

VOLUME 1 | ISSUE 1 2020

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED LEGAL RESEARCH

Debunking Taboos in India- Pritika Negi¹**An Analysis of the Fourth Wave Feminist Movement****Abstract**

Women empowerment and liberation movements and relative studies are expanding and generating an essential theoretical debate in the discipline of feminism studies. The aim of the article is to contribute to the debate through a critical analysis of the events occurred so far, through which the concept of liberation and empowerment has been introduced, interpreted and acted upon. The study widens the scope of understanding the concept that how social taboos in countries like India subjugated the notion of women's freedom. The article attempts to focus on the concept of aversion of women's suppression but for ages living in the same society without attempting to bring a change, however still being governed by the social taboos in various forms. Also, how the much debated fourth wave of feminism with its new concept has assisted women to ameliorate.

Key Words: social taboo, liberation, empowerment, freedom, feminism

Background

Since time everlasting, women have been underestimated and denied of fundamental rights. The excursion of woman's rights set into movement in 1840 with the interest for 'option to cast a ballot' and procure citizenship rights. By focusing on various issues having the same

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foundational thought of opportunity, liberty, empowerment, freedom, strengthening and uniformity, the rushes of women's liberation i.e., the waves of feminism appeared. Over time, the wave representation turned into an approach to portray and recognize various periods and ages of women's liberation. It tends to be reductive and can recommend that each flood of women's liberation is a stone monument with a solitary bound together plan, or could propose that there is solid congruity between the waves. Feminism is fighting on many fronts. The first wave of feminism struggled for equal rights, citizenship rights and right to vote. The second wave focused more on the issue concerning suggestions and idea of female, i.e., what women think or do must be favoured over the way they dress or the way they look.

Fourth wave of feminism: How people did well out of it

Fourth wave feminism, a heterogenous movement is an online activism. It is an activism with a new platform, where when a post goes viral, it spreads, it starts conversations, it changes minds. It makes people angry; it makes people laugh. It makes people think. It reaches people and then it inspires change. Laws have been created and changed because of online activism. Fourth wave feminism is not merely about female but about those who believe in a world that is equitable, tolerant, just and safe for all, one in which the human rights and dignity of each person is protected. It divulges the more extensive discussion on "intersectionality"—the possibility that various gatherings of ladies interconnected through social media experience persecution in various manners. Incorporate the analysis that women's liberation has regularly been commanded by the worries of the advantaged.

A chorus rose against online misogyny when Criado-Perez highlighted the string of rape threats sent to her on Twitter. Subsequently writer Lindy West published the comments she received, and the academic and broadcaster Mary Beard, and Ruby Tandoh from the Great British Bake off, all spoke out on his issue. Slowly and gradually women started speaking up for one another and therefore, even persistent attempts to suppress women, either by sharing mean comments or by threatening them failed and these bald attempts to silence women only made the movement larger and louder.. The quality of discussion on the scope of the contemporary feminism just serves to underline how alive and important the feminist movements are. The internet has both broadened and ruptured the concept of liberation through online feminism, and this contemporary feminism has both pros and cons.

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Undoubtedly, it has liberated women, given them separate identity and helped them to make themselves heard. Fourth-wave activism is not necessarily to take place on the internet. Sometimes it takes place on the streets, but it's conceived and propagated online.

Rape, sexual assault, domestic violence and numerous other issues became the fundamental cause to start with a new movement for liberation and empowerment of women. Then started a movement, #MeToo which was considered to commence the culture of hashtags, and became a symbol of movements. The movement starts with Harvey Weinstein case where Harvey Weinstein being on his influential position committed criminal sexual acts including rape. More than eighty women had filed complaint against him regarding his inappropriate behaviour over a period of 30 years of his career. In compliance to this episode, many other women came forward to share their stories, which led to ousting of those guilty from their positions. It also encouraged a great number of women to share their own experiences of sexual assault, harassment, or rape on social media under the hashtag #MeToo, also known as #woyeshi in China. Social media gave these #MeToo survivors a platform to share their stories, connect to people across the globe who suffered the same sitch and then collectively fight for the wrong done to them. Internet helped create safe space, gender equality, human rights and women's health, support survivors and encourage them to speak up, take action to oust their abusers and ultimately be an advocate for their rights. This movement gave justice to many women who couldn't have spoken earlier, but to some, especially belonging to marginalised areas it was the worst nightmare. It alleged some women of having shady character, and thus, their fight for their rights ended that very moment. But if we talk about the discerning class, these movements have not only brought awareness, but also brought people to book, who simply brag about raping women.

