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TROLLING WOMEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- CASE STUDIES FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

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Abstract:

Introduction: *Trolling refers to the sending or spreading of demeaning and insulting messages online in order to intentionally hurt an individual's feeling and self-worth and to gain an audience to satisfy one's (troll's) desire for online attention. Although there are a few instances where the troll isn't intentionally hurting another person but merely wants to be in the limelight, most trolling is deliberate.* **Aim:** *To look at case studies where women have been trolled online for various reasons, around the globe and the impact of such trolling on the lives of women.* **Methodology:** *The researcher has looked at certain case studies involving the trolling of women around the world in which the victim's gender had a major role to play. These case studies are from different parts of the world but there is a shared similarity between many of the cases which have been pointed out in the paper.* **Results:** *An examination of cases involving the trolling of women will help the observer gain a greater understanding of the issue and the seriousness of it as well.*

Keywords: *Trolling, women, social media, insult, abuse*

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Introduction:

Merriam Webster which is an American company that publishes reference books and also is known for its dictionaries defines social media as "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)." (merriam-webster, 2004)Statista which is German online portal for statistics states in the year 2019 there will be 2.77 billion social media users around the globe which would increase to 3.1 billion in the year 2021. (J.Clement, 2019)

According to Cambridge English Dictionary a troll is "Someone who leaves an intentionally annoying message on the internet, in order to get attention or cause trouble". "A message that someone leaves on the internet that is intended to annoy people:" In the late 1980's the term was used on the internet. (Dictionary, n.d.)But according to Oxford English Dictionary the origin of the term was seen in Usenet in the earlies 1990's in the phrase "trolling for newbies". Earlier trolling was considered same as Flaming which is the online act of posting insults, offensive language on social media networks. But flaming is done anonymously where various internet forums provides anonymity to the user whereas trolling is a person going online and posting annoying messages. According to an online portal refinery29 sixty-six percentage of online harassment takes place on social media sites and apps, twenty-one percentage of victims

stop using these social media sites, Men are less worried about these online harassment as a result of which forty-one percentage of women censor themselves online compared to thirty-three percentage of women. (Buxton, 2017) Thus, there is a need to study how online trolling of women affects their state of mind and the need for enactment of stricter laws to stop online trolling or abuse of women and the platform.

Review of Literature:

(Gudipaty, 2017) A study was carried by the researcher titled "Gendered Public Spaces Online trolling of women journalists in India" in the year 2017. The researcher intended to look at how women journalists deal with oppositional behaviour, offensive and abusive behaviour which is done through personal attacks of these women journalists, abusing them or issuing them with life threats and rape threats. The study was carried on fifteen female journalists working in the two south Indian cities of Hyderabad and Bangalore. It was done through convenient sampling technique and journalists that agreed to take part in the interviews were selected. The in-depth interviews personally and via emails were conducted. The sample included journalists from different media contexts (7 from print, 4 from television and 4 from online websites), across the two cities. The in-depth interviews focused upon collecting detailed information on various aspects and perspectives on trolling and how they are negotiated. The sample included journalists with experience from

6 months to more than 10 years. The respondents included journalists at various levels like reporters, sub editors, correspondents, program in-charges, executive producers and resident editors in different organisations. This was to ensure a fair representation of women journalists at all levels and experience in the profession.

The questions asked were related to accessibility of internet, use of net in their professional and personal work, experiences of trolling (their own or anyone they know) their negotiation with such trolls and their attitude towards such trolls in their professional work were asked. This was to help analyse and interpret the way in which women journalists viewed and negotiated online trolling. The findings of the study stated that all the respondents use the net enormously both in their professional as well as personal lives. The respondents viewed internet as a useful tool to access sources and get instant feedback from audiences. Almost all journalists interviewed, mentioned that either they experienced online trolling or one of their friends/colleagues experienced it. The journalist experienced extreme trolling when they shared their opinions or commented on politics and religion. These women journalists cope up with trolling by self-censoring, limiting their time on social media interactions or refraining from making any negative comments on politics and religion. The researcher concludes by stating that the journalists accept the trolling part of their routine and also trolls uses sexist remarks towards the women due to the patriarchal society that we live in.

