Assignment 1

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An analysis of the impact of the #MeToo movement as part of online advocacy for social change in India

Theme – Identity and Online Advocacy

Abstract – This conference paper discusses the impact that the #MeToo movement had on social change and advocacy in India focusing on digital platforms and social media. Although the movement has had a global impact, cultural & regional views, traditional gender roles, and indulgence towards sexual harassment have affected its acceptance and response in India. The movement, which originated as a way of assisting survivors of sexual assault and harassment, garnered worldwide prominence and empowered women to come up with their stories. up with their stories. This paper delves in the significance of online platforms in encouraging women to reach out against sexual harassment and assault and it also addresses the field of higher education in India, where sexual assault is common, and how the #MeToo movement has brought these concerns to light and inspired critical reform. The movement has also enabled feminist narratives to be conveyed more overtly in India and has opposed old social hierarchies using social networking sites. While hashtag activism has not instantly culminated in legislation change, it has created discourse and awareness, and this will be examined in this paper.

Introduction:

Web platforms can serve as vehicles to effect social change in India. The prevalence of social media in India has experienced tremendous growth throughout the twenty-first century, and it has grown into an essential component of everyday life. This has resulted in the formation of communities across numerous sites and platforms on social networks, allowing its users to leverage these networks to advocate causes and interact with other supporters as a form of advocacy. The #MeToo social movement was first founded in 2006 by an activist, Tarana Burke, who sought to stop women's abuse as well as sexual harassment by giving support and connecting survivors to elevate their voices so that they may hold predators liable for their wrong deeds (Murphy, 2019). It has turned into a revolutionary cascade as it provoked a social reckoning by empowering individuals who had suffered from sexual abuse and highlighting gender disparities as well as power relations via the voices millions of women. It only emerged in 2017, when Alyssa Milano, jumped on the 'Me Too' bandwagon and propelled the movement into the forefront when she used her Twitter account to call for women who had experienced sexual assault to affiliate themselves with #MeToo. After her tweet, the hashtag #MeToo was employed 12 million times over the following 24 hours, swiftly propagating over the globe and fostering a participatory culture within the community (Palmer et al., 2021). In India, the movement was first propelled when Raya Sarkar a Indian student who was 24 years old, provided a crowdsourced listing of Indian male scholars that apparently harassed women, via the social media platform; Facebook in October 2017. While Twitter was an important platform for spreading the movement in India, conversations and issues also took place on WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat,

Tiktok, YouTube, Instagram, as well as Weibo. (Dey & Mendes, 2021). Additionally, the prefix India was incorporated to the #MeToo Twitter hashtag in contrast to the American hashtag, tweets were collected on individual Twitter accounts and then pooled under the #MeTooIndia hashtag, which was moderated by journalists and activists (Goel et al., 2018). The use of the hashtag may be seen as an essential component of modern fourth-wave feminism in India, charged with the responsibility to convey the stories and voices of Indian women upon an intersectional scale. (Narayanamoorthy, 2021). This was a watershed moment in the country because, previously, owing to the failings of the Indian judiciary and capitalism, male-dominated, casteist foundations of Indian society, more than 100 victims that faced sexual assault at colleges and universities emerged online, divulging their personal experiences of harassment or assault; alongside, the women were able to advocate for societal change and incriminate predators irrespective of their affluence, fortune, or position of authority.

<u>From global impact to diverse response across different societies and cultures</u>

The #MeToo movement has had a tremendous worldwide influence, but its adoption and response has differed among societies as some nations have indeed been swift to recognise the severity of harassment and sexual assault, but it has taken longer in India due to cultural beliefs, conventional gender roles, and overall tolerance for sexual harassment. Despite the fact that scores of women brought exposure to the magnitude of sexual abuse with #MeToo social media posts, efforts to spark a Me Too movement throughout India in 2017 were nowhere as effective as when the Harvey Weinstein backlash tore in the United States, and it wasn't until October 2018 that Mobashar Jawed Akbar, a former editor from a renowned newspaper, stepped down from his position as a junior foreign affairs minister because 27 women accused him of harassment (Kumar, 2018). For years, Indian women depended on "whisper networks" to exchange details regarding sexual harassment and assault, and the #MeToo movement has permitted these narratives to be discussed more openly and explicitly, challenging the traditional social order via social networking sites. One explanation for this is India's culturally ingrained patriarchal system, that has established a culture of secrecy and stigma concerning sexual harassment and assault. There has been an ongoing lack of legislative and policy reform to tackle these issues, having tons of women who come out about their assaults but are frequently met with criticism, retaliation and victim blaming. In 2018 Tanushree Dutta, an Indian actor, reignited a sexual harassment allegation against Nana Patekar, another Indian actor, on October 4, 2018, she accused Patekar, of attempting to molest her publicly and that he had deployed thugs to intimidate and menace her with grave repercussions when she resisted and by October 7, 2018, almost 1000 tweets with the hashtag #MeTooIndia, #TanushreeDutta, plus #ibelieveyou began trending on Twitter in the country, demonstrating how, despite a year of irregular bursts of activity, India's #MeToo movement had sped up gained concrete action in two of the nation's greatest influential industry sectors: entertainment and the media outlets. (Goel et al., 2018). In the month that it broke out, the movement was successful in identifying and taking effective measures towards powerful figures. This form of "empowerment through empathy" which illustrated how strangers can break down barrier and build communities via affective connections, had a profound feminist reverberance, as women recounted

private accounts of abuse and found favor, validation, and assistance from other women publicly (Pain, 2020).

