6. Navigating Gendered Power Dynamics on Instagram: An Intersectional Analysis of Digital Gender-Based Violence

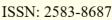**Singamala Neeladri**[1]
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Abstract

The term "digital gender-based violence" refers to unsafe behaviors that are perpetrated on digital platforms that target individuals depending on their gender. The increasing prevalence of digital gender-based violence on social media platforms such as Instagram presents a substantial challenge to achieving gender equality in today's digital landscape. This form of violence, encompassing online harassment, cyberstalking, revenge pornography, cyberbullying, doxing, and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, disproportionately affects women and gender minorities, reinforcing existing gender power dynamics. Instagram, as a prominent social media platform, often becomes a battleground where traditional patriarchal norms are replicated and exacerbated through the anonymity and reach of the internet. In this paper, we explore how digital gender-based violence on Instagram intersects with other forms of oppression, such as caste, class, and gender, resulting in compounded vulnerabilities for marginalized groups. It critically examines the role of Instagram in either perpetuating or addressing these power imbalances. Often, social norms and internalized beliefs reflect invisible power dynamics keeping women away from using the platform, normalizing online harassment, and dismissing it as routine. Through a review of existing literature, case studies, surveys, and specific incidents on Instagram, this paper highlights the limitations of current legal frameworks and platform policies in addressing digital gender-based violence. Digital violence is often overlooked due to the nuanced and intersectional nature of these frameworks. The paper calls for implementing more robust, intersectional policies that center on the experiences of those most affected by digital gender-based violence and for Instagram's design and policy-making to be gender-sensitive. In a digital age, addressing digital gender-based violence is not only critical to achieving gender equality but also an essential step toward justice. By challenging and dismantling the structural inequalities

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that enable digital gender-based violence, the paper contributes to a broader understanding of how social media platforms like Instagram reflect and shape gender power dynamics in contemporary society.
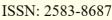
Keywords: *Digital gender-based violence, online harassment, caste, class, gender, power dynamics.*

Introduction

Instagram is a popular social media and photo-sharing platform that enables users to upload, edit, and share images and videos. Key features include posts, reels, stories that vanish after 24 hours, and a personalized explore tab. Users can interact through likes, comments, direct messages, and live streaming. Owned by Meta Platforms, Instagram serves as a space for personal connections, social interactions, and marketing for individuals, influencers, and businesses. It has become crucial for exploring and expressing identity, particularly regarding gender and power dynamics. However, it also hosts technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), which has increased as more people engage online, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (UN Women, 2020a).

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), digital gender-based violence, and online gender-based violence refer to harmful actions enabled by digital platforms, primarily impacting women and gender minorities. On Instagram, this includes harassment, doxing, revenge porn, and other forms of abuse, often targeting individuals based on gender and worsening discrimination. The anonymity and reach of online platforms empower perpetrators, causing significant emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical harm to victims. Digital gender-based violence on Instagram encompasses a range of issues, including cyberstalking, body shaming, and severe harassment.

Studies indicate that women and LGBTQ+ individuals are particularly at risk, as many users have reported experiencing frequent online harassment related to their gender identity or sexual orientation. (Eckert, 2018). Digital gender-based violence, encompassing harassment, threats, cyberbullying, and the circulation of misogynistic content, reflects and often intensifies offline power imbalances, targeting users based on their gendered identities. (Henry & Powell, 2015). This research paper offers an intersectional examination of digital gender-based violence (DGBV) on Instagram, emphasizing how overlapping identities—including caste, class, and

