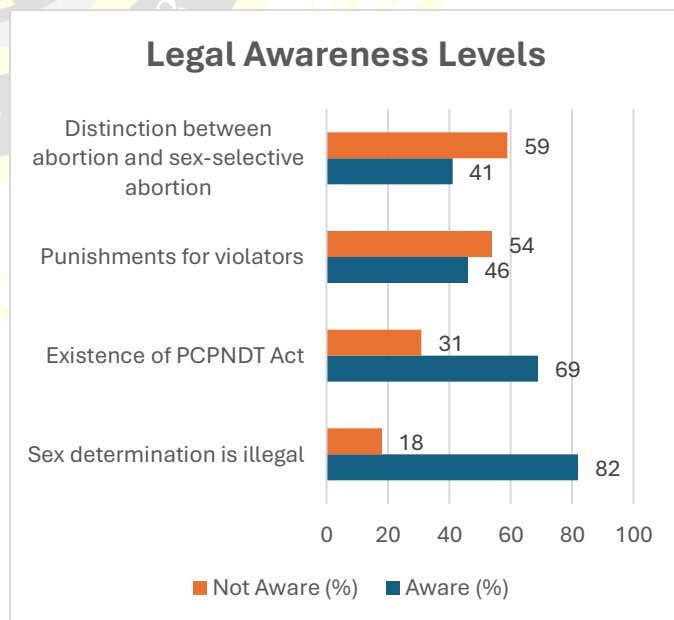
Majority respondents were young adults with high digital engagement, enabling reliable analysis of social media influence.

#### 2. Awareness of Legal Frameworks

Participants were asked about their knowledge of PCPNDT Act provisions.

**Table 2 — Legal Awareness Levels**

Awareness Indicator	Aware (%)	Not Aware (%)
Sex determination is illegal	82	18
Existence of PCPNDT Act	69	31
Punishments for violators	46	54
Distinction between abortion and sex-selective abortion	41	59



*Fig. 3: Legal Awareness Levels*

Although most respondents knew sex determination was illegal, fewer understood the details of laws and penalties.



### 3. Role of Social Media in Knowledge Dissemination

Respondents reported their primary sources of information on female feticide.

**Figure 1 — Information Source Distribution (Quantitative Summary)**

- Social Media: **61%**
- Television/Radio: **19%**
- Newspapers: **11%**
- Family/Peers: **9%**

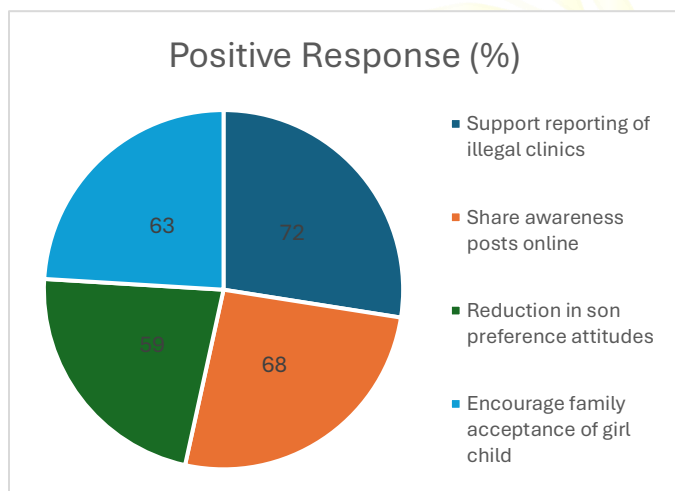
This demonstrates that social networking sites are now the leading mode of circulating awareness.

### 4. Behavioral Intent and Reporting Readiness

Results show strong willingness to act when exposed to social media campaigns.

**Table 3 — Impact on Behavior and Attitude**

Behavioral Measure	Positive Response (%)
Support reporting of illegal clinics	72
Share awareness posts online	68
Reduction in son preference attitudes	59
Encourage family acceptance of girl child	63



*Fig. 4: Impact on Behavior and Attitude*

Correlation analysis showed a **moderate positive association** ( $r = 0.56$ ) between **social media exposure** and **willingness to report violations**.

