The Gendered Discourse of Sensuality, Sensibility and Digital Murals: The Curious Case of Internet 'Social' Influencers

Dr. Oly Roy

Previously Associate Professor, Bennett University, Greater Noida, India

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Abstract

Digital platforms are a desideratum that facilitates exchange of services, goods and information. It includes a broad range of platforms: Social Media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn), E-commerce, Service and Knowledge platforms and also content sharing platforms. Given the importance of it, it has a profound impact on our daily chores (knowingly or unknowingly), decisions and mind set. It has a dark side to it as well. Digital platforms and technologies not only wield cultural influence but also expedite the creation of social hierarchy. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has recognised the risks and challenges of digital technologies. Social media platforms and other digital murals have become a medium of self-expression, of sexuality, sensuality, morality, opinions and agendas. This paper mainly focuses at the interplay of social media platforms, sexuality and intricate issues of gender justice with an intersectional approach. The study specifically analyse the case of 'Social Influencers' to navigate the impact of the virtual world.

Keywords: *Gender; Sexuality; Sensuality; Social Media; Social Influencers*

1. Introduction

Digital platforms have a profound impact on our thinking process and lives. It is no longer a medium to stay connected, but in recent years it has become a need to make new connections, networking, learn, display skills, monetising on it and most importantly facilitating our thinking and mind set. It has now developed into a marketing platform as well. The main aim of such avenues is to reach out to populaces on a global scale. It was a journey that reached its peak through the introduction of Facebook and Twitter, limited in its usage though. But now individuals spend hours scrolling and posting on digital portals, each community having its own targeted audience – some appeal to people to work on their lifestyle, eating habits, hair and skin care, educating on technology and spirituality, political views and other types of outlooks and opinions which has social consequences. These platforms can be useful to spread information that might be beneficial to the targeted audience, but the recent trend has displayed an overflow of misinformation that has been damaging – causing division, privacy invasion, personal income losses, and distrust and affecting mental health as well.

Before we delve into the dynamics of the paper it is crucial to understand the dynamics of various digital murals.

2. Exploring Digital Platforms

"...platforms can be described as digital resources that enable efficient interactions between external producers, content providers, developers, and consumers that lead to value creation from (online or even offline) trade."(Parker, Petropoulos, Bruegel, 2020, pp2) Considering the present situation, it has been rightly said, "Platforms are at the core of the digital economy." (Fay, 2019) The range of digital platforms can be called colossal. It includes social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), OTT ("over-the-top") platforms, e-commerce (Amazon, Etsy and eBay), content creation (YouTube and Spotify), business collaborations, knowledge, learning, gaming platforms, financial platforms,

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transportation and travel platforms etc. Digital platform users though in most cases like Facebook and Instagram use them free of cost, but such platforms "monetise their operations by charging advertisers a price per user interaction that is realised through a generalised k-th price auction for the allocation of k advertising slots per search keyword." (Parker, Petropoulos, Bruegel, 2020, pp2) In the other category, 'Marketplaces' platforms "facilitate the matching between third parties in an efficient way through data collection, analytics, and techniques that reveal their users' preferences."(Parker, Petropoulos, Bruegel, 2020, pp2) Many digital platforms are created at a very low cost and which is 'less proportional' to the number of users' and has the ability to expand their market and reach new users at a minimum cost. Other instruments like, machine learning and artificial intelligence has facilitated this process. This has also encouraged firms to invest in unexplored domains.

The 2019 UK Report of the Digital Competition Expert Panel, by combining data from different sources (eg StatCounter, Comscore, Plum Consulting) concludes that concentration is particularly prominent in the following digital markets: ."(Parker, Petropoulos, Bruegel, 2020, pp8)

- Online search, which is dominated by Google, with some competition from Microsoft Bing,
- Social media, dominated by Facebook and the services its owns, with some competition from Twitter and Snapchat,
- Digital advertising, dominated by Google and Facebook,
- Mobile app downloads, which is a duopoly between Apple and Google,
- Commerce through online marketplaces, where Amazon is a dominant platform, with some competition from eBay.