#MeToo was followed by several other text messages, WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter hashtags. #NotOkay, #YesAllWomen, broke the internet, and was a social media campaign in which users share stories of misogyny, harassment and violence against women. It mirrors a grassroot battle in which women shared their own anecdotes about harassment and discrimination. The campaign endeavoured to bring light to issues of sexism that ladies experience regularly from individuals they know, and interest for change in the public arena. The movements emerged was against the states which believed hierarchy and inequality to be inevitable and led violence against Dalit and Muslim communities. By bringing the

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discourse of freedom, sexuality, choice and desire into the public realm, in the streets and spread through social media, this agitation forced the government to expand its legal definition of rape. Also, it urged the government to introduce harsher punishment for rapists and criminalise stalking and voyeurism. It's high time for each and every individual across the globe to understand that women has all the rights over their body and even their movement. So instead of limiting freedom of women, men's demeanour and gender distinctions made by the society need to be modified. It needs to be understood that rapists are the cause of rape and not women's conduct or clothes.

In *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*² the court stated that. "commercial enterprise can site religious belief as a reason to withhold contraception coverage from their employees." Hundreds of thousands of tweets including #HobbyLobby and the familiar #NotMyBossBusiness, expressed indignation at the logic applied by the court in the case mentioned and shared their story of how refusal to provide insurance coverage for these services will cause serious financial hardship.

The fourth wave of feminism with its "hashtag activism" has contributed in building bonds among women, creating camaraderie and strengthening their awareness, their fundamental and social rights. Result of these feminist movements can be seen in the recent judgement of the Supreme Court, where the court stated that sexual harassment at workplace is an affront to women's fundamental rights. Online social networks allowed women and girls to surf across world, cultural, class and religious boundaries and recognize common conditions, problems and feelings. Social media provides a platform for discussion and a path for campaigning that encourages a call out culture against misogyny and sexism. These online networks create an unavoidable intersectionality of perspectives which not only deals with different local articulations of the waves of populism but also deals with governance based on nationalism, xenophobia and sexism. Where on one hand this wave of feminism has helped different sexes especially women to speak up and get their culprit punished, on the other hand, it has not only defamed or maligned the victim but also curtailed their self-confidence. In certain countries like India, the wave is suppressed by several social taboos. These societal norms try to hold women back and doesn't allow them to rise. Only a quarter of these women

²573 U.S. 682 (2014)

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have access to internet, and only 50% of this quarter has the courage to stand up uproarious and help empower every single woman.

How feminism has failed with social constraints in India

“Women are to be seen, not to be heard”, An incessantly used phrase by conservative Indians, not only shows their sick psyche but also show how the society has been developed over the years. Making a solid base of women repression and altered ideas of femininity, a patriarchal structure of the Indian society was formed. Biological differences became the base of discrimination and sociological reasoning became the tool to distinguish between good and bad, and define roles with respect to the sex. This led to formation of a new concept- Gender.

