



Echoes of Oppression: Navigating Misogyny and Online Abuse in Social Media

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ABSTRACT:

Social media platforms are often hailed as revolutionary tools for democratization, granting a voice to millions of individuals globally. These platforms, in theory, enable anyone to express their thoughts and opinions with the potential to reach audiences across continents, breaking down traditional barriers to communication. However, this idealistic vision rarely aligns with the realities experienced by marginalized communities. Instead of levelling the playing field, social media frequently reflects and even amplifies existing inequalities present in the real world. Among those most affected by this disparity are the doubly marginalized women of the Global South. These women face systemic barriers, including limited access to technology, digital literacy challenges, and cultural restrictions, which hinder their ability to engage fully on these platforms. This article uses discourse analysis of social media content, particularly on Twitter/X, to examine how entrenched patriarchal structures continue to oppress women, even those perceived as influential, such as activists and celebrities.

Keywords - Misogyny, Online Abuse, Sexism, Freedom of Speech, Gendertrolling

Introduction

According to Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution, every citizen of India has been granted the right to freedom and expression of speech. The media derives its power to publish and to broadcast from the same. Media is considered as the fourth pillar of democracy and plays a crucial role as a watchdog of the society (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2024). It helps in the formation of public opinion, critiquing government policies and becoming the voice of the voiceless. In the era of the internet and 24x7 TV news, the media do take enough precautions while presenting cases to the public, especially those that are still under trial in court. This leads to superfluous debates, sensationalism of news, and the formation of a prejudiced public opinion which affects the fair trial of the accused. This media trial affects the individual's public image and labels him/her guilty even before the court of law comes to a verdict. Such media trials date back to the 20th century - The Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle case (1921) in which the accused was charged with the murder of Virginia Rappe. It is considered to be the first recorded case of a media trial. Later, Arbuckle was acquitted by the court, however, he lost his social status and his reputation due to the conduct of a parallel trial by the media. Even before the full acquittal of Arbuckle, an important statement had been made by the third jury - "Acquittal is not enough for Roscoe Arbuckle. We feel that a great injustice has been done to him." This statement perspicuously alludes to the horrible outcomes of parallel media trials (Justice and Diversity Center, 2019).

Another notable case is of O.J. Simpson (1995), who was a primary suspect in the brutal murders of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ronald Goldman. The trial, famously dubbed the "Trial of the Century", was extensively broadcasted on cable television and captivated millions of viewers worldwide. This high-profile case exposed deep racial divides in the United States. A significant portion of the African-American community rallied behind O.J. Simpson, expressing their support and belief in his innocence. Conversely, a majority of white Americans were convinced of his guilt. On October 3, 1995, after a highly publicized and sensational trial that lasted for over eight months, O.J. Simpson was acquitted of all charges related to the murders. The verdict shocked the nation and sparked heated debates about race, justice, and the legal system in America. This case remains one of the most controversial and talked-about trials in modern history.

From the cases discussed above, it becomes evident that media has the power to control the perception of the general populace, and it can significantly influence public opinion. The advent of the internet has revolutionized contemporary society, embedding itself as an indispensable facet of daily life. This paradigm shift has consequently elevated social media platforms to a pivotal role within the digital landscape. Individuals now utilize these platforms to disseminate their thoughts, opinions, perspectives, feelings, and understanding on a myriad of subjects.

Recent data on social media usage, published by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), underscores the vast proliferation of these platforms within India. WhatsApp emerges as the frontrunner, boasting over 530 million users. This is closely followed by YouTube, which commands a substantial user base of 448 million. Further down the hierarchy, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have amassed 410 million, 210 million, and 15 million users respectively (Chakravarti, 2021). These users exercise their right to freely express their views on social media without hesitation, as they enjoy the freedom of speech and expression. However, issues arise when these users disseminate fake news, fabricated stories, and altered images to malign the character of an accused person. This problem becomes particularly egregious when they post or endorse degrading and misogynistic content targeting accused women, often without verifying the facts, thereby attempting to sway public opinion and judicial outcomes through parallel narratives formed on social media.

