Trolls To Cyber Mob: The Virtual Rape Through Facebook

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Abstract: Sexual harassment charges and allegations are on the rise in the film industry. Many in the industry have come forward to share the bitter experiences they went through while pursuing a luminous career. Some of them assert that there exists a "casting couch" syndrome in the industry. In addition to being physically assaulted, these gifted actresses are victims of sexual repartee. Social media has become a virtual platform for this. Award-winning South Indian actress Parvathy is one such victim as she was viciously trolled and abused on social media. Lewd and malicious comments and posts were hurled on Twitter and Facebook after she publicly criticized the misogynistic and sexist dialogues in Mammootty starrer " Kasaba'.

This paper examines the nature of cyberbullying of celebrities in the social media and the attitude of the general public towards it taking the Parvathy issue as a case study. Fifty trolls related to the issue were selected for analysis. Then the response of a sample of 500 respondents of age group 15-60 from four districts of Kerala were obtained through a structured questionnaire survey. Frequency analysis is used to present the data in the form of proportions or percentages. The study found that the cyberbullying against actress Parvathy was gendered and sexist and also it showed that females disagreed with the cyberbullying against Parvathy whereas males supported the attack.

Keywords: Trolls, Cyber-Mob, Virtual Rape, Cyberbullying, Facebook, Twitter, Social Media

I. INTRODUCTION

"*Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter*"- Martin Luther King Jr Sexual harassment at the workplace, rape, molestation and instances of manhandling make news in the print and broadcast media. But with the advent of the internet, these have reached another level. The internet gave opportunities for several ways of social criticisms. Cartoons and middles in the newspapers once food for thought. It was followed by satirical programmes or spoofs in the Television channels. But, all these had some sort of editorial control. Now with the growth of social media as the medium of the day,

Trolls or Memes have taken over as powerful tool for spreading information or for directing attention towards an issue in a short time span with humour as the icing on the cake. Every troll has a different history or a different reason. The creators may be depressed, attention-seeking, furious, jealous, and narcissistic or under some other emotion about which they may not be aware. These emotions seriously affect their online behavior. Usually, trolls are liked for their superfluous innocence and their eagerness to respond. It states people are doing it for fun, laughter or amusement, especially that derived at someone else's expense. For this, trolls range from clever spoofs of harassments to violent threats. Usually, the victims do not experience the so-called fun and laughter. Earlier, trolling meant systematic and careful search for something. But this situation changed by the extensive use of social media. Now, trolling is a game of character attack, to be fooled around without the consent of most of the players. Trolls endeavor to share genuine interest or taste or concerns of a group, but it becomes offensive when it turns against the ideology of any person. Creation of trolls is not similar to cartoons. Cartoons are created by cartoonists with some artistic skills. But trolls can be created by anyone who has an excellent sense of humour and has the skill to connect the real-life situations to some film clippings. They also require some technical skill which is not difficult to acquire these days.

II. CYBERBULLYING

The term cyberbullying is coined by a Canadian Educator, Billy Belsey. According to Wikipedia, cyberbullying is a form of harassment using the internet or an online platform. Internet trolling is a common form of cyberbullying. One commonly used definition of cyberbullying is an "aggressive, intentional act or behavior that is carried out by a group or an individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and overtime against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself" [1]. It may also be that the sharing of a personal or private information of a person in an online platform that causes embarrassment and humiliation. With the introduction of social media and digital forums of discussions and sharing, any content shared by an individual can be dessminated by his acquaintance or even by strangers who follow the discussion content, whether it is a photo or comment or a post or a link, shared by an individual which is in a way a permanent or public record which marks the owner's views and character. Cyberbullying can harm the online reputations of everyone involved – not just the person being attacked, but even those who share it or receive it passively or even get involved in it in any way.

III. RESEARCH CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE

A controversy was raked up in the Mollywood industry when award-winning actress Parvathi expressed her apprehensions on the misogyny in the Malayalam film ' Kasaba' at the open forum of the International Film Festival of Kerala. She also pointed out the need for the film industry to create better working conditions for women. The comment by Parvathy irked many Mammootty fans who went on a relentless tirade against her and they immediately came to the defence of the superstar and trolled her viciously. Some of the comments and posts were threatening and rancorous.

' Kasaba' was criticized for its dialogues which had overtones, from the very day of its release. It depicted the protagonist Mammootty verbally abusing various women characters and grabbing the belt of a lady police officer threatening to punch her so severely that it would apparently result in immediate menstruation.