(Suler, 2004) A study was carried out by the researcher titled "The Online Disinhibition Effect" in the year 2004. The study focuses how people say or do things in online space that they wouldn't actually say and do in the face-to-face world. They express themselves more openly. The study tries to understand what causes people to hide their feelings and behave differently that is online disinhibition. The study emphasizes on six factors that create psychological barriers and prevent people from expressing their true self. The six factors are: Dissociative Anonymity, Anonymity is one of the principle factors that encourages disinhibition effect as anonymity makes the person feel less vulnerable, they are not held accountable of what they do in their real lives. Thus they do not have to own their online behaviour or acknowledge their identity. Invisibility gives the people the courage to comment or write whatever they want knowing that the person is not physically present and do not know how the person is reacting to the comment made. As often it is noticed humans use eye-contact, facial expressions, body language to convey what they are feeling. But invisibility promotes disinhibition as there is no physical presence of the person while expressing any views. Asynchronicity, in messages and e-mails there is no immediate communication. The response to the message is not immediate.

Thus this inhibits people as one did not have to deal with someone's immediate response or reaction. Solipsistic Introjection, People sometimes feel that their mind is in the same wavelength as that with the mind of the online friend. Reading another person's message might be experienced as a voice within one's head, as if that person is psychologically present and influences the conversation. Thus this encourages disinhibition because talking with oneself feels safer than talking with others. Dissociative Imagination, the user creates an imaginary character and believes that there is an online world which is different from the real world, the rules of this online imaginary world does not apply to the real world and thus this magnifies disinhibition. Minimization of Status and Authority, the internet philosophy traditionally states that everyone is an equal that the significance of the internet is to share ideas and resources among people. The internet is designed with no centralized control and it is growing with no end to its potential for creating new environments, many of the inhabitants of internet see themselves as innovative, independent minded, explorers and pioneers. This atmosphere and this philosophy contribute to the minimizing of authority. The researcher concludes stating that the disinhibition effect releases deeper aspects of one's inner feelings, it unlocks the true needs, emotions, and self attributes that reside beneath surface personality presentations.

Methodology:

The researcher studied case studies on young women being trolled in India and foreign countries to understand the reasons of trolling, perspective of trolls and impact of trolling on these young women.

Case Studies from India.

The newly-elected Member of Parliament's Nusrat Jahan and Mimi get trolled for western attire:

Actor-turned-politicians Nusrat Jahan and Mimi Chakroborty who have been elected as Trinamol Congress Member of Parliament's from Bengal, received hatred on social media after they posted pictures of their first day at parliament. Both Nusrat and Mimi came elegantly dressed up in shirts, jeans and pants excited to start their political career. But both were subjected to relentless trolling on social media platforms not just for their appearances but also for taking pictures outside the parliament building. The trolls basically could not accept a women lawmaker wearing anything other than saree or khadi clothes which is a cliché and thus attacked the MP's. The comments from the trolls ranged from comparing both the female MP's to new elected MP of south Bengaluru Tejasvi Surya, the trolls reminded both the women to focus on development of the country and carry out work and not focusing on posing and makeup. The trolls also shamed both the women calling them disgrace and labelling them as pornstars. These trolls never seem to troll male politicians for their choice of clothing but would go to any extent to

slut-shame female politicians. The only criticism the MP's should receive is when they are not able to work for their constituency efficiently, not able to fulfil the promises made and failing to perform the assigned duties of a member of parliament (Times Of India T. , 2019).