In India sexual violence was noted most against marginal women, such as rape of Dalit Tribes, or Muslim women, women from poor family, or those living in the country's military zones such as Kashmir or the North East. The 2012 Fatal gang rape of a 23-year-old student in Delhi became a tripping point. An extraordinary number of millennial youths propelled a rally looking for women's freedom and battled that women ought to have outright rights over their bodies, their decision of garments and their movement in the open spaces at any hour. They challenged old fashioned social convictions that women welcome sexual savagery through their garments and conduct. The country on facing resultant rise of sexual violence in the society, rather than addressing and fighting the root cause of misogyny and sexism or ensuring women's safety in public and private places, the state and society responded by being patronising and policing young women's behaviour. Their answer to these demands and rising problems was to ensure women's safety by restricting and confining their movements. The response of definite Indians towards such episodes is not to penalize rapist but to curse women for their conduct, which invites men to rape them, because this is the natural and men cannot control their actions. Also, marital rape is not regarded as rape here.

The concept of online activism helped many, but on the other hand it became dangerous for the majority. While many women gained awareness of how sexism permeated their lives, they did not become radicalized and were uninterested in overthrowing societal norms. Though they made changes in their personal lives, but did not take any action on issues at

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macro level. They centre around featuring issues, however overlooked the base of such issues. These online battles spoke to an uplifted degree of disappointment among the adolescent in a nation where, in spite of quite a few years of women's activist activism, the profound established issue of sex imbalance and sexual brutality endures.

Despite seventy years of the movement, women being provided the rights of laws framed to protect women and empower them, yet the dream of women liberation and empowerment is a big question. Around sixty girls in a hostel in Gujarat, Kutch, which is a part of Shree Sahajanand Girls Institute, run by a trust of the Swaminarayan temple were allegedly asked to remove their undergarments to prove that they were not menstruating, after complaints that girls having periods have entered the temple and the kitchen in the premises. The outrageous act was allegedly conducted by the orthodox and ardent followers of Swami Krushnaswarup Das, who in his teaching said, “a menstruating woman who cooks food for her husband will certainly be born as a bitch.” In response people flood internet with happy ‘kutris’ picture, mocking the swami’s statement by writing how women in this life as a bitch after feeding their husbands during menstruation in their earlier life are enjoying their life sleeping and playing while others cook for her. A police team was sent under a woman inspector to talk to the girls, but the ladies were not ready to come forward³. Then how have these movements aided in liberating and empowering women when they are still afraid to share their story. People speak for them through this platform of contemporary feminism, but until its access is given to all, it won’t have an impact on the mass. Women who were earlier locked within the four walls of their home are still there and women who earlier feared men are still petrified. They still cannot speak their minds.

There is a need to acknowledge social norms as problems and address them in a constructive manner. Thus, behavioural change is required in individuals and groups. People still believe that menstruating women are impure and thus should sleep in cowshed. They should neither cook, nor enter the temple as it would be judged as a sinful act. These women are also told to wash their clothes during the night time after everyone is asleep. The psyche behind it is that

³MAHESH LANGA (15 FEBRUARY, 2020) GUJARAT HOSTEL ASKS GIRLS TO PROVE THAT THEY ARE NOT MENSTRUATING. THE HINDU. [HTTPS://WWW.THEHINDU.COM/NEWS/NATIONAL/OTHER-STATES/IN-GUJARAT-HOSTEL-GIRLS-ASKED-TO-REMOVE-THEIR-UNDERWEAR-TO-CHECK-IF-THEY-WERE-MENSTRUATING/ARTICLE30821711.ECE](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/in-gujarat-hostel-girls-asked-to-remove-their-underwear-to-check-if-they-were-menstruating/article30821711.ece)