Commenting on “Freedom of the Press in the Digital Age”, Justice A. K. Sikri remarks, “It is becoming very alarming, but we are in the era of paid and fake news because of the digital era. Stories are created...and somebody puts it on any digital mode, and these, in a few hours, become viral. The reach is a billion people.” This user-generated content, replete with language of hatred, bullying, and trolling, is frequently employed to silence women who advocate for their rights (DNA Web Team, 2019; Chauhan, 2019).

The study aims to conduct an in-depth exploration into the linguistic patterns and discourses prevalent on Twitter during social media trials involving accused women whose cases had been sub judice (during the tweets).

The key objectives of the study are:

- To analyse the prevalence of gender-specific abuse in derogatory tweets directed towards women.
- To assess how enfranchisement acts as a double jeopardy against women in Twitter trials.
- To identify and elucidate the recurring themes of misogyny in Twitter trials involving enfranchised women.

This article delves into the intricate interplay between social media platforms and the persistent barriers faced by doubly marginalized women of the Global South, particularly in navigating and participating in digital spaces. Social media, often heralded as a democratizing force, offers individuals a platform to voice their opinions on a global scale. However, as this paper highlights, the digital divide remains deeply entrenched, perpetuating the systemic inequities experienced by marginalized communities. Through a discourse analysis of social media content, specifically on Twitter (now X), the article examines how patriarchal power structures affect women - including those perceived as powerful figures such as social activists and celebrities - reinforcing their exclusion from these ostensibly inclusive digital spaces. By shedding light on these challenges, this research contributes to the growing discourse on gender, digital inequity, and intersectionality, offering both critical insights and an invitation for further scholarly dialogue on the intersection of gender and digital media.

Literature Review

Academic and journalist Timothy Garton Ash asserts that “free speech has never meant unlimited speech - everyone spouting whatever comes into his or her head leads to global logorrhoea” (2016). Nevertheless, many individuals believe that under the banner of free speech, they are entitled to post anything against anyone on social media and engage in trolling behaviour towards other users. This often escalates into hate speech. The conflation of trolling with hate speech is a significant issue, as it obfuscates the true nature of online hostility. Many users tend to overlook or dismiss hate speech online, erroneously labelling instances of racism, sexism, or homophobia as mere “trolling” (Clucas, 2020, p. 49).

Social media platforms serve as public arenas where individuals express their views and opinions on a wide range of issues. Article 19 (1) (a) of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression to all citizens of India, without gender discrimination. However, studies indicate that women who engage in political protests and struggles often face online violence and misogyny, predominantly in the form of text-based content (Barker and Jurasz, 2021, p. 80).

Online abuse is not limited to women in the spotlight; even female politicians, who are perceived as powerful, also encounter such hostility on social media platforms (Dhrodia, 2017; Delisle et al., 2019; Mukherjee et al., 2021).

Misogyny, whether online or offline, is a longstanding societal issue that transcends spatial and temporal boundaries, deeply entrenched in power dynamics and gendered hierarchies. Women often pay a high price for accessing and participating in digital spaces to share their work, thoughts, opinions, and experiences. Aggressors commonly employ three overlapping tactics - threatening, humiliating, and discrediting - to silence women or diminish their influence within online communities (Sobieraj, 2018, p. 1704).

The phenomenon known as “gender trolling” is characterized by the use of gender-based insults, vicious language, and credible threats (such as rape or death threats) by a coordinated group of trolls aimed at humiliating women, particularly those who speak out. This coordinated effort involves multiple trolls who relentlessly attack the victim with gender-based insults, credible threats, or vicious language. The intensity of such online assaults can sometimes exceed a hundred verbal attacks per hour over a certain period (Mantilla 2013; Rubin, 2016; Mendonca et al., 2021).