According to market intelligence provider, International Data Corporation, digital transformation spending should reach $3.9 trillion by 2027. (Gibson, 2024) On the other side, there are apprehensions about 'market boundaries' and a 'good objective measure of quality in digital markets'. (Gibson, 2025, pp5) Scholars have also discussed about harmful impacts, such as excessive prices, inferior quality and reduced incentives for innovation. (Gibson, 2025, pp5)

As far as digital media is concerned, most of our days begin with opening of at least one digital media platform to keep us 'updated' and 'upgraded'. Digital spaces have both advantages and disadvantages. With the combination and collaboration of smartphones and other digital devices with internet has provided access to various categories of information at our fingertips. One can develop and learn new skills from the comfort of their home. It also aids in maintaining constant connection and communication and the recent pandemic era has displayed the need to remain connected. Such platforms have also expedited the process of establishing business varying from small to large setups as it provides access to a vast audience at a minimum or no cost.

Even though digital spaces have been instrumental in keeping us updated, but it has led to addiction, for example 'doom scrolling' the Instagram and Facebook. It has psychological effects including anxiety and depression to the extent that people feel lost or hardly aware of what to do with their time if they do not have access to Internet. It has also led to spread of misinformation and fake news in recent years resulting in misguiding people, chaotic and panic situation and even loss of lives. Apart from adults, such resources have become easily accessible to small children and teenagers resulting in health and life hazards. It can even affect their social skills and emotional development.

In *UNICEF Policy Brief 4: Digital Technologies, Child Rights and Well Being* have recognised the risks and challenges that digital technologies involve for children and young people. Articles 13, 15, 17, 19, 34, 35, 36, 37(a) of the Convention on the *Rights of the Child* are relevant as far as digital technologies are concerned. The Policy Brief also mentions the risks that cyber spaces encapsulate – cyber bullying, exposure to unwanted material, misinformation and sexual exploitation. (UNICEF, 2024) It also raises concern about harmful contents. According to 2020 EU (European Union) Kids Online survey, an average of 4 per cent of children aged 12-16 had experienced unwanted sexual requests at least once a month and a further 13 per cent a few times in the past year. This experience was more common for girls (19 per cent) than boys (14 per cent). (UN Women) Moreover children have also faced various forms of data misuse and hate messages that aim a particular group or community.

This paper would mainly focus at the interplay of various social media platforms, sexuality and intricate issues of gender justice. Social media has become an inexplicable part of our lives, it is not only a medium for communication, networking and connection, display of our moments and thoughts, but is also a platform for validation, propagating and navigating. It can have both positive and negative impact based on how and for what purpose it would be used for, for example UN Women has been upholding the use of media, especially social media, as a powerful tool to advocate for eradication of violence against women and promote gender equality.

The following online initiatives can be mentioned that aimed at ending gender disparity (UN Women):

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- Eastern Campus, a PR firm, implemented a project involving young university men in the prevention of violence against women through social media and campus-based activities in 2011. The "Zero-violence, let's do it together 17-MAN" online campaign involved over 49,000 followers on various Weibo sites. More than 3,500 signatures were collected from young population both online and on campus during the EVAW Day campaign(UN Women);
- UN Women supported the Hong Kong-based NGO Half to Sky to develop two Public Service Announcements (PSA, as part of a Chinese "Ring the Bell" campaign. After the successful Ring the Bell campaign in India, the PSAs invigorated the public to knock on a neighbour's door when they overhear domestic violence in order to stop the violence "with a face-saving excuse";(UN Women);
- UN Women also co-hosted with NetEase.com, one of China's most popular websites, the 2010 and 2011 Women's Media Award Ceremonies. The 2010 awards were awarded to the ten most gender-sensitive TV commercials for the way they challenged society's gender stereotypes mindset of what 'women' and 'men' should be like. The 2011 awards went to 10 outstanding women who made the news that year for their contributions to society and for being positive role models for young women and girls in China.(UN Women)

There is a flip side of the coin. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasized increasing women's participation in decision-making and promoting a balanced portrayal of women in the media. (Neelam, 2024) But there also grave concerns regarding their safety and security – few examples would be the rise of AI-generated deep fake images of women or threatening and hate comments. A report, ***Entitled Women, Peace and Digital (In)Security in South-East Asia – Reflections on Diverse Experiences in the Digital Sphere*** "examines technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), cyber-facilitated trafficking in women and other aspects of the digital landscape…" (UN Women, 2024) The report proposes developing policies to deal misogynistic content on digital platforms which includes gendered hate speech and violent and extremist messaging. It also suggests improved accountability mechanisms across public and private sectors which are in compliance with countries' legislative frameworks and their international commitments towards advancing and establishing women's leadership, peace and security, and ending all forms of violence against women and girls. (UN Women, 2024)

3. Sensuality, Sexuality and Social Media

Intersectionality plays an important role as far as understanding the complexities of digital narratives are concerned.

