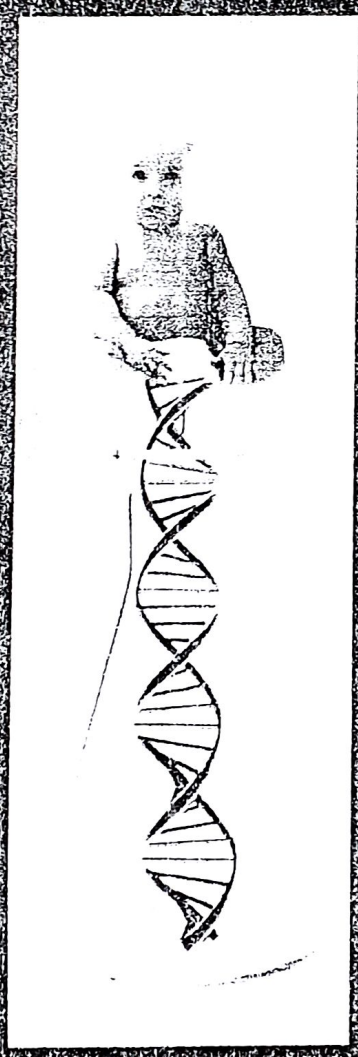


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Research Article

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SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

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Wide spread, less expensive Internet and various multimedia tools have made the access to the tools of violence easier. For example, in today's scenario it is very difficult to get hands on to an Acid bottle compared to a photo morphing software and publishing in the internet. User friendly apps are readily available to create contents like morphed pictures, doctored video, obscene & abusive memes etc. This paper attempts to find out how social media acts as a tool and serves as a platform for violence against women to thrive using Qualitative Observation on various case studies.

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INTRODUCTION

The Union Minister for Women and Child Development tweeting "Are you a woman who is trolled or abused? Inform me...", testifies the gaining significance of Cyber Violence against women. She also introduced #IamTrolledHelp as an emergency call for the women in distress. The Cyber violence against women in India is on the rise and didn't spare even the celebrities, social activists and journalists. Eye-teasing as a motive constituted 20% of the entire cyber crimes recorded by NCRB in its 2013 report. Some studies have highlighted that there is a lack of awareness about the prevailing legal support and also suggest that women hesitate to acknowledge and report cases of cyber violence. In 2013 it was estimated that, globally 450 million new female internet users will get added before 2016. Though this celebrates the gender inclusion in ICT, it does not veil the increasing vulnerability of women to Cyber Violence. Violence against women and the suppression of women's voice in any public forum remains a debatable topic in this new millennium too. India being fancied as the fastest growing economical superpower has failed miserably in the Human Development Indices. As per the 2014- Human Development Index Report published by United Nations Development programme, India ranks 135 out of 147 countries on women empowerment (PTI, 2015). In 2012, a study conducted in New Delhi found that 92 per cent of women reported having experienced some form of sexual violence in public spaces in their lifetime, and 88 per cent of women reported having experienced some form of verbal sexual harassment (including unwelcome comments of a sexual nature, whistling, leering or making obscene gestures) in their lifetime (UN Women, 2013). It was not very surprising when Delhi was rated as one of the most dangerous cities for women to travel in public transport system (Simon, 2014). The physical violence against women like molestation and rape were making headlines recently. The national outrage against the 2012 Nirbhaya Gang rape case, mediated by social media, did very little to bring down the rape incidents across the country. In the year 2015, the national capital recorded an average of 6 rapes and 15 molestations each day (Indian Express, 2015). This just shows the entire country's statistic would be much more humiliating. There is no doubt that the violence against women in India is still unabated.

The political representation of women could be a fair indicator of women's voice in the public forums. In 1985 out of 40 central ministers, 4 were women, which is 10% of them. In 2015 out of 45 central ministers, 8 were women, which is just 18%.

It has taken 30 years for the women to get 8% increase in their representation in the central council of ministers. In the second Lok Sabha elections held in 1957, out of the total contestants fighting for 494 seats, 3% were women. In the fifteenth Lok Sabha elections held in 2009, out of the total contestants fighting for 543 seats, 7% were women (source: Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation). In 52 years and 14 Lok Sabha elections later, women managed to increase their representation as electoral candidates by 4%. This speaks volumes about the patriarchal nature of the Indian communities. The voice of the women is hardly heard and thus the current political body has to face extreme challenges to orient the legislations towards women issues.

The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been marketed as a tool for women empowerment (Arrawatia & Meel, 2012) and it is also been hailed as a platform to bring gender equality in India (Mishra & Kiran, 2015). Before we celebrate it, let us look at how the above discussed issues namely the violence against women and the suppression of their voice gets spilled over to the cyber space. The nomenclature for such violence changes to Cyber-Violence but the impact on women has not differed much.

OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this paper is to identify various social media tools which can be a boon for perpetrators of violence against women. It has analysed recent cyber-violence cases and other secondary data to identify the characteristics of ICT in the context of Cyber-Violence against women and list various digital tools readily available for a prospective harasser. The characteristics are derived from the qualitative observations made from various case studies and other online activities.

Cyber-Violence

The United Nations defines violence against women as "Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." According to the Cyber Violence Gender Report, Violence against women includes forced intimate partner violence and sexual assault, marriage, dowry-related violence, marital rape, sexual harassment, intimidation at work and in educational institutions, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, forced sterilization, trafficking and forced prostitution and gender-related killings. When the Internet is involved in any of the above violence in any form, it becomes a Cyber-Violence. A rape video