Based on Pew Research data, the percentage of internet users participating in online chats and discussion groups declined from 28% in 2000 to 17% in 2005, largely due to a reduction in women’s engagement, attributable to unpleasant behaviour in chat rooms (Fallows, 2005). Concurrently, researchers from the University of Maryland conducted an experiment involving a large number of fictitious online identities in chat rooms. Accounts with feminine usernames received an average of 100 sexually explicit or threatening messages daily, whereas accounts with masculine usernames received only 3.7 (Bartlett et al., 2014, p. 3). Furthermore, the final report by the Broadband Commission Working Group on Gender (2015) revealed that 73% of women have encountered or been subjected to some form of online violence. The report also noted that in India, only 35% of women report their victimization, often due to fear of societal reactions and consequences.

The report by Amnesty International states that a variety of reasons can be attributed to women being targeted with violence and abuse on Twitter. Sometimes it is for voicing their opinions about feminist issues. In other instances, it is because of their status as public figures. While online abuse is not limited to women and is extended to all genders, women often experience sexist or misogynistic abuse including dire threats of violence and online sexualisation with explicit reference to female body parts (2018). When women are the target, online harassment quickly descends into sexualized hate or threats. Online gender-based violence is an overt expression of the deeply rooted gender inequalities in our society (Maundu, 2020).

A majority of women had faced trolling when commenting on politics or religion for their posts. One respondent alluded that gender trolling was simply because “women are always easier targets, especially women who talk about gender, feminism and equality, are targeted”. The participants spoke of the type of trolls and threats they were subjected to, ranging from bodily harm to rape to all forms of character assassination. They were also at the receiving end of name-calling and often felt like they were being “publicly lynched”. Sexist remarks and body shaming were also ways the trolls responded ((Pillai & Ghosh, 2022, p. 5).

Based on a comprehensive review of existing literature, two primary conclusions emerge distinctly. Firstly, the prevalence of online violence against women and girls is alarmingly widespread. Secondly, women who are politically active, hold public office, or vocalize their opinions are particularly

susceptible to online harassment. This harassment often manifests in the form of sexism and misogyny, which can include abuse, bullying, trolling, and body shaming.

Framework

Smith et al. (2008) explain cyberbullying as an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend themselves. Cyberbullying, online bullying, and/or electronic bullying are new forms of bullying that involve harassment through the use of technology, including blogs, instant messaging, email, chat rooms, mobile texting and cameras, picture messages (including sexting) on social media sites like Facebook and MySpace (Beale & Hall, 2007; Miller & Hufstедler, 2009). Bullying on the computer gives the aggressor a bigger advantage, this is the reason that it has become more widespread. The bully can torment a victim at home, launch anonymous attacks, and worsen psychological damage with the knowledge that most authorities won't be able to track them down or put an end to their harassment. In contrast, a victim feels more helpless and alone and has emotional consequences that typically linger longer than a black eye (Anderson & Strum, 2007; Notar et al., 2013).

The type of online abuse based on gender is referred to as "gendertrolling" by Mantilla (2013). Her concept of gendertrolling emphasises the institutionalised harassment of women based on their gender, offers a critical framework for comprehending the trends and underlying causes of this kind of online behaviour on social media platforms. She argues that online gendertrolling can take the form of doxing, which is the publication of lengthy, personal information about women online, libelling, which is the posting of slanderous or defamatory information about women, and flaming, which is participating in online debates with women in an attempt to provoke them. She contends that "generic trolling" manifests in various forms, including behaviour that is unpleasant, disturbing, or intentionally harmful. However, she identifies a distinct pattern of abusive, threatening, and harassing conduct specifically targeting women, which has been escalating on the Internet. Mantilla differentiates this particular form of abuse, threats, and harassment directed at women from general trolling, coining the term "gendertrolling" to describe it. In this form of trolling, women are often subjected to derogatory language, such as "cunts", "sluts", and "whores". Their physical appearance is criticized with labels like "ugly" and "fat". Additionally, photographs of the targeted women are frequently used in graphic pornographic depictions.