Nithin Renji Panicker, Director of the movie, alleged that Parvathy's comment was just an attempt to gain popularity by attacking a strong pillar. The producer of the movie, Joby George went to the extent of addressing the actress "aunty".

Parvathy filed a complaint about being viciously trolled and abused on social media. A youth from Thrissur district of Kerala was arrested for cyberbullying Parvathy. A case was registered against the accused under section 67 of IT act for intimidation and sexual abuse.

This paper attempts to negotiate the incidences of cyberbullying or virtual rape against our celebrities in the social media and the response of the general public on it taking the Parvathy issue as a case study. Here, we can see how the people in a virtual world turned into a cyber mob.

A. Cyber Mob

Cybermob is a group of people who unite together to humiliate or offend someone else through the internet. The attack can be malicious with hate speech, rape threats, and death threats. It is a kind of cyber violence. Shockingly, just one incident can evoke a cyber mob. Parvathy's case is an example of this. Her speech against the film 'Kasaba' at the International Film Festival of Kerala irked the fans of the superstar and they started hurling abuses against her on the online platform.

B. Virtual Rape

The word rape means to force someone to have sex even if they are unwilling. Violence and threats are used to make the thing happen. And, now with the advancement of technology, we all are having another life in a non-real, simulated world- a virtual world. It harbors virtual criminals. Sexual assault in this virtual world is becoming common today. According to the Urban dictionary, "virtual rape is using information trusted with online to completely discredit someone" [2]. It can be considered as assaulting the dignity and character of a person through the internet. In this paper, the term carries the meaning of sexual abuses hurled against a person through an online platform. In the case cited there is character assassination of an individual using posts, and tweets with the sexual inclination and rape threat.

C. Theoretical Framework

The framework of the study is based on Differential Association theory [3], Space Transition Theory [4] and Symbolic Interactionism.

The Differential Association:

The Differential Association theory states that criminal tendencies are learned by interacting with another deviant person and this interaction can lead a person to a crime. This theory explains how the social environment can inculcate criminal behavior in an individual. The main principle behind this theory is that criminal behavior is learned through social interactions [5]. Every group in a social networking site/s has its own privacy policy and guidelines. The members of the groups are bound to follow it. And at times, the norms propounded by these groups are contradictory with the law of land.

Space Transition Theory:

"Space Transition Theory" is coined by K. Jaishankar [6]. It clarifies the accommodating and non-acclimating conduct of an individual in both physical space and virtual space. The internet gives an obscurity to each person who turns it into one where a person can express his or her inclination feelings and even fury. Cyberbullying, cyberstalking and digital slander are precedents where wrongdoers abusing the extent of online virtual space on account of its obscurity and worldwide reach. It additionally contends that individuals carry on distinctively when they move starting with one space then onto the next. People with repressed criminal behavior (in the physical space) have a propensity to commit a crime in cyberspace, which, otherwise they would not commit in physical space, due to their status and position. [7].

Symbolic Interactionism:

This perspective relies on the symbolic meaning that people develop and build upon in the process of social interaction. Formulated by Bhumer [8], it is the process of interaction in the formulation of meanings for individuals. This is an American theory which assumes that a physical reality does not exist by a person's social definitions. This is created in connection to something 'genuine'. Rather than responding to this reality specifically, individuals react to the comprehension of the structures in terms of individual reactions. At the end of the day, the reaction of the people to the fact of the matter is aberrant and has been separated by the person's point of view. This implies people exist not in the physical space made out of substances, but rather "on the planet" made just out of "objects". Here, it is trusted that people build significance through correspondence and self-idea created through this correspondence goes about as a trigger for conduct [9].

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The rise of the internet and social media is a topic of interest for several academicians. It is an evolving field of research. But the literature on trolls and cyberbullying is less and little. Weinstein and Selman [10] said that online pantomime,

individual assaults, open disgracing, and mortification typify social "hardness and ruthlessness" attacking into the computerized space. So, advanced apparatuses offer incredible, yet possibly harming courses for youngsters to convey and react. "Life online, like life offline, involves opportunities for enhancing relational closeness and enacting relational hostility". Where it involves online victimization, the latter has been termed "cyberbullying" [11]. In a study conducted in Australia, researchers found that trolls appear to be master manipulators and have an impact on both the cyber setting and victim's emotions. Trolling can have a powerful effect on victims, potentially exacerbating depression and anxiety [12]. In Griffiths' [13] perspective trolling is a conduct that is empowered and strengthened by the secrecy accepted by the Internet. Widyanto and Griffiths [14] uphold that the Internet gives anonymity, which disposes of the danger of encounter, confrontation, refusal and other consequences of conduct.