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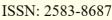**Website:** www.apijgs.com , **Email:** apijgs@gmail.com

gender—affect user's experiences of empowerment and oppression. Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, emphasizes the necessity of analyzing the interplay of various social identities to comprehend the complexities of oppression fully. While anyone can face online harassment, individuals who belong to intersecting marginalized identities, such as women of color or LGBTQ+ people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, often face compounded experiences of violence online. (Crenshaw, 1989). The structure of Instagram's platform, which prioritizes visibility, visual content, and public engagement, presents distinct challenges and vulnerabilities for marginalized communities, particularly women and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Gender power imbalances on Instagram are exacerbated by the digital divide, which affects access to technology. Women and girls from marginalized communities are particularly vulnerable to online exploitation due to limited internet access and digital literacy. The platform's algorithms often favor specific demographics, amplifying sensational content while marginalizing others. This engagement-driven focus creates a feedback loop highlighting extreme perspectives, overshadowing balanced discussions and reinforcing existing biases. Instagram's inconsistent content moderation policies can unfairly penalize marginalized users defending against harassment (Matias, 2019).

Literature Review

Rising Challenge of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

Technology and online platforms are increasingly weaponized against women and girls, leading to a form of violence known as technology-facilitated gender-based violence. This digital aggression affects their homes, workplaces, and personal lives and can escalate to physical harm, including femicide. It includes various forms such as sextortion, image-based abuse, doxing, cyberbullying, online harassment, and stalking, among others. The repercussions are significant, impacting health, safety, and economic stability while also silencing women's voices and undermining democratic processes. The UNFPA addresses this issue by providing essential support services to survivors, including social, health, legal, and justice assistance. Their "Virtual is Real" and "Body Right" campaigns aim to raise awareness about critical issues, empowering survivors and advocating for accountability. "Virtual is Real" emphasizes the significance of online experiences, highlighting that virtual spaces can evoke genuine
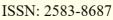
emotions and foster relationships. The "Body Right" campaign, launched by the UNFPA, promotes bodily autonomy and respect in digital contexts, addressing online abuse and harassment, particularly affecting women, girls, and marginalized groups. (Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: A Growing Threat, n.d.)

A Structural and Intersectional Approach to Addressing Tech-Facilitated Violence: Tackling Overlapping Oppressions and Systemic Inequities

Tech-facilitated violence (TFV) has become an essential area of research, especially when viewed through structural and intersectional lenses. Bailey and Burkell (2021) contend that conventional definitions of violence, which focus mainly on physical acts, fail to recognize the substantial harm caused by digital platforms. Their analysis incorporates perspectives from Black feminist and critical race theorists, like Crenshaw and Hill Collins, who stress the need to see violence as a result of overlapping oppressions, such as sexism, racism, and homophobia. While both men and women can be victims of TFGBV, research indicates that women, particularly those from marginalized communities, are disproportionately affected. Women and gender minorities often find themselves as the primary targets of TFGBV. LGBTQ+ individuals experience unique forms of violence, such as harassment linked to their sexual identity and online threats of physical harm. Individuals from lower castes, especially Dalits, often encounter online harassment, abuse, and cyberbullying that explicitly targets their caste and gender. This harassment can be derogatory remarks, threats, and exclusion from digital spaces. Technology can be misused to reveal someone's caste identity in damaging ways, resulting in public humiliation. Dalit women, in particular, are at heightened risk of this type of violence, as the intersection of their caste and gender makes them especially susceptible to online attacks. Violence rooted in caste frequently appears as online hate campaigns or organized trolling, where individuals are singled out for their caste identity and subjected to verbal and emotional mistreatment. This is often accompanied by misogynistic abuse directed at women from lower castes. Studies show that individualistic views on violence usually overlook the realities faced by communities striving for equality, thus ignoring the underlying structural factors involved (Dunn, 2021). This body of work underscores the importance of tackling systemic problems rather than just concentrating on individual violent incidents, which can result in solutions that disproportionately affect marginalized populations. Additionally, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence
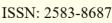
Against Women (UNDEVAW) offers a framework for understanding violence against women across different contexts, highlighting the necessity for a holistic approach to combat TFV effectively. In summary, there is an increasing agreement that effectively addressing TFV demands a comprehensive understanding that combines structural and intersectional viewpoints to foster justice and equity. (Bailey & Burkell, 2021).

