Social Media, Nature and Culture of Violence against Women

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Introduction

The Feminist Movement across the globe has strived hard to mitigate unequal gap between men and women in society. Till date the women organizations are watchful on any discriminatory practice against women or girls in general at any level. However, with the evolution of Information Communication Technology a new issue seems to be emerging i.e. women and girls are deliberately victimized on cyber platform. This is leading to new sociological, psychological issues that requires a conscious consideration among academicians and an awareness about dos and don'ts of social media. In order to understand the problems and concerns of women and girl who are led to face problems on online platform, it is necessary to deliberate over the use of Social Media and women as end user of it.

The Nature and Culture of Social Media

Social media is significant tool for communication because of its ubiquity and interactivity. Its characteristics such 'Free web space, Unique web address, Possibility of building profiles, Real time content upload facility, Feedback and Time stamp'[1] make more unique and user friendly to the extent that even a kid can operate an application on social media.

Given the ubiquitous and interactive nature it is playing major role in boosting our social interaction as it has following features:

Communicative and Connecting Nature:

Social media allows us to communicate. It is one of the most effective communication tools in the history of communication. With the more interactive technology involved in this

form of communication, the feel through this way of communication is rather very lively and gives a feel of face to face communication. Social media is not only the media of extroverts, but also of introverts. They have the freedom of communicating at an ease without directly facing the responder, unlike in face to face communication or the so called interpersonal communication.

Collaborative

Its collaborative nature allows chats, blogging and hangouts of google talk etc. One person initiates the communication by his/her posts with or without the support of multimedia content and it is circulated among a closed or open group of Netizens. People keep on adding the comments to the post which further processes the communication. The comments can be considered as the feedback to make the conversation a dynamic one. The entire process turns to be innovative and collaborative.

Engaging:

Every employee of the organization can be made equally responsible by engaging them in some or other way. Such a process not only brings up their morals high, but also paves them a way to feel as part of the team and to come out with more innovate ideas, to improve the overall performance of the organization, at any given time. It happens so because, when people are engaged, they feel respected and valued. As a result, they ponder the most, deliver extra, and even work with a heightened strength. The ultimate result is the great productivity from the employees; it happens because of the happiness of the employees.

Entertaining:

Social media is the new media that offers the audience a great entertainment. It enables the user to get all sorts of multimedia content, thereby dispelling all the limitations which otherwise are possessed by each of the traditional media. It has all good qualities of each and every conventional media embedded in it and more advanced features added to it.[2]

Problems Created by Social Media for Women and Girls

Given the nature of social media instead of adding to the boon of empowerment of women, it is adversely affecting the wellbeing. Gender bias emerging as a global problem with serious implications for societies and economies. The statistics pose risks to the peace and prosperity for gender equality and the empowerment of women as key to its achievement. Every now and then in news, as girl after girl and woman after woman, has come forward to expose physical and verbal attacks on them: teenage girls driven to suicide by online trolling; an airline passenger using her cell phone to record and report physical and sexual harassment from a male co-passenger; an actress publicly responding to targeted online hate speech against her; a former Major League Baseball pitcher using doxing to identify people responsible for "Twitter troll" posts with obscene, sexually explicit comments about his teenage daughter.

A current Twitter hashtag shows just how rough it is being a woman on the Internet in North America. Women of the Global South also experience various acts of cyber violence against women but these are usually less well-publicized.

High profile incidences attract public attention and tort law responses: a Twitter troll was jailed in September 2014 and a porn site operator sentenced to 18 years in in prison in February 20156. One person was suspended from his community college, and another lost a part-time job with the New York Yankees when the doxing case involving a former Major League Baseball pitcher was made public. In May 2015, a Toronto sports reporter was verbally assaulted while broadcasting live at a professional soccer league game. Following public outrage, the main aggressor lost his high paying job at a public corporation.

The sports team also banned four of the offenders from the stadium. Responses, however, have yet to fully address the many degrees and impact of violence, trauma and loss that women, girls and children are routinely exposed to and that go unreported. It is a problem of pandemic proportion when research asserts that one in three women will have experienced a form of violence in her lifetime. Cyber violence could significantly increase this staggering number, as reports suggest that 73% of women have already been exposed to or have experienced some form of online violence in what must still be considered a relatively new and growing technology.

The sheer volume of cyber violence has severe social and economic implications for women and girls. Threats of rape, death, and stalking put a premium on the emotional bandwidth and put a stress on financial resources (in terms of legal fees, online protection services, and missed wages, among others). The direct and indirect costs to societies and economies are also significant, as needs for health care, judicial and social services rise and productivity goes down with the sense of peace and security required for business to thrive. yber violence can also have adverse impact on the exercise of and advocacy for free speech and other human rights. Perpetrators of violence are rarely held accountable in part due to the relatively low capacity to prosecute offenders.