UPSC topper gets trolled online for her disability; highlights the need for inclusivity:

The web is fast becoming a space for spreading negativity and bullying, which is impacting the mental health of those at the receiving end. Ira Singhal, who became the first woman to top the UPSC exams was subjected to not-so-good comments. Ira suffers from scoliosis, a spine-related disorder which impacts her mobility. She has 62% locomotor disability. The woman, who cleared the competitive exams in 2014 and has been posted in Delhi was subject to trolling online when somebody made fun of her disability and mocked her with a slang. Following the abuse, Ira shared screenshots of people name-calling her, adding that such incidents don't make life easy for people living with disabilities. "For anyone who thinks people with disabilities don't have to face anything, as the world is nice and kind - just sharing someone's comments from my Instagram account. A face of cyber-bullying. She also stressed on the nature of the comment, adding the dire need to start inclusive schools in the country and teach children the right values. "Unfortunately someone who cannot be bullied is being attempted to be bullied. And this is probably a person who wants to be a Civil Servant. This is why we

need Inclusive Schools and this is why we need our education system to focus on producing better human beings more than anything else," she wrote. However, displaying bravery and sharing some positivity, Ira said that such comments will not bog her down and such incidents of cyber-bullying do not get her down. He (The bully) "picked someone who cannot be bullied" as "being disabled- andha, behra, kubda, etc.- are not bad things. "Not blaming the troll entirely, Ira added that the problem needs to be eradicated from the roots. She said we need to make the world a kinder and more compassionate place to live and breathe in. (Times Of India T. , 2019).

Rakul Preet burns troll who slut-shamed her for wearing shorts:

"Rakul Preet, one of the most sought-after actresses in Tamil and Telugu, is toiling hard to make a mark in Bollywood. Her previous venture Aiyaary tanked at the box office. Now, she is shooting for De De Pyaar De with Ajay Devgn. Recently, the NGK actress was spotted getting out of a car wearing shorts. A nasty troll took to Twitter to shame her. But, Rakul gave him a taste of his own medicine. The troll, going by the name Bhagath wrote, "When she forgot to wear her pant after the session in the car (sic)" The particular comment received a lot of flak from Rakul's fans and they asked Bhagath to be sensitive and respect women.

The Dev actress decided to shut him down with a bold statement. Calling him a sick mind, she wrote, "I think your mother does a lot of sessions in the car so you are an expert!! Ask her to give u

some sense also besides these session details. Till the time people like this exist women can't be safe. Just debating about equality and safety won't help. Sick mind (sic)" Her fans, too, came in support of Rakul and slammed the guy who made the obnoxious comment. One Twitter user wrote, "Tight slipper shot to you brother from Rakulpreet (sic)"

After receiving a lot of comments against his nasty remark, Bhagath changed his Twitter profile from Public to Protected. But, Rakul's reply has earned her the wrath of self-proclaimed moralists. One Twitter user wrote, "When a celebrity crosses all boundaries and shows their dirty side out & open...How correct is it on Rakulpreet's part to pass such cheap remarks about a MOTHER just because her son is behaving in vulgar manner Giving gyaan on women safety by abusing a woman (sic)".Another Twitterati wrote, "When I first saw his tweet it's too vulgar and abusive but after seeing ur reply felt like u deserve this. (sic)". Unable to bear the brunt for teaching her troll a lesson, Rakul once again made a point that she made such a remark to make him feel what she felt. Her tweet reads, "Well for people questioning my ethics why don't you speak up when women are objectified and I've chosen my words only to make such #sickminds realise that they have a family too and how would they feel if the same is done to them! I am sure his mother would give him a slap too (sic)". This shows how trolls are moral policing young women of what to wear and what not". (Janani, 2019)

This Muslim Woman Was Hit With 4 FIRs, Rape Threats for Writing Poetry in Her Mother Tongue:

Sultana was 18 when she first heard the word 'miya' being used as an insult. She had just moved to Guwahati from her village in lower Assam, and had stepped out with a group of girls from her hostel when they spotted a thin, dishevelled rickshaw-puller coming their way. As the man stopped near them, the teenage girls shook their heads vehemently, motioning him to move ahead even though they needed a ride. Then one of them rolled her eyes and said, "I knew he was a miya when I saw him coming." The others laughed.