Understanding and Preventing Technology-Facilitated Gender- and Sexuality-Based Violence: A Study on Perpetration, Motivations, and Prevention Strategies

The growing issue of technology-facilitated gender- and sexuality-based violence (TFGSV) is linked to digital communication. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research reveals that 25.6% of adults reported experiencing TFGSV in the past year, with harassment related to physical appearance (18%) and gender-based harassment (22.6%) being the most common forms. The findings align with existing literature on the normalization of violence against women. Men were identified as the primary perpetrators, though women and non-binary individuals also engaged in TFGSV, often due to ideological conflicts or self-defense. Younger individuals (ages 18-24) were more likely to participate in TFGSV than those over 45. Many participants justified their actions as responses to differing viewpoints, particularly regarding feminist ideologies, and cited peer influence and a lack of awareness about the harm caused by their behavior. Many participants indicated that their sharing of violent content was not intended to cause harm but rather to promote awareness of TFGSV. This suggests a nuanced relationship between perpetration and advocacy. The results highlight the urgent need for specialized prevention programs that tackle TFGSV across various age demographics. The research supports the implementation of interventions that not only assist victims but also involve potential offenders by exploring the underlying motivations for their behavior. Educational programs should focus on enhancing emotional regulation, fostering critical reflection on online activities, and examining the social factors contributing to the normalization of TFGSV. (Martínez-Bacaicoa, Alonso-Fernánde, Wachs, & Gámez-Guadix, 2023)

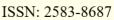**Understanding Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence in Low- and Middle-Income Countries**

Sheikh and Rogers' scoping review offers a thorough analysis of technology-facilitated sexual violence and abuse (TFSVA) in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), emphasizing the unique and challenging contexts where this violence is on the rise. The review includes 14 empirical studies conducted between 1996 and 2022, highlighting the pressing need to address TFSVA as access to digital technology proliferates in LMICs. It categorizes various forms of TFSVA, including online harassment, image-based abuse, doxing, and coercive control. The authors examine the role of socio-cultural factors, particularly patriarchal norms, in exacerbating the prevalence and impact of TFSVA. The prevalence of male dominance in technology and the anonymity provided by the internet can intensify existing power imbalances. Some men exploit this anonymity to engage in violent behavior without facing repercussions, fostering an environment where misogynistic actions can flourish with minimal accountability. The largely male-dominated tech industry has been sluggish in establishing strong policies or features aimed at safeguarding against gender-based violence, thereby continuing to expose women and minorities to risks online. By investigating how these societal dynamics lead to the victimization of women, the review reveals the reasons for the underreporting and insufficient responses to TFSVA in these areas. Additionally, the analysis of victim-survivor reactions and coping strategies, such as reliance on informal support networks, offers insights into the limited help available and the urgent need for more formal, victim-centered approaches. The review highlights significant legislative gaps, victim support services, and public awareness, calling for policy reforms and enhanced legal frameworks. While acknowledging limitations like definitional inconsistencies in TFSVA that complicate measurement and hinder effective comparisons, the study remains an essential contribution to understanding the complex effects of TFSVA in LMICs, advocating for targeted interventions that consider both technological and cultural factors**. (Sheikh & M.Rogers, 2024)

Exploring Digital Gender-Based Violence: Future Research Directions

The literature mainly focuses on subjects like digital intimate partner violence, domestic violence, digital dating violence, gender-based digital violence, and actions taken by digital feminists**. It summarizes findings from various studies, including the effects of social networks on the mental health of adolescents and the occurrence of multiple forms of digital violence. For example, de Felice et al. (2022) discovered that social networks significantly
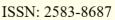
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impact young people's development and mental well-being**.** It shows that the most studied forms of digital violence encompass "communities promoting violence," "culturally sanctioned violence against women," "intimate partner violence," and "harassment and aggression."