Mantilla found seven basic characteristics which distinguished "gendertrolling" from other forms of generic trolling (2015, p. 18), which are:

1. Online viewpoints expressed by women tend to trigger accusations of gendertrolling.
2. Contain derogatory remarks that are sexualized and gendered.
3. Contain (often credible) threats of rape and death, as well as regular IRL (In-Real-Life) targeting, which lends credence to the threats.
4. Use a variety of internet and social media channels.
5. The number and intensity of them are abnormally high (several threats or messages every day or even hour).
6. Continue for an atypical amount of time (months or years).
7. Engage a large number of assailants in a coordinated and well-planned effort.

Methodology

This study employs discourse analysis of tweets following the prominent media trials of three women in India between April 2020 and February 2021, a period characterized by the first and second waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. The subjects of these media trials are Safoora Zargar, a student-activist based in New Delhi, who was charged and arrested under the contentious Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2008 in April 2020; Rhea Chakraborty, a film actor based in Mumbai, who was charged and arrested for abetment to suicide of actor Sushant Singh Rajput in July 2020; and Disha Ravi, a climate activist based in Bengaluru, who was charged and arrested for sedition in February 2021. Utilizing purposive sampling, tweets and subsequent comments directed at these women were selected for analysis. The data comprised tweets (including comments) that mentioned or tagged the official Twitter handles of the three individuals: "@SafooraZargar", "@Tweet2Rhea", and "@disharavi". Only derogatory tweets were chosen for the study to comprehend the nature of the abuse these women faced.

Disha Ravi Case

During the media trial of Disha Ravi, the young climate activist faced a significant wave of online abuse on Twitter, which became a poignant example of the detrimental impact of sensationalized media coverage and public backlash. Following her arrest in February 2021, related to the toolkit controversy linked with the farmers' protests in India, Disha Ravi was thrust into the national spotlight. The media portrayed her actions as a threat to national security, leading to a barrage of hostile and derogatory remarks on social media. Twitter users subjected her to personal attacks, questioning her motives and integrity, and some even issued threats of violence and harm. The flood of misinformation further fuelled the abusive comments, with many individuals spreading false narratives about her involvement in the toolkit incident. Reports from sources like Global Freedom of Expression documented the intense harassment she faced, highlighting how the public discourse turned toxic. Legal documents and court observations also noted the abusive nature of the comments directed at her. The relentless online harassment took a toll on Disha Ravi's mental health and well-being, yet she remained resolute in her activism, continuing to advocate for climate justice and farmers' rights (Alphonso, 2021; Global Freedom of Expression (Columbia University), 2021; The Hindu, 2021).

During her media trial, Disha Ravi faced a barrage of derogatory remarks on Twitter. Here are some specific examples of the abusive comments she encountered:

Personal Attacks: Users questioned her motives and integrity, with comments like, "How can a 22-year-old girl be so anti-national?" and "She is just a pawn in a bigger conspiracy". Moreover, Ravi faced some explicitly derogatory remarks directed at her genitals; as well as an array of vile comments comparing her to a prostitute.

Threats: Some tweets contained threats of violence, such as, “She should be punished severely for her actions” and “She deserves to be behind bars for life”.

Misinformation: There were numerous tweets spreading false information about her involvement in the toolkit incident, with comments like, “She was working with foreign enemies to destabilize India” and “She is a traitor who deserves no mercy”.

Another name that surfaced in the same case was Shantanu Muluk, but his gender played a role in how his situation was perceived. Both Disha Ravi and Shantanu Muluk were implicated in the same probe; however, Muluk was granted pre-arrest bail by the court, while Ravi was remanded into police custody for several days. This disparity raised questions about gender bias in the handling of their cases. Ravi’s gender not only contributed to her harsher legal treatment but also made her the focal point of online abuse, with many Twitter users either unaware of Muluk or indifferent to his involvement. Ravi became the target of hecklers, amassing 582 abusers on social media, while the number of people targeting Muluk was almost negligible (DisInfo Lab, 2021). This case highlighted the gendered nature of public and media scrutiny, where Disha Ravi faced disproportionate harassment and vilification compared to her male counterpart.