Sensuality and sexuality forms a part of one's identity. It can be defined as,

Relating to the gratification of the senses or the indulgence of appetite. Relating to, characterized by, or involving enjoyment derived from the senses; physically enjoyable or pleasurable.

One also has to keep in mind that though sensuality and sexuality are related, they are not interchangeable. It is awareness, acceptance of one's own body. Sensuality might be /might not be sexual and forms a part of self-expression. The expression of one's sensuality is often influenced by culture and society they belong to, it is often related to the definition of femininity and beauty. The understanding of femininity and beauty is mostly linked to youth, while middle aged women or above are often not considered. Knowingly or unknowingly individuals across genders accept this social conditioning that gravely impacts their social, private, sexual life including their self-expression. For instance, the same society permits men of the same age to act according to their age, but regards them as being more striking as they age. There is evidence that as most women age, they stop regarding themselves as attractive, but become preoccupied with supposedly more important social rather than sexual roles. They tend to change their self-image to asexual beings in agreement with societal expectations, once they become mothers and grandmothers, which can negatively affect their expression of sensuality. (Lawal, Duma, 2023)

A formidable Indian female actor, Neena Gupta was trolled on Instagram for supposedly not conforming to the way a middle aged or above should be dressing. The 'trollers' are a reflection of the society and displays that any kind of transgression would not go unnoticed and would be criticised or punished through use of sharp words.

Social media platforms and other digital murals have become a medium of self-expression, of sexuality, sensuality, morality, opinions and agendas. Social networking sites can provide a safe space for an individual struggling with their sexuality by creating a supporting community through the process of social contagion, but on the other hand hate comments can affect mental health leading to anxiety, depression and self-doubt. Such platforms if used in a correct manner can help overcoming subjects that are stigmatised, but being exposed to explicit sexual media without a proper understanding and guidance can have adverse effects on both children and adults.

4. The Digital Anomaly

Each social media platforms have their own set of rules that ensures a standard of behaviour expected from their users. Such community guidelines categorises contents as 'accepted' and 'unaccepted'. It is meant to combat sexually explicit and violent content along with spam, discrimination, child sexual abuse material, harassment and spread of misinformation. Such guidelines also are meant to control the narrative of the contents that would be created in such platforms.

Instagram states in its community guidelines that it promotes authenticity and aims to be a safe place for 'inspiration' and 'expression' and does not support spamming people and 'nudity'. As far as 'nudity' is concerned, there are exceptions, but with certain conditions and context applied. Instagram further mentions that it upholds diversity as far as cultures, ages and beliefs are concerned. (Meta, Community Standards, https://help.instagram.com/477434105621119>)

For safety purposes it also does not allow certain explicit contents and behaviour. Facebook follows the same community guidelines. Youtube community guidelines are quite expansive, it has categorised them into the following (Rules and policies, Community Guidelines, Youtubehttps://www.youtube.com/intl/ALL_in/howyoutubeworks/policies/community-guidelines/):

- Spam and deceptive practices (Fake engagement, Impersonation, External links Spam, deceptive practices and scams, Playlists, Additional policies)
- Sensitive content (Child safety, Thumbnails, Nudity and sexual content, Suicide and self-harm, vulgar language)
- Violent or dangerous content (Harassment and cyber bullying, Harmful or dangerous content, Hate speech, violent criminal organisations, Violent or graphic content)
- Regulated goods (Firearms, Sale of illegal or regulated goods or services)
- Misinformation (Misinformation, Elections misinformation, Medical misinformation)

The main purpose of the above community guidelines is to "safety of our creators, viewers, and partners is our highest priority." It does not allow sexually explicit and violent content in its platform. If one violates their guidelines, it will lead to the removal of such content/video/link. (Rules and policies, Community Guidelines, Youtubehttps://www.youtube.com/intl/ALL_in/howyoutubeworks/policies/community-guidelines/)

While social media platforms provides community guidelines regarding nudity of sexually explicit content, but it is quite unclear about specification of the parameters on the basis of which such guidelines have been framed (though this understanding excludes the category of adolescents).