"I still remember the sound of the word, the laughter and my silence," said Sultana, now a 28-year-old doctoral student in Gauhati University. When, in 2016, she wrote her first poem in the dialect she spoke at home, she felt shaken and raw, like she had just had a painful conversation she had been putting off for way too long.

After she uploaded 'I'm Miya', written in the Miya dialect, people wrote to her on Facebook expressing how necessary and important her writing was. Someone even said, "May your pen never rest." But three years later, Sultana's poems have been dug up on social media and her inbox flooded with threats and insults. She has also had four police complaints lodged against her. In 2016, poet Hafeez Ahmed was the first to write a poem in the Miya dialect—a loose translation of the title would be "Write Down, I Am a Miya"—and upload it on Facebook. And

the first time Sultana read poetry in the Miya dialect, she felt like the words were painting pictures in front of her. "I could see the tears in the eyes of the men the words spoke about, I could see them struggling to cope with the oppression and poverty they face," she said.

It took her some time to realise that while she spoke many languages; English, Hindi, Assamese Miya was the language she *felt* in.

Sultana's first poems, therefore, was about an average poor migrant Muslim's desperation in to be counted as an Assamese. "They have given up their mother tongue, they gave up their culture to try to fit in. *'Mother, you don't trust me, because I have a beard, I wear a lungi, I am distraught from trying to prove my identity to you, yet, despite tolerating thousands of insults, pain and deprivation, I will stay say that you're the one I love'* — I wrote this to capture their cries of desperation, to be accepted even after being born here like any other Assamese," Sultana said. On 17 June, a message landed on her inbox, calling her a prostitute and asking how much it would cost to 'have a night with her'. The man, called Manash, did not try to hide his identity and messaged Sultana from a profile which he seemed to be using to post regular content and interact with friends and family. When Sultana did not respond, he followed up with more messages, asking her to go to Pakistan and taking a dig at 'beef-eating Muslims'.

While most of the miya poets were getting trolled, being the only woman miya poet of the group meant Sultana received a special kind of abuse.

She was sent graphic descriptions of how 'miya' men must be masturbating at women like her, long messages about the alleged sexual excesses of her community, accusations that she probably wants '40 children', and assertions that miyas are rapists who should be cut up in public. And, unsurprisingly, multiple rape threats. Once Sultana changed the privacy settings of her Facebook profile and the men couldn't comment on her posts, she received messages saying that they wanted to write things about "her vagina, nipples" on the posts. They dared her to change the privacy settings.

One man wrote, "We are so disgusted by you that we won't come near miya girls even if they stood naked in front of us." "I thought of reporting them but how many will I report? I am one person," she said. In some of the screenshots Sultana shared with *HuffPost India*, women also participated in degrading conversations about her and when the men wondered who she was, some of them posted links to her Facebook profile in the comment's threads.

One of Sultana's friends, a Hindu Assamese woman, who defended miya poets on Facebook, had to deal with torrents of men commenting on the nature of her relationship with the male miya poets, each conversation sexually coloured and obscene. Sultana's WhatsApp inbox also started getting flooded with threatening messages.

"I work and study in Guwahati University. Many people have my number, it's not difficult to get it," she said.The messages were so graphic and disturbing that Sultana was forced to switch off her phone. When this correspondent tried to get in touch with her two weeks ago, her brother informed *HuffPost India* that she had stopped using the phone because it was flooded with threatening, abusive messages. Even her family could only get in touch with her by calling people around her—friends when she was at university, relatives when she was visiting their homes. "It became unbearable and honestly, the slew of obscene messages made me feel deep shame. Every time my phone buzzed, I froze, thinking someone will message me asking for sex or threatening to rape me," she said. Sultana finally got bail in all the three FIRs filed against her, and decided that she would give her parents some idea of what was happening to her,"I stay in Guwahati and both my parents are old and suffer from high blood pressure. If my mother heard about a FIR, she would die," she said. (Dasgupta, 2019)

Case Studies From all over the World.