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certain diseased mind people think that the menstruating fluid can be used for black magic. People consider buying sanitary napkins as a waste of money and thus use simple cloth which causes severe diseases like candidiasis. Many of the girls belonging from such families learn about periods whilst getting their first one, which makes the experience distressing and traumatic. In 2012, despite everything, stuck and obliged by their social taboos, Haji Ali Dargah Trust barred women from stepping inside the inner sanctum of the dargah, where the grave of male Muslim saint was placed. The reason broached was that proximity of women with the grave of male Muslim saint was an intolerant sin as per the Islam. Though in 2016, Bombay High Court lifted ban on women's entry, people still protested against the order given by the court on the ground of cultural beliefs. People forget that it is us who impose these restrictions and then make it a custom, disregarding the fact that someone is being affected by such acts. Another such case was the Sabrimala case where women between 10-50 years of age was prohibited from entering the Sabrimala temple in Kerala, in light of the idea that menstruating women is impure and would thus pollute the temple and the god as well. The ban was lifted by the court. While some women across the country encouraged the judgement by requesting them to lift the restriction from all other temples under the hashtag #RightToPray and #RightToBleed, however on the opposite side an unquestionable number of women were exasperated on this decision of the court because, for them their culture was utmost. Women in certain areas are themselves barriers to their liberation and empowerment. These social taboos are so profoundly established that it left no niche or corner of the Indian society untouched. A petition under #RightToBleed was signed which demanded free sanitary products to all those women who can't afford buying them. But the question is, did the service reach to the niche areas where it was actually required. Are people there even aware of such happening?

India as a developing nation is making immense achievement in various factors. However, there exists notion where women are meant to be felt liable for a natural phenomenon that has occurred, like the feminine cycle. From early childhood they are instructed; how as a woman you must behave and act outside the walls of your home, maintain seated during monthly cycle, to stay away from places and individuals during this period of month. Women in country such as India are primarily since childhood instructed that periods are a symbol of impurity and embarrassment. Though the ongoing voice of feminism through web of social

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networking has put immense efforts to try and connect people, communicate, remove vices of such thinking as flagrant and shouldn't be promoted, the root issue underlying is that the essential needs of various social orders in different countries and communities are different. Where consciousness of embarrassment while purchasing sanitary products is significant, while for another cash affordability to purchase sanitary products is the essential need. A period song launched by the Girliyapa group of Mumbai braces menstruating women. Equality among genders is merely a theoretical concept and has no practical implications in the actual. All this system, such as gender norms, as well as some customary rules are made by society to restrict freedom of individuals, these rules includes to a large extent restrictions and constraint on women. Since beginning of communities there has always existed societal division of labour and conduct between men and women. The latter sex is considered as weak, sensitive, and inferior to the former.

Girl child in certain Indian families is killed even before she is born, as her education is considered as an unhelpful waste to her family. The family's ultimate thoughts on her is the fact that she would be married off to another family in which the family must prepare her Dowry price. Henceforth the girl is seen with less inferior value in such families or societies. Women in certain places still follow the parda system after marriage. Women is not addressed as a human however as an object that can be used the manner society needs. Marriage, a sacred and holy relationship in Hindu culture, is considered to give licence to men in India and other countries for marital rape and domestic violence and afraid of society, women as is customary, speak nothing. Instead of spreading knowledge merely about exploitation at work or at any public place, women need to be well learned about abuse within the four walls of her house. It is seen that men who saw their dads utilizing viciousness against their moms, and men who encountered some type of savagery at home as kids, were altogether more likely to be seen executing barbarity in their grown-up connections. Also, of the 87,000 women who were intentionally killed, more than half were killed by intimate partners or family members⁴. They consider it to be the rule of nature and thus never file a divorce, as they do not want their so-called blessed relationship to end. Purity of a women is classified according to her virginity. Therefore, a divorced woman is

⁴(NOVEMBER, 2019) FACTS AND FIGURES: ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN. UN WOMEN.

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

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considered less pure than a woman who has never been married. All these issues might be due to the backwardness of society but the situation will still prevail because inequality in literacy rate is still witnessed. The overall literacy rate in India is 69.1 per cent. In rural India, the literacy rate among females is 56.8 per cent and among males is 72.3 per cent. In Urban India, 74.8 per cent females are literate and 83.7 per cent males are literate⁵. How has this feminism helped us when it's evident that even the LGBTQIA+ community cannot admit their sexuality openly? How have these movements aided women, if women are still not safe in public places, at isolated roads during the night hours? The gender gap index of India is slipped to 112 rank in 2019, even though from past 70 years of freedom we are fighting for equality. Why is it so that in the current government of India only 2 among 26 cabinet ministers are women? Where lies the equality? Rape cases gradually rose by 2.4% in the subsequent years in India⁶. Ten rape cases in just ten days came out in a small state of India, where when asked about the punishment that the rapists should receive, people argued that it is the fault of the women as she is the one who encourage or persuade the rape culture. India in the recent years had been reported as one of the most dangerous places in the world for women due to the cases of brutal rape and inhumanity portrayed against women. More than 32,500 cases of rape were registered with the police in 2017, about 90 a day, according to the most recent government data. Indian courts disposed of only about 18,300 cases related to rape that year, leaving more than 127,800 cases in 2017⁷.