Earlier this year, Meta announced "sweeping" changes in its policy – users are now allowed to refer to "women as household objects or property" or "transgender or non-binary people as 'it'". Moreover, Meta will allow "allegations of mental illness or abnormality when based on gender or sexual orientation, given political and religious discourse about 'transgenderism' and homosexuality." It also announced to remove restrictions on certain issues like immigration, gender identity in order to facilitate "free expression".

While certain contents displayed at OTT platforms have faced legal issues for being sexually explicit, such platforms have the option of parental control as well and how to create profile for kids.

Within the realm of social media platforms, apart from general users, there are "influencers" as well. They have changed the understanding of whom and what makes one a "celebrity." Such influencers have a great impact on the consumer making decision process. They have turned out to be our virtual "friends", "mentors" and "role models". But now we have a new trend wherein there are set of 'de-influencers' that bursts the misinformation shared by certain influencers. Such influencers might not have complete knowledge or have not specialised in the subjects or categories that they have might built their profile on. As the term "influencer" suggests, their main aim and purpose is to influence. The influencer is "a person with the ability to influence potential buyers of a product or service by promoting or recommending the items on social media" or "a person who has become well-known through use of the internet and social media, and uses celebrity to endorse, promote, or generate interest in specific products, brands, etc., often for payment."(Oxford English Dictionary)

Social influencers are those who have established themselves as a brand and create content that would be entertaining or informative or both. Another criterion would be that they have a large number of followers and then there would be followers trying to emulate such social influencers. Thus, they can be a source of inspiration or otherwise. Every social influencer has their own niche and purpose.

Social influencers and their content can be a medium to break stereotypical beliefs, taboos and practices surrounding the narrative of sexuality and sensuality. The list of influencers in India is quite extensive, Prajakta Koli, Kusha Kapila, Dolly Singh, Komal Pandey, Kritika Khurana, Tanya Khanijow, Bhuvan Bam, Aashna Hegde, Ashish Chanchlani, Siddharth Batra, Nancy Tyagi, Malvika Sitlani, Bani J, Ankur Warikoo, Ranveer Allahbadia, Ankush Bahuguna (to name a few).

The influencers have brought about a new perspective with their content, some has talked and spread awareness as to how the concept of skincare and make up is related to women only, while others have helped people to accept their body and maintain a healthy lifestyle. One needs a special mention here, Uorfi Javed, who has successfully established herself as a personal brand despite all odds. The Telegraph praising her commented,

"Uorfi goes to great lengths to flaunt her creativity and courage in her wardrobe choices. From trying out all kinds of bold new cuts to making wearable from wire, safety pins, gunny bags and her own pictures, she is popular – and also the subject of online trolling – for her fashion statements. It looks like a lot of thought goes into coming up with looks that will make heads turn, but her brave fashion has made her who she is today." (Toppo, 2022, What makes social media influencer Uorfi Javed so popular?, *The Telegraph*)

Uorfi and paparazzi shares a special relation. It is because of them, her boldness, creativity and confidence that she has been able to climb up the ladder to success. But this success did not come easy to her. Her boldness and unique creativity including DIY (Do it yourself) dresses were not the only issues, but acceptance from celebrities across industries was difficult to attain. She has been looked down by many for her choices and people have even gone to the extent of labelling her a 'slut'. Uorfi Javed did not lose any opportunity to take a stand for herself that reflects the misogyny and hypocrisy that exists in our society. Nothing stopped her from calling out 'established celebrities' for their comments, the list includes Ameesha Patel, Chetan Bhagat. She has also been open about her personal and professional struggles. Receiving abusive messages has been one of the many hazards that she has faced, it includes comments by certain influencers as well.

