Leadership Excellence and Gender in Organizations

Social media, gender inequality and the workplace

Valerie Stead

Carole Elliott

Belinda Blevins-Knabe

Emily Chan

Kathy S. Grove
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, ksgrove@iupui.edu

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Valerie Stead, Carole Elliott, Belinda Blevins-Knabe, Emily Chan, Kathy S. Grove, Maylon Hanold, and Amy E. Smith

The media is recognized as a powerful tool in aiding career advancement for women by challenging traditional preconceptions of women as leaders. The media is also acknowledged as maintaining gendered assumptions about how we view women in organizational, management and occupational environments. However, in spite of the media's central role in reflecting and shaping contemporary social power relations, there is limited theoretical and empirical research that examines social media generated campaigns that address gender inequality in the workplace and their effects.

This article draws on high profile cases that have emerged in the U.K. and the U.S. in which professional women have turned to social media in response to either individual or collective experiences of gender discrimination. Examining the strategies used in these cases to unveil gender inequality and their effects at micro, meso and macro levels, we illuminate the complex dynamics of utilizing social media to generate gender equality campaigns. Our analysis offers two contributions. First, it reveals a push pull relationship between social media and gender inequality in the workplace, with a push towards social change yet equally a pull towards reinforcement of traditional gendered values. Second, we contribute to concepts of 'distributed discourse' (Greene et al, 2003) and "accelerated pluralism" (Bimber, 1998) in relation to gender inequality campaigns, and how gendered power relations combine to influence their operation and impact.