The existing literature does not encompass all studies related to digital violence, underscoring the need for more comprehensive research that considers the demographic traits of both offenders and victims. While gender is a critical focus in studying DGBV, the impact of caste is often overlooked. Research must adopt an intersectional approach to explore how caste and gender interact in experiences of online violence. Many studies on online harassment primarily address general gendered violence, neglecting caste-based discrimination in digital spaces. There is an urgent need for research that examines how online abuse varies by caste, especially in societies with solid caste hierarchies. A significant gap in the current literature is the absence of caste-specific data on DGBV, as most studies do not consider caste as a demographic factor. Future research should prioritize collecting caste-inclusive data to better understand caste-based online violence. Additionally, it is crucial to include the perspectives of Dalit women and other caste minorities in digital feminist discourse. There is also a lack of research on how specific digital platforms like social media and gaming communities contribute to caste-based violence despite their scrutiny for gender-based violence. It highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in understanding the complexities of digital violence, particularly about working women, and how it can serve as a tool for mobbing or intimidation in professional settings. The author stresses the need for further research that brings attention to the often-ignored experiences of women and girls who face digital violence. Additionally, they advocate for collaborative efforts among universities, NGOs, and government bodies to protect women in digital environments. The literature review concludes by suggesting areas for future investigation, including time series analyses to track changes, exploring the psychological factors behind digital violence, and examining women's digital rights in emerging technologies like the metaverse. (DUMAN, 2023)

Objectives

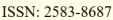- To examine digital gender-based violence (DGBV) on Instagram, focusing on

harassment forms like cyberstalking and non-consensual image sharing, mainly targeting women and marginalized communities.

- To explore how intersecting identities such as caste, class, and gender relate to gender-based violence on Instagram.

- To highlight how women and marginalized groups deal with digital gender-based violence, examining the effects on mental health as well as the strategy users adopt for self-protection, such as blocking, reporting, or practicing self-censorship.

- To analyze how the platform moderates content, upholds community guidelines and contributes to or helps reduce gender-based violence.

- To offer suggestions for Instagram to improve its reporting tools, offer robust support resources, or partner with advocacy organizations to foster safer environments for marginalized groups.

Methodology

The present study adopts a mixed-methods approach. The study combines quantitative surveys and qualitative case studies to examine the prevalence, forms, and impacts of digital gender-based violence (DGBV) on women and gender minorities. The study focuses on understanding how online harassment, cyberbullying, doxing, cyberstalking, revenge pornography, and sextortion affect marginalized groups.

The quantitative survey was conducted with 45 participants from diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, focusing on their experiences with DGBV, including cyberstalking and harassment related to caste and gender. Open-ended questions provided deeper insights. Participants were purposively selected from social media or online communities where DGBV is common. The qualitative case studies examined individuals who have faced significant DGBV, using interviews and social media analysis to understand personal impacts and resilience strategies. By integrating these methods, the research aims to comprehensively understand DGBV, highlighting general patterns and individual stories and ultimately informing policy recommendations for digital platforms and support organizations. Closed-ended questions provided demographic data and prevalence information, while open-ended questions allowed for detailed personal accounts of the violence experienced. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants who had faced significant DGBV to gain
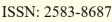
insights into individual experiences. The interview method was used to explore personal stories, the psychological impact of DGBV, coping strategies, and the role of digital platforms in either worsening or alleviating violence. In addition, social media content was analyzed to understand broader patterns of online abuse. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the current study at any time.

The data was collected from various sources to gain a thorough understanding of digital gender-based violence. Primary data was obtained from individuals actively using Instagram, mainly focusing on those who identify as women and non-binary individuals and their perspectives and experiences significant for the research. Most of the Participants were college and university students. Alongside first hand accounts from these participants, secondary data was gathered from newspaper articles and media reports that highlight instances of digital gender-based violence. These articles provided contextual insights into broader societal trends and public and institutional responses to notable cases of DGBV. This mixed-source approach, which combines personal experiences with documented media narratives, will provide both depth and breadth in understanding how digital platforms influence gender-based violence and the specific challenges faced by marginalized genders online.