Uorfi said, "It takes an X-factor to do what I have done. Kar ke dekh lo [try if you want]. I'd be more than happy if anyone tried what I've done and got successful... I never backed out. People discouraged me so much. Everyone has always discouraged me, everywhere. Everyone was against me. But, I still did what I did... I am trying to build a world for myself where I am very very famous. I create my own opportunities. Even if it involves anything that is controversial, I don't mind. As long as I am not harming anyone." (Sanya,ed.,2024,Uorfi Javed reveals 'her secret to being infamous'; says she 'would love to retire' if Shah Rukh Khan did this, *Hindustan Times*) She aims at achieving the status of Shah Rukh Khan,

"Some people just want to exist. I don't want to just exist. I want to rule. Shah Rukh Khan is my benchmark. The day I feel like I am the Shah Rukh Khan of the world [I'll hang up]... As long as Shah Rukh is giving me half of his estate and wealth, then why not? I would love to retire." (Sanya,ed.,2024,Uorfi Javed reveals 'her secret to being infamous'; says she 'would love to retire' if Shah Rukh Khan did this, *Hindustan Times*)

The hatred showcased against her portrays that a fear still persists for women who are open about their sexuality, sensuality and their body. She received death threats. In addition to this, a man was called out for spreading her fake death rumours. Uorfi shared a screenshot of a post by a social media user who posted a morphed photo of Uorfi's bruised neck with a rope around it, making it seem like she hung herself. Along with the morphed picture, the user also wrote 'Rip Uorfi Javed a big loss for no anyone' and commented 'Stand with Uorfi's murderer.' (Times Entertainment,2022, Urfi Javed aka Uorfi reacts to the social media post about her fake death news saying 'Stand with Uorfi's murderer' ,*TOI*)

In the year 2023, Uorfi Javed appeared before Oshiwara police in connection with a case registered against her for 'maligning' the image of Mumbai Police. Uorfi Javed and three junior artistes recorded a video showing two women dressed as cops arresting the actor for wearing "chote chote kapde". It was later clarified that the video was created as promotional content for a self-promotion. Mumbai Police issued a statement on X stating, "One Can't Violate Law Of The Land, For Cheap Publicity! A viral video of a woman being allegedly arrested by Mumbai Police, in a case of obscenity is not true – insignia & uniform has been misused." The charges included Sections 171 (carrying a token used by a public servant with fraudulent intent), 419 (cheating), 500 (defamation) and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code.

Recently she has joined another reality show, Playground S4 which is presented by Hero MotoCorp and co-presented by Tecno and the show will be streaming exclusively on Amazon MX Player. Her "daring fashion statements and bold social media persona" was considered as a catalyst to "push contestants beyond their comfort zones." The said show is said to have already quite a number of followers. And her entry "is set to ignite new rivalries, drama, and

entertainment, ensuring viewers remain on the edge of their seats."(DC Correspondent, 2024, Uorfi Javed joins Playground S4 as a mentor on Amazon MX Player OTT, Deccan Chronicle, https://www.deccanchronicle.com/entertainment/ott/uorfi-javed-joins-playground-s4-as-a-mentor-on-amazon-mx-player-1831262)

In her last show that was streamed on Amazon Prime she narrated about her struggles and ordeals – patriarchal beliefs at home, difficulties she has faced in her childhood and how she struggled financially. Uorfi spoke brazenly about what she feels about herself and others. Respect in others' eyes for her, is what she strives for, as she says in one of the episodes, "When it comes to respect, no compromises. With money, I can compromise." In one of the interviews that was streamed in her show, she talked about how her character was assassinated for posting a photo on Facebook – a photo that she posted on Facebook, was uploaded on a porn site by another person. She was fifteen when this incident happened. Her dresses, that she makes out of safety pins, egg shells etc is tailored by her to make herself go 'viral'. Her insistence on getting fillers refilled and breast implant portrays the kind of insecurities women go through in order to not only attractive but acceptable. Her sisters remind her that people have accepted for what she is.

Her insecurities are a part of women's life. A women's apparel is a parameter of her morality and character. In one of the chapters of the series, she expresses her anxiety that a man would not date her for the way she dresses and would be judgemental of her character. But this judgemental aspect is what she thrives on, as she says, "And the day there is no judgement, my career will be over." Knowingly or unknowingly she might inspire others to accept who they are, no matter what the society and its norms prescribes – it is like a never ending saga.