Social media websites like Facebook or twitter comprise menaces which are recognizable, in fact. A few people, particularly young people conveniently overlook this accuracy, conformity to the facts that they are not unidentified when they exploit web-based social networking. [15]. There are a lot of studies identified with the issues brought about by the obscurity given by new media. The web based life gives a connection between the secrecy of the Internet and the genuine connections individuals have. This connection between the two has indistinct limits, and young people in some cases settle on poor decisions with their online articulations that can cause them harm, all things considered. Remarks influenced online to have grabbed the eye of school regions and neighborhood police offices have been included1 [16]. In another study by Bauman and Yoon [17], it was found that the reason for the rise of cybercrime is the anonymity provided in the online platform. As there are no time and space restrictions and as the medium has a global reach, there exist more chances of cyberbullying. According to Tanrikulu Taşkın [18], cyberbullying is raised due to the failure of a person to meet his/her power and entertainment need.

In a study by Konkar, Walk, Helic and Stromair [19], it was found that small amounts of trolls have a higher impact when connecting to users in the networks' periphery, as those users receive and exercise less peer influence and cannot compensate for the negative influence of trolls as well as highly connected and highly active users can. However, larger amounts of trolls influence activity levels more when performing an informed selection of high-degree users.

A. Research Questions

R1. What is the nature of comments and posts against Parvathy?
R2. What is the attitude of the general public towards the controversy?

V. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This paper investigates the nature of cyberbullying against actress Parvathy after she expressed her opinion against the misogyny in the film Malayalam film ' Kasaba'. The research

employs a qualitative method including a content analysis and a questionnaire survey.

First fifty trolls related to the issue are selected using purposive sampling method. The depth and intensity of the attack, the language used and the memes used are analyzed.

Then a sample of 500 respondents of age group 15-60 from four districts of Kerala are selected and structured questionnaires are distributed to them and the response is collected. There are 250 female respondents and 250 male respondents. Since the aim of the survey is to measure the gender wise difference in the attitude towards cyberbullying against Parvathy, purposive sampling is used. The data were analyzed using SPSS 20 version. Frequency analysis is used to present the data in the form of proportions or percentages.

A. Objectives of the Study
1. To find the nature of cyberbullying against actress Parvathy
2. To analyze the gender-wise difference in the attitude of the general public towards the issue

B. Hypotheses
1. The cyberbullying against Parvathy was gendered and sexist
2. Females disagree with the cyberbullying against Parvathy
3. Males support the cyberbullying against Parvathy

VI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

R1. What is the nature of comments and posts against Parvathy?

Parvathy was furiously attacked by the Mammootty fans on Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube following her misogynistic remark on the film ' Kasaba' at International Film Festival of Kerala. The threshold of decency was crossed. The trolls were much derogatory and had a personal attack on the actress. The actress faced character assassination.

One troll threatened her with rape and acid attacks. It says "we are planning to rape you.. better be ready.. ## with him". The post got several likes and shares on the Facebook and Twitter. The language used in the post was explicitly antifeminine.

The gendered abuses hurled against Parvathy paint a grim picture. She had endured ageist and sexist attacks on various online platforms. She was addressed as a "Feminichi", a slang for the feminist in Malayalam. Some posts addressed her and her companions as "Kochammas", another slang in Malayalam. In a study, Cyberbullying: an Indian Perspective, Mehta & Jaishwal [20], states that people with a low social status find bullying as a medium to become more popular and satisfy their egos. Some people find happiness in hurting others. The same has occurred in Parvathy's case also. By bullying Parvathy, some reinstated their self-esteem, some found happiness by hurling abuses at a lady. But the fact is that what Parvathy pointed out has no direct impact on any of these persons' lives.

Some fans asked to stop watching her films. This resulted to one million dislikes for the new song of the movie "My

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Story", in which Parvathy plays a lead role with Prithviraj. The fans went to the extent saying "it is protesting against Parvathy, sorry Rajuetta##". Raju is the pet name for Prithviraj. One of the new generation directors in Malayalam film industry equated her to a monkey in a circus camp. The post roughly translates to this:

"A monkey somehow enters a circus tent. It acted and played as per the circus owner's directives. It studied all need tricks and craft and became an expert. After a while, the monkey started complaining about being exploited. It could have eloped from the camp at the beginning itself and gone back to the forest. But then, who will know about it, right?" [21]. The post was indirectly attacking the actress saying she had won fame and glory from the film industry and at last like a monkey in the circus camp she is complaining about the industry itself. Not to the wonder, Parvathy replied to this harshly and strongly.