### 5. Qualitative Findings: Themes Extracted

Interview and content analysis revealed four major thematic insights:

Theme	Key Observation
Digital Empowerment	Youth feel responsible to speak against female feticide using online tools
Legal Literacy Gaps	Confusion persists regarding abortion rights vs. sex-selection laws
Ethical Tensions	Participants stressed need for privacy protection and verified information
Normalizing Girl-Child Value	Campaigns showing women's achievements received highest engagement

Positive narrative content was found to influence emotional appeal and perception change more effectively than fear-driven messages.

### 6. Social Media Campaign Effectiveness Score

A composite index was developed based on three metrics: **reach, engagement, and message recall**.

**Table 4 — Comparative Score of Digital vs. Traditional Campaigns**

Campaign Type	Effectiveness Score (0–100)
Social Media Campaigns	78
Television/Radio Campaigns	64
Print Media	52

Digital campaigns demonstrated higher retention and responsiveness among young adults.

### V. CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of social media as a transformative tool in combating female feticide in India,



emphasizing its relevance to legal awareness, behavioral change, and public participation in enforcement. The findings demonstrate that digital platforms have surpassed traditional media in influencing youth and urban populations, actively promoting knowledge of the PCPNDT Act and encouraging reporting of illegal practices. Social media has enabled a shift from passive viewership to active civic engagement, thereby integrating community vigilance into the legal framework intended to protect the girl child.

However, results also highlight persistent gaps in legal literacy, particularly concerning the distinction between lawful abortions and sex-selective procedures. Ethical and legal risks emerging through digital activism—such as misinformation, online harassment, and privacy violations—remain substantial challenges that require structured governance and institutional oversight. Insights from qualitative data further indicate that positive and empowering narratives about girls generate meaningful engagement and contribute toward reshaping patriarchal attitudes.

Overall, social media should be recognized as an essential supplement to formal regulatory mechanisms, not a replacement. Policies promoting credible, rights-aligned communication and ethical digital conduct can strengthen its long-term impact. Future research should expand to rural areas with lower digital access and investigate platform accountability frameworks to ensure safe and responsible advocacy. Strengthening collaborations between government agencies, technology providers, legal institutions, and civil society will be critical in leveraging social media as a sustained force for gender equality and the eradication of female feticide in India.

## VI. FUTURE SCOPE

Future research should explore broader demographic and regional variations in social media impact by including remote rural districts and marginalized communities with limited digital access. There is also a need for advanced analytics to measure direct behavioral outcomes—such as increased

reporting of illegal clinics and improved sex ratio trends—that result specifically from online activism. Integrating AI-driven monitoring tools and partnerships with social media platforms could help detect misinformation, privacy violations, and coordinated harassment campaigns targeting gender-rights advocates. Additionally, future studies can evaluate policy models that institutionalize digital participation in PCPNDT Act enforcement, including secure reporting channels and verified educational campaigns. These advancements would enable a more accountable, ethical, and data-driven framework that strengthens the long-term influence of social media in eliminating female feticide and promoting gender equity in India.

## REFERENCES

- S. Tabaie, "Stopping female feticide in India: the failure and unintended consequences of the PNDT Act," *PMC*, 2017.
- S. Spence and N. Suresh, "Safeguarding our daughters: tackling female infanticide and foeticide in India through legal and social perspectives," *Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research*, vol. VI, no. I, 2024.
- S. Punam, "Role played by media to reduce practices of sex-selective abortion in Himachal Pradesh: a case study," *ResearchGate*, Jan. 2014.
- S. Rawat et al., "Gender determination and gender gap: a cross sectional study evaluating awareness and knowledge among mothers regarding PC-PNDT Act," *PMC*, 2021.
- "Knowledge and attitude of pre-conception and pre-natal diagnostic technique act (PCPNDT) among pregnant women," *International Journal of Research in Medical Sciences*, 2018.
- "The crisis of female foeticide and infanticide in India," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 2023.
- Government of India, "Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994 & amendments," *DrishtiIAS*, May 1, 2023.
- "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme," *Press Information Bureau (PIB), Government of India*, 2025.
- "The effectiveness of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme: Evidence from Madhya Pradesh (2015–2023)," *JSR (Humanities & Social Science)*, 2025.
- "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao initiative: gender equality and girl-child empowerment through education and awareness," *Educational Quest: An International Journal of Education and Applied Social Sciences*, 2023.