The misogynist trolls attacking Katie Bouman are the tip of the trashpile:

The researcher Dr Katie Bouman played a leading role in taking the first photograph of a black hole. A photo of the 29-year-old Bouman taken the moment the photo was processed shows her with her hands clasped in front of her mouth, looking at the camera with a mix of shock and excitement. It went viral – both a testament to the ground-breaking work itself and a moment of victory for women in the sciences, whose contributions have long been ignored, downplayed and erased. Trolls created fake social media accounts impersonating Bouman. They questioned her contribution to the project. When she said that she was part of a team who all worked hard to make the photo happen, they dug in deeper, suggesting she was only getting public attention because she was a woman, when men did all the real work. Unfortunately, this is par for the course for women on the internet. Or women in politics. Or women on television. Or women who become prominent in any way, even if they are, like Katie Bouman, private citizens who did something truly amazing.

Highlighting these attacks is crucial, if only to show the depth and degree of virulent misogyny. Too many women who have come into the public eye for any reason – or even women who are not in the public eye but spend time in online social spaces – know the feeling of being harassed, belittled, threatened and demeaned. Too many women have, as a result, piped down, shut up or bowed out. Untold numbers more never jump into the ring in the first place, keeping their voices down, their work quiet and their successes private. Women see how other women are treated when we shine or succeed – how quickly we are cut down, how insults snowball into threats – and are intimidated. I never have a good answer, except to say that the internet can be a rough place for women, and to the extent you can ignore it or even work to change misogynist online culture, the

better. But "ignore the bullies" is deeply unsatisfying and profoundly unhelpful advice. Katie Bouman probably knows that. I don't know how much time she spent online before this incident (she's a computer scientist, so maybe quite a bit), but no doubt it has been jarring. But it goes beyond Bouman herself. Just as Bouman's success was an inspiration to young women and girls in the sciences, the very public attacks on her work as a corollary warning. And that's how we should understand this: not just as one of the ugliest forms of misogyny rearing its head, but as a pervasive, systematic part of a broader system that undermines women's success and recognition at every level.

Attacks from sexist trolls are overwhelming and destabilizing. But far worse is the slow drip of sexism that keeps women from achieving their full potential for power, success and achievement every single day. (Filipovic, 2019)

Jesy Nelson Discusses Body Positivity After Viewing Herself As 'The Fat One' In Little Mix:

Little Mix singer Jesy Nelson has opened up about body positivity after years of viewing herself as "the fat one" in the music group. Earlier this year, the singer revealed that she would be opening up about her struggles with mental health in a new BBC Three documentary. The documentary, which is titled *Jesy Nelson: My Story* and is yet to be given a release date, will explore how social media trolling and body-shaming comments the performer

received online took an emotional and psychological toll on the 27-year-old musician. On Tuesday, the singer posted a photograph of herself on Instagram and opened about how she "hated" herself as a result of the abuse she has received online since joining the band in 2011. "Six months ago this girl was someone I just wanted to forget," she captioned the image, adding that she wanted to erase herself from the public's mind. "I didn't see her as Jesy I saw her as 'the fat one from Little Mix'," the singer continued. "Up until now I hated her not because she'd ever done anything bad but because I was made to hate her by endless amounts of trolling." The star, who has over 5.4m Instagram followers, explained that working on her documentary has helped her learn self-acceptance. "I refused to speak about how I was feeling for so long," Nelson added. "I was embarrassed and scared to. But I was so wrong to feel that way."

"As a young female in a successful girl band where intense scrutiny from the public is the norm, Jesy offers a unique perspective on the impact social media can have on an individual and their mental health," Campbell stated. "It promises to be an eye-opening watch, full of universal themes which will no doubt resonate with our audience." (Malley, 2019)

Sarah Hyland was 'broken' by Twitter trolls:

Modern Family actress Sarah Hyland couldn't escape online trolls, even amidst a family tragedy. In December 2018, the star revealed that her teenage cousin, Trevor, had been killed by a drunk driver

in a car accident. She asked for donations on GoFundMe to help cover funeral costs and medical expenses as her uncle, who was also injured in the accident, awaited more surgery. The internet did not take kindly to a sitcom star asking for money to help her family. According to BuzzFeed, Twitter users complained that the cost of a funeral would be nothing for Hyland, who has an estimated $14 million net worth and made at least $100,000 per episode on her hit ABC show, according to Forbes. Others were confused about why the actress wasn't personally bankrolling her family members during their time of need instead of begging for donations. One person pointed out that Hyland only donated $1,000. Hyland responded by asking those who had "negative thoughts or opinions" to "keep them to themselves." Within 24 hours, Hyland felt so devastated by the avalanche of online animosity that she temporarily quit the internet. "You guys finally did it. Your horrible negative ignorant words have broken me. Happy? Staying offline for a while," she tweeted. On the plus side, that GoFundMe raised about $45,000. (Loveland, 2019)

Internet trolls and Demogorgons can't take down Millie Bobby Brown:

If you thought you had it bad in middle school, at least you probably weren't being trashed by thousands of online trolls who spread rumours about you being racist and homophobic purely for the purpose of taking you down. Eleven apparently has a lot more to worry about than the Demogorgon in Stranger Things,

which is precisely the reason actress Millie Bobby Brown left Twitter.

According to CNN, the hate campaign started when someone claimed the actress "refused to take a picture" with a fan unless she "removed her hijab." The troll alleged that Brown pulled the hijab off the woman's head. There's no evidence that the then-14-year-old star did any such thing, but nevertheless, started trending on Twitter, and trolls used the hashtag to invent stories that linked the teen to homophobia too. Forget the fact that Brown has publicly supported GLAAD's Together movement. The star deleted her Twitter account amidst the flurry of fake news and spoke up about bullying during a pre-recorded acceptance speech at the MTV Movie and TV Awards. "If you don't have anything nice to say, just don't say it," Brown said. "There should be no space in this world for bullying, and I'm not going to tolerate it, and neither should any of you." (Loveland, 2019).

Conclusion:

Through the case studies the researcher could learn how the gender plays a very important role in young women being trolled both in India and other foreign countries. The trolls attack the clothing, question the achievement, appearances, skin colour and body shame the women. The trolls' moral police the women of what is right for them and also showcase that doing so they are protecting the culture and heritage of the country. Personal attacks are made on the young women when the trolls do not agree with what is being stated by the women it could be strong political opinions by the

women. The trolls use abusive, violent and obscene language to put forth their views oozing out hatred for the women. There is a clear sign of misogyny and sexism in the comments. Often due to this type of brutal trolling online spaces has often been viewed as unsafe space for women and thus subjecting women to refrain from going online, deleting their accounts, causing damage to their levels of self-esteem, self-acceptance, lower their self-confidence, making the women feel guilty of her identity, individuality and thus leading them into mental health issues such as depression, panic attacks, stress, anxiety etc. Thus it is important to understand online trolling is a serious issue with 2.77 billion people using various social media. Today social media platforms being widely used by people to connect to different people, to express about their lives, what they're feeling. It is important to have a safe and secure online space for both women and men to express themselves without being attacked

Suggestions:

As most of the trolling happens on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter etc. It is important that all these social media platforms have stricter community standards, mechanisms that check these community standards are properly implemented. As often it is seen a troll's comment is screenshotted and then promoted in various humour pages and troll is appreciated or praised for the way she/he has mocked the person. The trolls on Facebook, Instagram take up jokes on disability promote sexist and casteist jokes for their meme pages and never violates the community standards in fact people share these memes and acknowledge the troll for the comment or the meme created and thus It is important to understand trolling is seen as virtual bullying. It is important to promote campaigns with not just online campaigns but putting forth these campaigns in schools, colleges that create awareness regarding trolls, trolling and the impact of being trolled. It is important to understand the right to freedom of speech and expression can not be imposed to curtail someone else's right to choice and liberty. The laws need to explicitly state the word 'internet' in their acts and also scrutinize trolls and create platforms such that people feel free to report cybercrimes.

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