Online harassment includes cyber bullying, cyber stalking, online predation, and online gender-based violence. It involves degrading, chastening, or humiliating individuals, targeting their ethnicity, faiths, gender, citizenship, disorder, or sexual orientation. The anonymity and accessibility of online communication make online harassment more prevalent and dangerous. Considering experiences across the globe, cybercrime is now recognised as a major international issue. Cyber sexual harassment which has a wider reach has been challenging to be dealt with. Sexual cyber bullying can be defined as any sexually aggressive or coercive behaviour enabled through the use of electronic media (i.e., text messages, social networking sites, cell phone applications, etc.). Such behaviours include, but are not limited to: sending nude photos or sexually explicit messages to another individual without their express consent, threatening to share a nude photo of another individual online if he/she does not consent to sex, coercing an individual to send sexually explicit photos against his or her will, sharing a sexually explicit photos or messages with individuals other than whom it was initially intended for using electronic media, publicly making unwanted sexually explicit comments on a person's social networking site, etc. (Ehman,Gross,2019) Cyber-crimes against women have been on a rise. The table below (Table 1) shows the cybercrimes against women State/UT wise in Indoa. But there are gaps in the government compilation of data as far as crimes against other genders are concerned, documentation of specific data on cybercrimes against men and transgenders are absent, even though Table 2 (pp 7) provides a rough idea.

Table 1: Cyber Crimes against Women-2022

TABLE 9A.10
Cyber Crimes against Women - 2022

SL	State/UT	Cyber Blackmailing / Threatening (Sec.506, 503, 384 IPC r/w IT Act)	Cyber Pornography/ Hosting/ Publishing Obscene Sexual Materials (Sec.67A/67B(Girl Child) of IT act r/w other IPC/SLL)	Cyber Stalking/ Cyber Bullying of Women (Sec.354D IPC r/w IT Act)	Defamation/ Morphing (Sec.469 IPC r/w IPC and Indecent Rep. of Women (P) Act & IT Act)	Fake Profile (IT Act r/w IPC/SLL)	Other Crimes against Women	Total Cyber Crimes against Women
[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	[8]	[9]
STATES:								
1	Andhra Pradesh	16	89	129	1	2	400	637
2	Arunachal Pradesh	0	1	0	0	0	4	5
3	Assam	10	101	3	0	41	455	610
4	Bihar	1	4	18	0	12	49	84
5	Chhattisgarh	3	200	7	0	0	69	279
6	Goa	1	4	1	0	0	26	32
7	Gujarat	3	43	48	0	7	251	352
8	Haryana	12	71	28	0	7	209	327
9	Himachal Pradesh	0	21	12	0	3	10	46
10	Jharkhand	0	10	2	1	0	93	106
11	Karnataka	1	234	0	0	0	3669	3904
12	Kerala	0	122	45	2	9	203	381
13	Madhya Pradesh	8	96	82	2	1	201	390
14	Maharashtra	11	75	578	3	27	1836	2530
15	Manipur	0	0	5	0	0	8	13
16	Meghalaya	0	5	0	0	4	18	27
17	Mizoram	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
18	Nagaland	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
19	Odisha	0	269	0	273	0	32	574
20	Punjab	3	33	26	0	6	126	194
21	Rajasthan	16	136	79	3	11	253	498
22	Sikkim	0	1	0	0	0	10	11
23	Tamil Nadu	3	82	31	24	22	239	401
24	Telangana	23	14	279	0	3	943	1262
25	Tripura	0	2	0	0	2	0	4
26	Uttar Pradesh	2	450	27	1	4	617	1101
27	Uttarakhand	10	21	17	75	8	30	161
28	West Bengal	0	9	11	0	3	119	142
	TOTAL STATE(S)	**123**	**2094**	**1428**	**385**	**172**	**9870**	**14072**
UNION TERRITORIES:								
29	A&N Islands	0	3	1	0	0	8	12
30	Chandigarh	0	2	2	0	0	12	16
31	D&N Haveli and Daman & Diu	0	4	0	0	0	1	5
32	Delhi	2	118	24	0	5	101	250
33	Jammu & Kashmir	0	25	2	0	2	10	39
34	Ladakh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
35	Lakshadweep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
36	Puducherry	0	5	0	0	0	10	15
	TOTAL UT(S)	**2**	**157**	**29**	**0**	**7**	**142**	**337**
	TOTAL ALL INDIA	**125**	**2251**	**1457**	**385**	**179**	**10012**	**14409**