Ravi’s experience underscores the need for responsible journalism and the protection of individuals from online harassment, illustrating how media trials and social media abuse can inflict profound personal harm.

Safoora Zargar Case

Safoora Zargar, a sociology student at Jamia Millia Islamia University, was arrested on April 10, 2020, under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). She was accused of conspiring to incite violence during the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests in Delhi in February 2020. The CAA, passed in December 2019, provides a pathway to Indian citizenship for non-Muslims from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, which critics argue discriminates against Muslims (Mander, 2020).

Zargar’s arrest and subsequent denial of bail drew significant attention due to her pregnancy at the time. The Delhi High Court eventually granted her bail on humanitarian grounds on June 23, 2020, with strict conditions to prevent her from influencing the ongoing investigation (Hindustan Times, 2020; BBC, 2020). This case sparked a debate on the balance between national security and individual rights. International bodies, including the United Nations, criticized the Indian government for using the pandemic as a pretext to suppress dissent (UN News, 2020). Zargar’s arrest was seen as part of a broader crackdown on anti-CAA protesters, many of whom were Muslim students and activists (Amnesty International, 2020).

Safoora Zargar’s case became a focal point of a media trial on Twitter, where public opinion was sharply divided. Right-wing trolls targeted her with misogynistic and Islamophobic comments, while supporters highlighted the broader issues of freedom of speech and human rights (Ramakrishnan, 2020). Critics used derogatory language to demean Zargar, focusing on her pregnancy and religious identity. For example, actor Payal Rohatgi tweeted derogatory comments about Zargar, which led to a court order for police to investigate the tweets for spreading hatred and disaffection towards Muslims (The Times of India, 2021). Additionally, countless other users participated in character assassination, using sexist slurs and threats to undermine her dignity and discredit her activism. This online vilification underscores the intersection of misogyny and Islamophobia, as Zargar was not only targeted for her political stance but also attacked based on her gender and religious identity. The Delhi Commission for Women (2020) noted complaints regarding the abuse and character assassination of Zargar on social media, including misogynistic comments outraging her dignity and threatening her family. Their report highlights the widespread Islamophobic and misogynistic comments on social media platforms, which included character assassination and threats. On the other hand, activists and supporters used Twitter to highlight the injustice of her arrest and the broader implications for civil liberties. The DCW issued a notice to the Delhi Police (Cyber Cell) to file an FIR against the online abuse (The Quint, 2020).

Legal experts and political commentators debated the legality of her arrest and the use of UAPA, bringing attention to the potential misuse of anti-terror laws (Venkataramakrishnan, 2020). The discourse on Twitter played a significant role in shaping public perception of the case, underscoring the deep divisions within Indian society regarding issues of nationalism, secularism, and human rights. Moreover, the discourse surrounding Zargar’s case starkly highlights the pervasive misogyny prevalent with such social media trials.

Rhea Chakraborty Case

The Rhea Chakraborty case, which emerged following the death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput, has been a subject of intense media scrutiny and public discourse. This case offers a rich ground for discourse analysis, particularly in understanding the role of media, gender biases, and online abuse (Chabba, 2020). The media coverage of the Rhea Chakraborty case was marked by sensationalism and a trial-by-media approach. Following Rajput’s death, media outlets and social media platforms were flooded with allegations against Chakraborty, ranging from financial misconduct to involvement in Rajput’s death. This coverage often blurred the lines between fact and conjecture, leading to a widespread public perception that Chakraborty was guilty before any formal investigation was concluded.

Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook became battlegrounds for public opinion on the case. The discourse surrounding Chakraborty was heavily gendered, with a significant focus on her personal life and character. This reflects entrenched misogyny, where women are subjected to intense scrutiny and judgment based on their gender. The vilification of Chakraborty included derogatory comments, slut-shaming, and even threats of violence. This kind of gendered discourse is not uncommon in cases involving female celebrities, highlighting the broader issue of gender bias in media and society (Ara, 2020).