Narratives of Primary Responses

Online Gender-based violence on Instagram: The Impact of Cyberstalking, Hate comments on Caste, Gender, and Sexual Orientation

Numerous individuals have shared experiences with online harassment on Instagram, particularly regarding cyberstalking, hurtful comments, and abusive language tied to their caste, gender, and sexual orientation, creating a toxic environment that perpetuates discrimination. Victims often feel as though they are being watched due to unwanted surveillance, constant messages, and intrusive interactions. Cyberstalking can begin with seemingly innocent actions but escalate into relentless attention, leading to feelings of insecurity. For instance, one participant recounted, "There was a time something close to stalking happened, and I complained to Cybersecurity," highlighting how these situations can drive victims to seek external help. Offenders may also set up false profiles to detour blocks, making it more challenging for victims to control their online
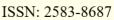
manifestation. These unidentified accounts often post invasive comments, allowing abuse to occur without repercussions. Instagram's structure and algorithms can inadvertently encourage harassment and gender-based violence. Although the platform has introduced reporting tools and content moderation, its focus on visual engagement can sometimes amplify harmful behaviors, and its algorithms may favor negative content, contributing to the increase in harassment incidents. Despite attempts to enhance safety through stricter policies and user control options, the environment remains challenging for users trying to report or block offenders, with the platform's emphasis on engagement often exacerbating the risk for those subjected to online abuse.

Intersectional Harassment on Instagram: The Struggles of Marginalized Communities Facing Online Abuse and Discrimination

Several Instagram users, particularly those from marginalized communities, report feelings of insecurity and vulnerability due to the prevalence of online harassment. This issue is especially grave for women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people of color, who often face targeted abuse and threats. Despite Instagram's efforts to implement safety features—such as options to block, report, and filter harmful content—the experience of harassment still creates a pervasive sense of discomfort. Research and user testimonies highlight that marginalized groups, including racial minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and lower-caste communities, endure heightened levels of harassment. The anonymity afforded by online platforms like Instagram can embolden harassers. At the same time, biases related to gender, sexual orientation, race, caste, and other identities exacerbate the frequency and intensity of targeted abuse. As a result, many users from these communities experience compounded forms of discrimination and violence, making it challenging to feel safe or fully belong on the platform.

Women and non-binary individuals, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, are frequently subjected to derogatory comments and violence tied to their gender identity. This form of harassment extends beyond general gender-based violence to include caste-based discrimination, as reported by various users. For instance, lower-caste individuals, particularly Dalit women, and LGBTQ+ people report instances of trolling, particularly when engaging in discussions around caste pride or social justice. Success stories from marginalized castes are often dismissed as the result of caste privilege rather than individual achievement, further undermining their efforts and reinforcing harmful
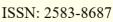
stereotypes. For example, one participant narrates an experience in which a schoolmate commented on their photo, calling them by their caste name, "Chamhar." This form of caste-based discrimination highlights the intersectional nature of online harassment, where marginalized identities such as caste, gender, and socioeconomic status intersect to produce unique vulnerabilities. Lower-caste individuals, particularly women and LGBTQ+ people, often face intensified harassment, including hate speech that targets multiple aspects of their identity. The online space is rife with trolling, abuse, and hate speech, with the anonymity provided by Instagram emboldening perpetrators.

Intersectional harassment, particularly gender-based violence, is another noteworthy concern on the platform. Another participant shares their perspective on the gendered violence that many face on Instagram, stating that while derogatory comments and harassment can occur across all social media platforms, Instagram's photo-centric nature often makes such abuse more visible and pervasive. While Instagram has introduced features like reporting tools to address abuse, many users from marginalized backgrounds feel these measures are insufficient in addressing the complexity and intensity of their experiences. Despite Instagram's ongoing efforts to improve safety protocols, significant barriers remain in ensuring that all users, especially those from marginalized communities, feel safe, heard, and represented on the platform. These challenges highlight the need for more comprehensive, intersectional approaches to combat online harassment and protect vulnerable communities from further harm.