Interestingly, female fans of the superstar also came against Parvathy's remark. They shared and liked the posts and trolls and became a part of the cyberbullying. One of the fans even took the criticism to a new level saying Parvathy is not worth when compared with what Mammootty has achieved. One among these female fans was given the first ticket for a special show of Mammootty's film Masterpiece.

As Hinduja & Patchin [22] argues, females, in order to win social support, often gang up against other females. And of course, the online platform is the best and easiest venue for this teaming up and to add to the humiliation.

There were video trolls too. All of them mocked at Parvathy and her strong stand against the sexist remarks in the film ' Kasaba'. One troll even lashed out at her parents and relatives. The controversial speech of Parvathy was remixed with some scene of Mammootty implying an indirect reply to her words. In another video, one of the famous mini-screen artists mimicked the speech of Parvathy.

The supporters of the actress were also attacked. Men who supported Parvathy were addressed "pavada" which means skirt in Malayalam because nothing can hurt a man more than "feminine" vocabulary being used to describe him.

These are some examples of trolls against actress Parvathy. As mentioned earlier. The attack on social media was gendered, sexist and even threatening. They didn't show any respect to her status and stand. The makers of this trolls acted as a cyber mob. The posts, jokes, and sarcasm turned to be humiliating and she was virtually raped in Facebook.

However, the case of Parvathy is not an isolated one. There are many celebrities who are not spared from cyberbullying. In this context let us examine some other examples of troll attacks on celebrities. At one time, the internet was flooded with Alia Bhatt jokes, trolls and memes, after she uttered an embarrassing blunder in the TV show "Koffee with Karan". Muscle Man of the Bollywood was trolled as "Hrithik Roshan once again proved that gym is not a place to build brain muscles##". He posted the much-debated photograph of a dress and was mocked at for not updating trending things.

Recently, Anushka Sharma was cyberbullied for the failure of Indian cricket team. She was termed as a distraction for her husband Virat Kohli. American President Donald Trump is also a victim of attacks by trolls. Social media is eagerly waiting for each word he utters for making another troll. There are several memes and jokes related to him. Even Melania Trump's, first lady of US, speech against cyberbullying was not spared.

R2. What is the opinion of the general public on the controversy?

A survey was conducted to find the answer to this question. A structured questionnaire was given to five hundred respondents and replies are collected. Then the data was analyzed using SPSS 20.0 version. Frequency analysis is used to present the data in the form of proportions or percentages.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS CYBERBULLYING

Table 1

ATTITUDE	N (500)	%
Cyber bullying is more serious than direct bullying	325	65
Cyber victims are usually victimized for no specific reason like Parvathy	336	67.2
Cyberbullying against Parvathy was just a fun	172	34.4
The consequences of cyber bullying are harmful	143	28.6
Cyberbullying against Parvathy was exciting and interesting	138	27.6
The reaction of Parvathy against cyberbullying is apt and a model to anyone	368	73.6
The accused must be punished	368	73.6
The reaction from the makers of Kasaba film towards Parvathy's comment was gendered and misogynistic	336	67.2
Victims of cyberbullying are weak	162	32.4

ATTITUDE OF FEMALES TOWARDS CYBERBULLYING

Table 2

ATTITUDE	Female (250)	F%
Cyber bullying is more serious than direct bullying	201	80.4
Cyber victims are usually victimized for no specific reason like Parvathy	196	78.4
Cyberbullying against Parvathy was just a fun	46	18.4
The consequences of cyber bullying are harmful	102	40.8
Cyberbullying against Parvathy was exciting and interesting	36	14.4
The reaction of Parvathy against cyberbullying is apt and a model to anyone	201	80.4
The accused must be punished	201	80.4
The reaction from the makers of Kasaba film towards Parvathy's comment was gendered and misogynistic	211	84.4
Victims of cyberbullying are weak	61	24.4

ATTITUDE OF MALES TOWARDS CYBERBULLYING

Table 3

ATTITUDE	Male (250)	M%
Cyber bullying is more serious than direct bullying	124	49.6
Cyber victims are usually victimized for no specific reason like Parvathy	140	56
Cyberbullying against Parvathy was just a fun	126	50.4
The consequences of cyber bullying are harmful	41	16.4
Cyberbullying against Parvathy was exciting and interesting	102	40.8
The reaction of Parvathy against cyberbullying is apt and a model to anyone	167	66.8
The accused must be punished	67	66.8
The reaction from the makers of Kasaba film towards Parvathy's comment was gendered and misogynistic	125	50
Victims of cyberbullying are weak	101	40.4