● As per data provided by States/UTs   TABLE 9A.10 Page 1 of 1

● States/UTs may not be compared purely on the basis of crime figures   # Clarifications are pending from Nagaland

Source: National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

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State/UT-wise Cases Registered(CR), Cases Chargesheeted (CCS), Cases Convicted(CON), Male Victims(MVIC), Female Victims (FVIC), Transgender Victims(TRVIC) under Cyber Stalking/Bullying (Section 354D of IPC r/w IT Act) During 2022

Sr No	State/UT	2022						
		CR	CCS	CON	MVIC	FVIC	TRVIC	TVIC
1	Andhra Pradesh	136	54	0	0	137	0	137
2	Arunachal Pradesh	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
3	Assam	3	1	0	0	3	0	3
4	Bihar	18	13	0	0	18	0	18
5	Chhattisgarh	7	7	0	0	7	0	7
6	Goa	1	1	0	0	1	0	1
7	Gujarat	48	39	0	0	50	0	50
8	Haryana	28	16	0	0	28	0	28
9	Himachal Pradesh	12	12	0	0	12	0	12
10	Jharkhand	2	1	0	0	2	0	2
11	Karnataka	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
12	Kerala	49	40	0	0	50	0	50
13	Madhya Pradesh	82	74	4	0	82	0	82
14	Maharashtra	581	313	1	0	587	0	587
15	Manipur	4	0	0	0	5	0	5
16	Meghalaya	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
17	Mizoram	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
18	Nagaland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
19	Odisha	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
20	Punjab	26	8	0	0	26	0	26
21	Rajasthan	80	46	0	0	80	0	80
22	Sikkim	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
23	Tamil Nadu	30	10	0	0	31	0	31
24	Telangana	280	142	2	1	281	0	282
25	Tripura	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
26	Uttar Pradesh	27	21	10	0	27	0	27
27	Uttarakhand	17	8	0	0	17	0	17
28	West Bengal	11	16	0	0	11	0	11
	TOTAL STATE(S)	**1442**	**824**	**17**	**1**	**1455**	**0**	**1456**
29	A&N Islands	1	1	0	0	1	0	1
30	Chandigarh	2	0	0	0	2	0	2
31	D&N Haveli and Daman & Diu	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
32	Delhi	24	16	0	0	24	0	24
33	Jammu & Kashmir	2	0	0	0	2	0	2
34	Ladakh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
35	Lakshadweep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
36	Puducherry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL UT(S)	**29**	**17**	**0**	**0**	**29**	**0**	**29**
	TOTAL (ALL INDIA)	**1471**	**841**	**17**	**1**	**1484**	**0**	**1485**

Table 2

Source: Government of India, Ministry Of Electronics and Information Technology, 2024

Various societal aspects can be attributed to it – perceived gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and race, social, cultural aspects also contribute to it. Patriarchal and misogynistic beliefs, certain assumptions, conditioning, rigid mind-set and unhealthy beliefs lead to such behaviour.

Moral policing through virtual platforms has become epidemic. It is an act by individuals or groups enforcing their moral standards which is often shaped by societal customs and traditions. While we talk about choices, which remain unproblematic till one abides by law, moral policing has been a rising concern. It is a tool to control that cripples the liberty and freedom of individuals. Autonomy over one's body is a matter of choice and right. There is a striking difference as to how a man's body and a woman's body, including the LGBTQIA+ community are conceived and treated. People use 'moral' arguments shaped by societal codes and customs to defend such an act. 'Moralisation' is a tool to impose and control in accordance to certain established set of social standards. Incidents of moral policing and honour killings have been on rise in India. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "honour killing" as a traditional practice in some countries of killing a family member who is believed to have brought shame on the family. It is rooted in patriarchy. Honour killings punish women for bringing so-called disgrace upon their families, for

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example by refraining from forced marriage, being the victim of rape, getting divorced, having sexual relationships, or adultery. The social construction of honour as a value system, norm, or tradition is the main justification for the perpetration of violence against women. (Pirnia, Pirnia, Pirnia, 2020) And the virtual world has not been an exception. Social influencers, including individuals across genders face harassment when they do not conform to set societal behaviour. The influencers interact with their audience through a public platform, thus their life is exposed to all. The content is based on demands, what people feel relatable and then there are those who make use of such platforms to spread knowledge and awareness even if it means breaking social barriers and obnoxious mind set. They are at a greater risk. Influencers have been vocal about the kind of harassment they endure ranging from verbal harassment, threat, sometimes even to their life.