Addressing Sexual Harassment in India's Higher Education Sector:

The #MeToo movement in India, has been pertinent but it did not emerge spontaneously. Alternatively, it represented the ultimate climax of decades of indignation on Indian colleges and universities and it was India's first large-scale use of social networking sites and electronic media to mobilize behind a feminist agenda (Dey, 2020). Before, The campaigns like #HokKolorob (let there be noise), #WeWillGoOut, or #AintNoCindrella, as well as bigger initiatives like Pinjra Tod (Breaking the cage), utilised internet platforms along with catchy hashtags to raise consciousness and discussions regarding pressing concerns like the rights of women within public areas, creating sexual harassment boards in higher education institutions, and calling for the abolition of curfews for girl's hostels on the universities' premises thus; when Sarkar's list was publicly traded, it soon developed into one of India's largest feminist campaigns in recent memory (Dey & Mendes, 2021). But what originated as an intergenerational debate quickly devolved into one about caste inequalities alongside hierarchies, as Raya Sarkar's list was first received with condemnation by notable feminists and academics in India because she is a Dalit, a member of the "untouchable" caste who have experienced oppression and slaughter, as well as cultural submission and political marginalisation (Pegu, 2019). Following that, another hashtag was generated, #LoSHA which means List of Sexual Harassers in Academia and it was used by students who had experienced traumatic incidents related to sexual assault on the premises of universities and it maintained its focus on marginalised groups in India by targeting various local colleges and universities and denouncing their failures (Narayanamoorthy, 2021). The MeToo platform has been beneficial to minorities as before, they felt that the stuctures of universities were unreachable to them and for many, submitting a police report is preferable than registering a complaint inquiry with Gender Sensitization Committees Against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH) and the Internal Complaints Committees (ICC) at colleges and universities in India (Morais dos Santos Bruss, 2019). Furthermore, many survivors in India have been familiarised with feminist political issues because of the #MeToo movement, delivering an exceptional chance for communities, collectives, and associations to draw in new contributions to the movement and broaden discussions surrounding gender-specific labor, societal reproduction, class inequalities along with the necessity of feminism to remain anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and egalitarian (Dey & Mendes, 2021). As Lokot (2018) observed, even though this type of hashtag activism does not promptly result in law change, online advocacy is still received with caution in some cultures but the collective compendium of feminist narratives conveyed via the hashtag also endorsed a more societal and political view on feminist activism all over the globe regardless of the age and socio-economic backgrounds of the victims and that after those narratives were made public, industries were compelled to implement different and new regulations into places of employment. In the Indian context, there were also multiple internal committees, approved by the University Grants Commission (UGC), that were set up in Indian universities to handle sexual harassment allegations and they were also in charge of examining allegations plus assisting survivors regardless of their

socio-economic backgrounds and it constituted one of the most significant reforms that were implemented in India.

Speaking out and healing

India is often identified as one of the most dangerous countries for women, amongst the concerns listed are the possibility of assault as well as cultural conventions and behaviors that systematically oppress women (Reuters, 2018). In Indian universities the UGC issued a regulation which prevents and prohibits sexual harassment in the university premises, and this legislation required every institution to create an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) comprised of appointed undergraduates to prevent, ban and address Sexual and Gender-Based Violence but it failed to support victims of sexual assault who felt abandoned by the system and survivors disclosed how the administration resolves the concerns in an arrangement that is a favorable to the institution making them feel more depressed instead of feeling supported (Dey & Mendes, 2021). Therefore the #MeToo movement has offered a space to voice out about their stories, to feel heard, supported and encouraged, which may be a crucial component of their recovery, but, for other victims, namely individuals who have not quite had the capacity to properly grieve and recover from their traumas, the movement has also been triggering too (PettyJohn et al., 2021). Prior to the social movement, sexual abuse victims considered themselves guilty as well as responsible for their predicament, and many did not attempt to approach anyone else about their suffering, retaining their repressed grief to themselves; all while dealing with mental health issues but women embraced the anger they felt, built actual support structures, and guaranteed that online efforts garnered support from offline decisions (Narayanamoorthy, 2021). For instance, two students from #Symbiosis Law School, Hyderabad, were compelled to vacate their hostel following their reported incidents of harassment by a university lecturer and numerous tweets requesting attorneys and other legal assistance emerged, and responses varied from providing hotline numbers to offering pro bono assistance showing how there were tangible support systems for survivors in India (Pain, 2020). With the said advancement of the #MeToo movement, victims now feel empowered supported to make a difference in society by shedding a spotlight on how sexual abuse affected them while also helping additional victims feel confident, secure, connected, and conscious of their innocence and that they are not the ones at fault but that is the abusers who are responsible and who should be condemned.

Conclusion

To conclude the #MeToo Movement is an excellent demonstration of the manner in which a social movement may employ social media networks can be vehicles to effect advocacy in India's communication scene as the use of social media platforms as an advocacy tool in confronting the patriarchal structure and societal norms as India is known for its concealment of sexual harassment and rape. Although the movement took awhile to gain traction in India, the movement has brought to light the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault in a number of areas, including Hollywood, Bollywood, and universities. The movement has spurred a much-needed dialogue around

sexual assault and continues to be an agent for reform, and constitutional as well as policy changes are still required to address the aforementioned issues in India.

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