Chakraborty received a serious threat from a supposed fan of Rajput on Instagram, who menacingly suggested acts of violence, including rape and murder, and pressured her to commit suicide, otherwise threatening to send people to kill her. This intense and unrelenting character assassination compelled Chakraborty to seek assistance from the cybercrime police. Supreme Court senior counsel Meenakshi Arora highlighted the hasty judgment rendered by the press, comparing their approach to having subjected Chakraborty to a “complete trial by media” akin to being “hanged, drawn, and quartered”. Various news channels, including Times Now, Republic TV, Zee News, News 18, and India Today, were identified for conducting media trials (Thomas, 2020). Consequently, three activists petitioned the Bombay High Court to curtail sensationalist reportage that could prejudice the investigation. The Press Council

of India reprimanded these outlets for breaching journalistic norms and advised against parallel trials that could sway public opinion (PCI, 2020). A study at the University of Michigan found that Indian journalists and media houses were complicit in advancing an agenda against Chakraborty, with Republic TV particularly fixated on her family's finances and perpetuating misogynistic narratives (Akbar et al., 2020). Reports from the South China Morning Post and Variety observed that India's television channels allocated more airtime to this case than to significant issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic and caste-based rapes, highlighting how sensationalist media often capitalizes on misogyny and public spectacle (Sarkar, 2020; Ramachandran, 2020; Kharude, 2020).

The #JusticeForSSR campaign, while initially focused on seeking justice for Rajput, quickly devolved into a platform for spreading unverified accusations and hate speech against Chakraborty. This online abuse is indicative of a larger problem of gender-based harassment on social media, where women are often targeted with vitriolic comments and threats.

Analysis & Discussion

In a patriarchal society, the roles assigned to women are rigidly defined by established social norms. When a woman attempts to transgress these prescribed roles, it often incites a struggle between the genders. This struggle is essentially a battle for dominance, power, and influence within society. Such conflicts generate tension between men and women. To uphold their societal dominance, men may resort to various forms of subjugation, including misogyny, sexism, and the objectification of women, thereby transforming women from "subjects" to "objects".

The objectification of women involves reducing them to mere instruments of pleasure or consumption, devoid of any right to self-expression. Consequently, the female body becomes a battleground for discourses on power and control. Individuals with patriarchal mindsets tend to use language laden with sexist and misogynistic remarks to further suppress women. By examining various case studies through the lens of feminist theories, we can gain insights into why women are often targeted and oppressed solely based on their gender. Analysing these dynamics allows us to understand the underlying causes of gender-based discrimination and highlights the importance of addressing these issues to foster a more equitable and inclusive society. In an interview, Kimberlé Crenshaw, a distinguished American law professor and the originator of the term in 1989, articulated "intersectional feminism" as a conceptual framework. She described it as "a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other" (UN Women, 2020). This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of different forms of discrimination and how they compound to create more complex and pervasive systems of oppression. By understanding these intersections, intersectional feminism seeks to address the multifaceted nature of inequality and strive for more comprehensive social justice. We can use the lens of intersectional feminism to analyse the case of Safoora Zargar. In her case, she became increasingly susceptible to online misogyny and experienced a surge of hateful and derogatory remarks from Twitter users for being a "Kashmiri Muslim woman" which is an intersection of her regional identity, religion, and gender. The sexism and misogyny she faced online is an example of patriarchal beliefs that aim to marginalise and suppress women's voices in the society.

Another critical aspect to consider in the analysis of these cases is the concept of "networked misogyny". This term refers to the coordinated and systematic use of misogynistic behaviour across digital platforms, which amplifies and reinforces the oppression and harassment of women (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Dickel & Evolvi, 2022). By understanding how these patterns of misogyny are interconnected and perpetuated online, we can gain deeper insights into the dynamics of gender-based discrimination in the digital age.