A current case was where girls in Banaras Hindu University, India shut inside hostels so as to avoid the boy's eve teasing them on the festival of Holi. Women is still not free from the shackles of male dread. Women is still not liberated, nor is she empowered. The flood of online sexism has been maybe the most self-evident, appalling backfire yet, to show that how

⁵ANISHA SINGH (SEPTEMBER 8, 2019) INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY 2019 TODAY; FIGURES ON LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN INDIA. [HTTPS://WWW.NDTV.COM/EDUCATION/INTERNATIONAL-LITERACY-DAY-2019-FIGURES-ON-LANGUAGE-AND-LITERACY-IN-INDIA-2097323](https://www.ndtv.com/education/international-literacy-day-2019-figures-on-language-and-literacy-in-india-2097323)

⁶PARTH SHASTRI (31 JANUARY, 2020) RAPE CASES ROSE BY 16 PER CENT IN GUJARAT, 2.4 PER CENT IN INDIA 2018. TNN. [HTTP://TIMESOFINDIA.INDIATIMES.COM/ARTICLESHOW/73179708.CMS?UTM_SOURCE=CONTENTOFINTEREST&UTM_MEDIUM=TEXT&UTM_CAMPAIGN=CPPST](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/73179708.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

⁷DITI PUJARA, GURMAN BHATIA, KARISHMA SINGH AND RAJU GOPALAKRISHNAN (DECEMBER, 2019) STATISTICS ON RAPE IN INDIA AND SOME WELL-KNOWN CASES. REUTERS. [HTTPS://WWW.REUTERS.COM/ARTICLE/US-INDIA-RAPE-FACTBOX/STATISTICS-ON-RAPE-IN-INDIA-AND-SOME-WELL-KNOWN-CASES-IDUSKBN1YA0UV](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-rape-factbox/statistics-on-rape-in-india-and-some-well-known-cases-idUSKBN1YA0UV)

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some people begrudge the notion of women advancement. India saw 457% rise in cybercrime in five years⁸.

Women still isn't stronger or more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one right. They are still slaves of oppression and require freedom from limits on thought or behaviour. One should not only help empower and liberate themselves, but also try to break those social taboos and open doors of freedom for other women too. Change in attitude of society is required and the definition of rape and sexual assault needs to be reformulated.

Ambiguity floating in online activism

Debbie Stoller, a very renowned feminist writes that the contemporary feminism has no new ideas and is merely using new platform to discuss the old issues. She questions the existence of fourth wave of feminism. The concept of online activism encouraged several, but on the other hand it became dangerous for majority. Another loop hole witnessed in the online feminism was that numerous women increased a familiarity with how sexism pierced their lives, they were yet not concerned or interested in toppling cultural standards. In spite of the fact that they made changes in their own lives, yet their voices and activity had no sway at large scale. They centre around featuring issues, however overlooked the base of such issues. These online battles spoke to an uplifted degree of disappointment among the adolescent in a nation where, in spite of quite a few years of women's activist movement, the profound established issue of sex imbalance and sexual brutality endures. 2013 report from the World Health Organization called barbarity against women a worldwide health issue that is flourishing through web based social networking and ranges from residential maltreatment, stalking, and harassment to molestation, rape, assault, and murder. According to the National Crime Records Bureau's report, released on October, 2019 India saw a 77% increase in the rate of cybercrime. Also, a 6% rise in the number of crimes against women was recorded⁹. The only way to end this cyber bullying, cyber harassment, etc was through appeal to government to bring in certain laws to punish people who try to suppress the speech of