User Experiences with Instagram's Security and Reporting Tools: Challenges in Privacy, Harassment, and Support Networks

Many participants find these tools lacking, as unresolved reports allow harmful behaviors to persist, leaving victims without sufficient assistance. There is a prevailing sense of doubt regarding Instagram's capacity to protect users' content and privacy, with concerns frequently raised about inadequate security measures and insufficient responses to privacy violations and unauthorized content usage. To navigate their Instagram experience, most users depend on blocking and reporting features, utilizing these options to manage unwanted interactions and safeguard themselves against harassment, spam, and other disruptive
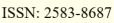
activities. For instance, one respondent recounts using privacy settings to control who can access their content. Respondent discloses, *"I set my account to private so only approved followers can view my posts, and I restrict who can comment on my photos to people I know. Occasionally, I use the 'close friends' feature for more personal content."* These privacy measures provide security by limiting interactions with strangers and minimizing the risk of unwanted or harmful comments. By taking control over who can engage with their posts, users feel empowered to create a safer online experience.

This approach is common among participants who fear harassment and privacy violations on Instagram. Many choose to limit their content visibility, believing that reduced exposure helps protect them from potential threats, such as online abuse or privacy infringements. In addition to privacy settings, features like restricted commenting or the "close friends" list help users safeguard their personal space on the platform while maintaining a presence on Instagram. However, opinions on Instagram's support networks for addressing harassment are mixed. Some users find these communities helpful for dealing with digital abuse, offering a sense of solidarity and connection. On the other hand, others feel that Instagram's support mechanisms are inadequate or lack effectiveness in providing real solutions to harassment. This divide reflects broader concerns about the platform's ability to offer meaningful protection and support, especially for those facing gender-based violence or discrimination. Despite privacy tools, many users still struggle to fully navigate the challenges of online harassment, highlighting the need for more robust measures to ensure user safety and well-being.

The Tragic Impact of Hate Comments on LGBTQ+ Youth in India

Praveen (name changed) a 16-year-old self-taught makeup artist from Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, gained recognition for their makeup and beauty content on Instagram. During Diwali, he posted a video reel wearing a saree, showcasing their artistic skills and expressing their gender fluidity. Unfortunately, the post drew a wave of homophobic and hateful comments, which ultimately influenced Praveen's tragic decision to take their own life. Actor Trinetra Haldar Gummaraju, an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, brought attention to this heartbreaking incident, urging social media platforms to take responsibility. Praveen's reel received over 4,000 hate comments, significantly impacting their mental health. Social
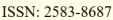
media platforms like Instagram are facing criticism for not offering sufficient protections for LGBTQ+ youth, particularly in light of increasing worries about online harassment. This case highlights the distinct mental health issues encountered by LGBTQ+ youth in India, who frequently deal with stigma in both digital and real-world environments. The sheer amount of negative comments can intensify feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression. Social media platforms like Instagram, owned by Meta, have faced criticism for their slow response in addressing such hate. Arthur Bejar, a former executive at Meta, remarked that Instagram is not a safe space for teenagers, pointing out a pattern of ignoring data regarding the platform's possible dangers to young users. For queer youth, feeling accepted and having a sense of belonging are essential for their mental health. Ongoing online harassment can damage self-esteem, heighten stress levels, and result in significant emotional turmoil. Pranshu's situation highlights the urgent need for supportive social environments, as negative online experiences can intensify feelings of isolation, especially for young LGBTQ+ individuals in conservative communities. Enhancing cyberbullying laws in India and implementing stricter social media regulations to safeguard minors could help reduce online hate. (NDTV, 2023)