Table 1 depicts the attitude of respondents towards cyberbullying. Table 2 indicates the attitude of female respondents towards cyberbullying and table 3 shows the attitude of male respondents towards cyberbullying. From the above three tables we can summarize:

65% of the respondents are of the opinion that cyberbullying is a serious issue. Among these, 61.8 percent are female respondents and 38.2 percent are male respondents. 67.2 percent of the total respondents agree that cyber victims are usually victimized for no specific reason, and the same is the case of Parvathy. Out of this, 58.3 percent are females and 41.7 percent are males. 34.4 percent of the total respondents take the incident of cyberbullying against Parvathy was just a fun. Interestingly, only 26.7 percent of the total female respondents agree to this whereas 73.3 male respondents hold this opinion. 28.6 percent of the total respondents felt that the consequences of cyberbullying are harmful. 71.3 percent of the total female respondents are aware of these harmful consequences. 27.6 percent opined that cyberbullying against Parvathy was exciting and interesting. Among these, the majority were male respondents. 73.6 percent of the total respondents agree with the reaction of Parvathy and felt it as apt and the need of the hour. Among these, 54.6 percent were females and 45.4 percent were males. Interestingly, 73.6 percent of the total respondents opined that the accused in the case must be punished. Among these, 54.6 percent were females and 45.4 percent were males. 67.2 percent felt sorry about the reaction from the makers of the film towards Parvathy. They felt it as gendered and misogynistic. Here also, the majority of the respondents holding this opinion are

females. Only 32.4 percent agree with the argument that the victims of cyberbullying are weak. 67.6 percent of the respondents rejected it.

They said that the case of Parvathy has set a very good example of reaction towards such incidents and she had reacted to the hurls harshly.

From the table 1 itself, there is the gender-wise difference in the attitude of the general public towards the cyberbullying against Parvathy. Most of the female respondents reacted empathetically towards Parvathy whereas the response of male respondents was different.

In a study by Sivakumar [23], it was found the use of social media has awarded a second life to all its users with a new world of known and unknown friends. People find it as a platform to express their rage, loathing, and frustrations against our so-called enemies and to spread hate messages with a defamation motive.

VII. CONCLUSION

Cyber socializing has paved the way towards a global city with a one of a kind culture, principles, and morals. However, it does not benefit to disregard individual flexibility or maltreatment of individual rights. The extend of digital exploitation in our nation must be contemplated in detail. It is shocking that no strong action has been taken to check digital violations ,when the rate of the equivalent is increasing step by step [24].

This study found that the cyberbullying against Parvathy was relentless and lewd. She even faced rape and death threats from different online platforms. The reaction of the general public towards the issue was also not helpful. Most of the male respondents supported the attack by the fans of Mammootty. However, the majority of the female respondents showed empathy towards Parvathy and appreciated her courage to move against the crime legally.

Cyberbullying is a growing menace. The implications of the phenomenon are widespread and intense including psychological effects on the victims. An indepth awareness about cyberbullying and its effects across various sections of the society is inevitable now. This would bring more insight into the issue.

Now, most of the population in the country live a 'second-life' in online platforms. They are anonymous there. This anonymity makes them daring and encourage them to do anything or speak anything they want without thinking about the consequences. Anger, frustrations, and hostilities are expressed in this virtual world without any social limits. In this context, Parvathy's is a good example of this sort of virtual harassment. Unfortunately, the case cited is not an isolated one. There have been innumerable instances of cyberbullying of Hollywood and Bollywood celebrities. Also, the sword of cyberbullying is aimed not only at the celebrities, but also the common people and both groups are victimized without any regret on the perpetrator's part.

Popular social networking sites adhere to western digital standards and controls. In the Indian social esteem framework, some of such cyber-cultures may offer access to extreme maltreatment of key rights ensured by our constitution (Jaisankar, Ronal, 2013).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As mentioned earlier, Parvathy filed a complaint against cyberbullying. But when, the cyber cell of Kerala Police removed most of the hate trolls from the internet, collecting samples for content analysis became a major hurdle in the study.

Secondly, apart from the gender of the respondents, other socio-economic characteristics like age, education, income or class should also to be taken into consideration to make the study worthwhile and valuable as a means of investigation into the causes for such acts of transgression. But time and economic restrictions were there for taking it into account. In the future, a comparative study of the attitude of the respondents based on their demographic characteristics can be done.

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