Women's autonomy over her body has long invoked morality – women seem to be the upholder of maintaining honour and prestige of a community. In a recent case, a social media influencer, popularly known as Kamal Kaur Bhabhi was killed for posting sexually explicit content on her social media platform, thus bringing shame. She had over 4 lakhs followers on Instagram. Bathinda SSP Amneet Kondal has stated that the investigation has revealed that this act was a result of "moral policing". Amritpal, the allegedly mastermind behind this gruesome killing has claimed responsibility for it over a video. He also stated that he had earlier warned her to stop posting "inappropriate" content, even though his counsel claimed that the video was AI generated.

Not only women, but individuals across gender suffer. Transgender Instagram influencers faces online harassment to the extent that on Quora people enquire about how "…someone stop seeing trans related posts on social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram?" (https://www.quora.com/How-can-someone-stop-seeing-trans-related-posts-on-social-media-platforms-like-Facebook-or-Instagram) The comments on their posts/stories/reels reflect the sharp existence of Trans phobia. The company's policies on adult sexual activity and nudity has a profound effect on LGBTQ+ individuals often classifying LGBTQ+ content as "adult" or "harmful" when similar heterosexual content is not treated the same.

Incidents like these, is a global crisis. Many social media influencers have also raised alarm against normalisation of such harassment. A renowned Spanish influencer, named Aida Domenech, confessed about the severe harassment she undergoes on a daily basis. Some of the comments were extreme, like "if I see you with an LGBT flag again, I'll burn you alive." (García, Guzmán, Pérez and Real 2023) But such perpetrators are rarely unpunished even if one is able to identify them. One of the critical reasons being, many of the influencers are not the 'ideal victim'. The first attribute of the ideal victim is weakness, which makes them appear harmless and evokes empathy and sympathy. (García, Guzmán, Pérez and Real 2023) Most influencers are vocal about the harassment and expose those harassing them. In certain instances, it might not be the case. It not affects their mental health, but also affects their work – whilst few fear about their loved ones and their safety, others censor or lessen their content. Such incidents have a tremendous damaging effect impacting their long term goals.

5. A Way Forward

An American influencer recreated Uorfi Javed's creation; she is a global influencer now, while another Kannada actress Saanya Iyer faced hatred for sharing bold photo shoot of hers was compared to Uorfi Javed. A woman who transgresses from the norms of the society has always been considered a threat and her punishment – either ostracisation or character assassination. Legal framework has a significant role in addressing such instances. In *State of Kerala v Civic Chandran*, Civic Chandran allegedly embraced a woman, who was resting near the seashore forcefully embrace her and outrage her modesty. The Ministry of Home Affairs, India has framed various policies and have taken steps to deal with the increasing concern. The court on the basis of pictures of what the victim was wearing on the day concerned remarked that she was wearing a "sexually provocative" dress and allowed the bail application of the alleged perpetrator. The Kerala High Court expunged this particularly controversial remark of the session's court by citing the case of *Aparna Bhat v State of Madhya Pradesh*, contending that dressing of a victim cannot be a legal ground to excuse the accused from his charge. The victim came forward to register the case almost two and a half years later. But the perpetrator was granted a bail on the basis that the complainant being a "very educated lady" did not provide convincing reasoning for the delay caused and that the perpetrator was a senior citizen, (Vaishali, 2022, pp159) even though on various occasions the High Court and Supreme Court have held that delay in filing an FIR in cases of sexual assault should not be equated with other cases to quash proceedings or hold an accused not guilty. (Gandhi, Sharma, 2023) The case is a reflection of our society's mind set and limitations.

The real change would be to comprehend diverse voices and that none should go unheard and uncounted. The digital murals can be a tool for spreading awareness, knowledge and positivity with caution for certain groups. But with such awareness and knowledge voices of the oppressed and marginalised can be amplified.

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