All three cases exemplify the phenomenon of "networked misogyny". Women, suspected of involvement in specific political and social issues, were targeted and subjected to derogatory remarks and insults on social media. For instance, Safoora Zargar, a student activist and research scholar at Jamia Millia Islamia, endured intense criticism and vitriol, with numerous individuals resorting to name-calling and even issuing threats of sexual violence. In a similar vein, Bollywood actress Rhea Chakraborty faced widespread demonization and was unjustly held responsible for the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput. Her alleged involvement led to her arrest in a drug-related case, during which she endured online harassment, threats, and abuse. False rumours and conspiracy theories were rampant, further exacerbating her ordeal. Likewise, Disha Ravi was subjected to online harassment, with numerous individuals directing insults and threats at her due to her gender and perceived participation in specific political and social issues. The common thread in all three cases is the manifestation of networked misogyny, illustrating how women were victimized and silenced within digital spaces through coordinated and systematic misogynistic behaviour. This underscores the pervasive nature of gender-based discrimination in the digital age and the urgent need to address these issues to ensure a more equitable and just society.

Beyond the concepts of "networked misogyny" and "intersectional feminism", "hostile sexism" also provides a pertinent framework for analysing these cases from a feminist perspective. Hostile sexism seeks to justify male dominance, traditional gender roles, and the exploitation of women as sexual objects through derogatory characterizations and discriminatory treatment (Glick & Fiske, 1997). This phenomenon is evident in the cases of Rhea Chakraborty, Safoora Zargar, and Disha Ravi. These women were frequently subjected to derogatory and discriminatory remarks, not only because of their gender but also due to their perceived transgressions against traditional gender roles.

In examining the commonalities among these three case studies, we observe that all three women are independent and influential figures within their respective domains. Disha Ravi is a climate activist, Safoora Zargar is a political activist, and Rhea Chakraborty is a Bollywood actress. As public figures, they possess the ability to raise their voices within a male-dominated ecosystem. Bell Hooks articulated this dynamic eloquently when she stated, "For women within oppressed groups, coming to voice is an act of resistance. Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject" (1989). By asserting their voices, these women transition from being perceived as "objects" to becoming "subjects". This transformation signifies that these women are not only independent and capable individuals but also possess a degree of social and political influence that inherently challenges patriarchal norms. Their ability to vocalize their perspectives and advocate for change underscores the disruptive power of women's voices in challenging and reshaping societal structures.

Conclusion

A critical discourse analysis of the words posted on Twitter against Disha Ravi, Safoora Zargar, and Rhea Chakraborty reveals pervasive patterns of hostile sexism and patriarchal norms. Terms such as “whore”, “single mother”, “mistress”, and “gold digger” were used to demean and discredit these women, implying immorality and a dependency on men. These derogatory remarks reflect the broader patriarchal attempt to regulate women’s sexuality and maintain male dominance. Additionally, internalized sexism among women perpetuates these norms, as seen in the use of sexist and misogynistic language on social media. By understanding these patterns, we can see how digital platforms reinforce gender-based discrimination in contemporary society.

In conclusion, this study highlights the grave repercussions of online abuse through the case studies of Disha Ravi, Rhea Chakraborty, and Safoora Zargar. Disha Ravi faced misogynistic attacks aimed at undermining her credibility as an environmental activist. Rhea Chakraborty experienced character assassination and blame during the investigation of Sushant Singh Rajput’s death. Safoora Zargar endured harassment exacerbated by her pregnancy, showcasing the intersectional nature of online misogyny. Analysing these cases through Mantilla’s concept of “gendertrolling” reveals that social media users often use abusive, sexist language against prominent women to silence them. This reflects deeper cultural issues supporting online violence and gender discrimination. Despite the fourth wave of feminism’s focus on online harassment, misogyny remains prevalent. These cases demonstrate that misogyny and patriarchy are deeply ingrained in our consciousness, as recent research shows the widespread use of misogynistic language during social media trials, leading to body shaming, slut-shaming, and textual violence. Social media users frequently silence and prejudge women, illustrating the pervasive nature of gender-based discrimination in the digital realm.

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