⁸JAIDEEP SHENOY (JANUARY 9,2019) INDIA SAW 457% RISE IN CYBERCRIME IN 5 YEARS. TNN. [HTTP://TIMESOFINDIA.INDIATIMES.COM/ARTICLESHOW/67454587.CMS?UTM_SOURCE=CONTENTOFINTEREST&UTM_MEDIUM=TEXT&UTM_CAMPAIGN=CPPST](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/67454587.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

⁹(OCTOBER, 2019) NCRB REPORT. THE HINDU. [HTTPS://WWW.THEHINDU.COM/NEWS/NATIONAL/WATCH-NCRB-REPORT-DECODED/ARTICLE29805942.ECE](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/watch-ncrb-report-decoded/article29805942.ece)

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women by their derogatory comments. But instead section 66A of the IT Act which defined the punishment for sending “offensive” messages through any online networking would lead to punishment of maximum of three years in jail and a fine, was struck down by the supreme court in the judgement of *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India*¹⁰, where the court held that restricting online speech would be unconstitutional and is not a reasonable restriction on freedom of speech.

Here we stand blethering about body autonomy knowing the fact that at least 200 million women and girls aged 15-49 have undergone female genital mutilation in the 30 countries. In most of these countries, the majority of girls were cut before age five. Which means the act was done without consent. In a multi-country study from the Middle East and North Africa, between 40 and 60 per cent of women said they had ever experienced street-based sexual harassment and 31 per cent to 64 per cent of men said they had ever carried out such acts¹¹. Fourth wave feminism on one hand give platform for women to speak up, but on the other hand tries to suppress their achievements and views by trolling them and sharing mean comments. Certain forms of online harassment include to send a screenshot of someone’s status to laugh at them, troll somebody, share or like something which openly mocks other individual, uploading some private pictures and many other. Senior female politicians are three times more likely to be insulted on Twitter than men because of their gender. Examples include Hillary Clinton and Diane Abbott. If you are a woman and are audacious and stand for something which you feel is correct, you’re more likely to be tweeted abuse. Women are then less inclined to pursue position subsequent to seeing female pioneers experience pessimism in the media. Furthermore, according to a study conducted by the Inter Parliamentary Union eighty-two percent of women reported having encountered some type of mental savagery while serving their terms, which was by methods for online networking. Almost 50% of those studied reported having received death, assault, death threats towards them or their families. A survey by Mastercard and research house incite that women are less inclined to seek STEM profession than men, attributable to elements, for example, the need to upskill continually and handle the male dominant work environment. If society and women themselves still believe in the term “male dominant work environment”, then where does the

¹⁰[1982] 2 S.C.R. 272

¹¹(NOVEMBER, 2019) FACTS AND FIGURES: ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN. UN WOMEN.

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

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development lie? According to the National Violence Against Women Survey, in the United States, one out of every 12 women and one out of every 45 men have been stalked. It was reported by the European Union report that one tenth of the women across the globe have experienced cyber-harassment since the age of fifteen¹².

Another report by Global Digital Population statistics 2020, showed that only 59 percent of the global population has access to internet¹³, which clearly means that the remaining 41 percent cannot be a part of this wave of feminism and speak about the bummer they faced. This is one of the main reasons, that why online feminism didn't have much impact worldwide. While bringing topics of equality, liberty and empowerment, the platform itself created inequality among the elite and the poor class. Therefore, first equal opportunity and equal platform is required, as it will bring change in society and life within the four walls of one's home.

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¹²*Id*

¹³(3 FEBRUARY, 2020) GLOBAL DIGITAL POPULATION AS OF JANUARY 2020. STATISTA. [HTTPS://WWW.STATISTA.COM/STATISTICS/617136/DIGITAL-POPULATION-WORLDWIDE/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/)

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