Caste Identity Assertion by Young Women on Instagram in India

In India, young women from various castes are using Instagram to express and defend their caste identities, with influencers from both privileged groups like Brahmins and marginalized ones like Dalits participating. This trend reflects a complex mix of cultural pride and resistance to traditional norms. For example, Brahmin influencer Shalini (name changed) promotes caste pride and opposes inter-caste relationships, while Dalit influencer Priya (name changed) challenges these views, often referencing Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Social media has empowered women from rural and semi-urban areas to engage in discussions that were once male-dominated, as highlighted by research from the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS). While this content often celebrates caste identities, it risks perpetuating discrimination. Brahmin influencers may reinforce traditional caste boundaries, whereas Dalit creators advocate for equality and challenge biases. Some posts may even border on hate speech, raising concerns about social divisions and casteism. Meta, Instagram's parent company, enforces standards against content that incites violence or targets individuals based on caste. Overall, this trend highlights the dual role of social media
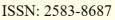
in both asserting dignity for Dalit influencers and potentially sustaining caste distinctions for upper-caste users. This trend highlights the increasing influence of social media in caste politics, showcasing both the benefits of representation and the dangers of division. It reflects a generational change, with younger users more open to discussing caste in a political context. Nonetheless, it also emphasizes the importance of platforms actively monitoring content to curb hate speech. (arya, 2024)

Unchecked Abuse: Instagram's Failure to Curb Gendered and Racial Harassment

A recent study conducted by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) highlighted Instagram's shortcomings in tackling the rampant gendered and racial abuse directed at female politicians in the U.S. By analyzing 1,000 comments from January to June, researchers found a range of offensive language and violent threats, including derogatory terms like "btch" and "whre," aimed at notable Democratic and Republican women leaders such as Kamala Harris, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Marjorie Taylor Greene. Despite Instagram's policies against such abuse, 93% of these comments remained visible a week after being reported, with 221 accounts identified as repeat offenders. Vice President Harris was mainly targeted, facing insults that questioned her professional credibility and attacked her ethnicity, with 92% of the abusive comments still visible after being flagged. Imran Ahmed, CEO of CCDH, contended that Instagram's lackluster response indicates a failure to genuinely commit to eradicating identity-based hate, thus perpetuating a culture of impunity. While Cindy Southworth, Meta's Head of Women's Safety, claimed that the platform provides tools to filter out offensive content and works with safety partners, critics maintain that this strategy falls short. The study emphasizes the urgent need for more vigorous enforcement on social media platforms to combat targeted gender and racial harassment, especially against public figures, to foster safer digital environments. (Ahmed, 2024)

Allegations of Inadequate Protection Against Harmful Content on Meta Platforms

In December 2023, New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez filed a lawsuit against Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, alleging that the company allowed ads from major corporations like Walmart and Match Group after content

potentially promoting child sexual exploitation. This action follows a Guardian investigation revealing Meta's struggles managing illegal content. Walmart and Match Group have expressed concerns about their ads being shown next to harmful content, criticizing Meta for prioritizing public relations over effective solutions. The lawsuit claims that child predators can use Instagram to groom minors, highlighting inadequate protections for young users. It also notes that inappropriate content often reappears after removal, indicating flaws in Meta's moderation. Despite Meta's community standards, the lawsuit argues that the company lacks transparency and adequate user safeguards. It underscores the ethical responsibility of social media platforms to ensure a safe environment for minors. It calls for more robust legal frameworks to hold tech companies accountable for their content and brand safety practices. (McQue, 2024)

Conclusion

Digital gender-based violence (DGBV) on Instagram presents significant challenges for marginalized communities, especially women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and lower-caste users. This study demonstrates how the power dynamics found in offline society are reflected and even intensified on Instagram, where issues like harassment, body shaming, cyberstalking, and hate speech are exacerbated by the platform's structural and algorithmic features. Although Instagram offers reporting tools and content moderation policies, these measures fall short of addressing the unique vulnerabilities faced by marginalized users. Factors such as caste, class, and gender further complicate the effects of DGBV, intensifying the oppression experienced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities. This research emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach, highlighting the necessity for more effective policies and improved user protections on social media platforms. By recognizing and tackling these intersectional aspects of harassment, Instagram and similar platforms can significantly contribute to creating safer digital spaces. Ultimately, this study advocates for greater platform accountability and policy reforms prioritizing the experiences of those most impacted, promoting discussions on digital justice and gender equity in the changing online environment.

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