Societal barriers, the limitations of legal recourse and other factors hamper access to justice for many women, particularly for girls and women living in poverty. This situation exacerbates already low reporting levels and spiraling a vicious cycle. In 1995 less than 1 per cent of the world population was connected to the Internet. That number has grown to 40 per cent, with over three billion unique Internet users. While women are about 25 per cent less likely to have access today, Intel's 2013 report, Women and the Web, estimates 450 million new female Internet users could come online within the next three years. Another report on women's access to and use of mobile technology shows a growing gender "use" gap which is partly attributable to women's concerns over privacy and security.

Solutions

Given the ubiquity of the Internet and its wide-ranging impact, particularly on the younger generation, it becomes imperative to ensure it as a safe place for both current and future generations. The respect for and security of girls and women must at all times be front and center of those in charge of producing and providing the content, technical backbone and enabling environment of our digital society. Failure to do so will clip the potential of the Internet as an engine for gender equality and women's empowerment. The increasing spread of the Internet frames the urgency for effective legal and social controls on attitudes and criminal behavior online. As this paper goes to print, Ellen Pao, former CEO of the online forum Reddit expressed grave concerns about the tensions between balancing freedom of expression with privacy and

protection of Internet users. Rigorous oversight and enforcement of rules banning cyber violence against women on the Internet is going to be a condition sine qua non if it is to become a safe, respectful and empowering space for women and girls, and by extension, for boys and men. Governments, regulators, "There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable. "United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (2008) businesses and everyday netizens alike need to demand and act on the basic principle that an unsafe Internet arena will mean that women will frequent the Internet less freely, with costly societal and economic implications for all.

Sensitization, Safety and Sanctions: a way forward

The first imperative in eliminating cyber violence is prevention. Changing social attitudes and norms is the first step to shifting the way online abuse is understood as a serious challenge. Violence is not new, but cyber violence is, and the public needs to recognize this and address it as a priority issue. Sensitization to cyber violence must include educating the next generation of ICT users, both boys and girls, through their parents, teachers and wider communities, as well as police authorities and the justice systems.

The second imperative is to put in place and implement safeguards to secure safe online spaces. Over the years, traditional violence against women's safety measures have evolved to include women's shelters, crisis centres, help lines and education. In light of the new cyber VAWG challenge, the digital world also urgently requires safety measures to keep up with a rapidly evolving Internet. This will necessarily require resources, attention and active participation of industry (digital gatekeepers), civil society and governments.

Third in this multi-level approach to addressing cyber violence are sanctions, which address laws as well as the will and ability of the courts and legal systems to enforce compliance and punitive consequences for perpetrators.

Establishing necessary laws is a starting goal; the next steps should ensure effective implementation. Sanctions however cannot on their own accord, define or set societal norms, or deter unlawful activity, or remedy injuries. The challenge requires a broad-based societal action,

engaging all stakeholders. For this reason, while part of the solution, a mere legal reform agenda alone centered on perpetrators or abusers would be limited in both its reach and impact. ree speech is a fundamental right, and its preservation requires vigilance by everyone. Free speech online requires the vigilance particularly of those who use the Internet. Some suggest that the establishment of a Cyber Civil Rights Initiative through international collaboration is necessary to ensure a safe Internet.

Others still stress that international human rights principles already provide the underpinning for a safe Internet, with the Human Rights Council's recognition that human rights apply offline as well as online. International and national laws and trans-national collaborative alliances are slowly evolving to address common global concerns of cyber violence, but if not dealt with commensurate to the challenge, crimes committed are likely to continue to increase, as more of the world violence goes online and these technologies become more and more a part of everyday life.

Each of the above imperatives of sensitization, safeguards and sanctions supports the others, and will need consistent, collaborative action at many levels. Failure to address and solve cyber violence could significantly impede the digital inclusion of women everywhere, putting women at increasing disadvantage for being excluded from enjoying the benefits of ICTs and the Internet. "Our work to eliminate violence against women is central to our commitment to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, both of which are integral to sustainable development." Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator, Statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (2014).

Conclusion

We might broadly agree that society's failure to address gender-based violence and crimes is symptomatic of a wider social failure to respect and honor each other regardless of sex, age, creed or race. "Culture is the sphere where we socialize ourselves – and the Internet- global in its reach, is a dimension of that sphere". As the Internet evolves and social media and networking tools increasingly become an intrinsic part of people's lives around the globe, attitudes and norms that contribute to cyber violence must be addressed with urgency. A

collective global effort, led by the United Nations system, has put in place the pillars for a 21st entury sustainable development paradigm. The Sustainable Development Goalsestablishing the global development priorities for the next 15 years includes a goal on gender equality, which places women's access to technology for their empowerment as one of the core indicators for progress. For this to be realized, all stakeholders must take accelerated actions to ensure a safer, more secure Internet for present and future generations – one without endemic violence against women.

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