Trolling of Women on Social Media: Some Reflections

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In broad sense of the term, trolling is when someone comments or responds to something you post, usually in challenging way to earn a strong, emotional reaction.

The Urban Dictionary has a bunch of definitions under the term 'trolling,' but the first one that pops up seems to define it as simply as possible. So according to the Urban Dictionary's top rated definition for 'trolling,' it can be defined as:

> "the deliberate act,(by a Troll-noun or adjective), of making random unsolicited and/or controversial comments on various internet forums with the intent to provoke an emotional knee jerk reaction from unsuspecting readers to engage in a fight or argument."

Wikipedia defines it as:

> "a person who starts quarrels or upsets people on the Internet to distract and sow discord by posting inflammatory and digressive,extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community (such as a newsgroup, forum, chat room, or blog) with the intent of provokingreaders into displaying emotional responsesand normalizing tangential discussion, whether for the troll's amusement or a specific gain.

The internet troll is someone who hides behind their computer screens and actively go out of their way to cause trouble on internet. Internet troll is angry and disruptive in every possible way-often for no real reason at all.

A troll is someone who posts deliberately proactive statements online to evoke an emotional reaction in others, with the goal of disrupting conversations.

Trolling of women on social media is not a new phenomenon, shaming women in order to silence them has been an age-old practice. In the patriarchal mind set, their private life sexual preferences, professional achievements, all are considered to be public property, one which can be exposed anytime the women dare to lens/raise a voice of reaction to the ongoing issues.

Whether these women are renowned journalists or just a regular Jane Doe with a radical opinion or someone who posted a picture are not considered normal, as one is safe from trolls who hide behind the Veil of anonymity. Kavita Krishnan, Secretary of the All India Progressive Women's Association, was abused and threatened with rape at a web-chat, organized by a portal in Delhi in late April to discuss anti-rape protests.

A person wrote on the chat; "Tell women to not wear revealing clothes, then we will not rape them" and then,"Kavita tell me where I should come and rape you…."

Such threats are reportedly the most typical incitement to online violence against women and they are increasing against women and they are increasing day by day. This is corroborated by a study done by Internet Democracy Project (IDP). "An exploratory study of Women and verbal online abuse in India" – The initial draft says that "to be a women online-just like to be woman walking the streets of an Indian City, town or village-is to transgress unwritten law of patriarchy, to cross over into a space that isn't meant to be yours,"

Anja Kovacs, director of IDP in India, says, "Threats are being used to silence women online abuse of women is increasing in India because most people are coming online." Men too face online abuse but the quality and content are different. The abuse directed at women is about their body, sexualisation, swears words."

Debarati Halder, advocate and MD of centre for Cyber victim counselling in Tirunelveli, agrees: "Women get abused more than men. This is because they can be easily targeted for their gender." By extension, their right to have an opinion in a male dominated space is also attacked."

Troll is not about the reaction to one's voice. It is about women who are raising their voice. The dark deep world of internet is nothing less than a swamp infested with crocodile. The only difference is that the crocodile of the internet are the online trolls the ones who are forever ready to pounce on an opinionated woman.

Liam Hackett, chief executive of Ditch the Label, an anti-bullying charity, said cyber bullying should not be treated separately but as an 'extension of bullying." We have to understand why people bully online to help them stop. There is a lot of emphasis on reactive support but no consideration made to how we can tackle bullying proactively," he said.

"There's a lot of research to show disempowerment offline, or stressful and traumatic experiences, can lead young people to troll and that the possibility of anonymity had allowed cyberbullying to increase."

The education secretary, Nicky Morgan said: "The internet is a powerful tool which can have brilliant and virtually limitless benefits, but it must be used sensibly and safely. We are working hard to make the web a safer place for children but we can't do it alone and parents have a vital role to play in educating young people."

In the recent news in Hindustan Times dated, January 13, 2020, out of 10,000 Cyber Crimes-cases, only 34 convictions in Maharashtra between 2011-2017. Another alarming fact which had been reported earlier this month is the poor detention rate. In the past five and half years 3,167 cases of 30% were detected.

In the Times of India news dated July 15, 2013 "Crime in India: 2012, lists all crimes and statistics across the country. It states that Cyber Crime, a new class of offences is rapidly increasing due to the extensive use of internet and information technology enabled services.

Online media today allows for an extremely fast flow of information. It also facilitates an active participation by the public in terms of sharing idea and counter viewpoints. But it is these posting of opinion, specifically bywomen that makes them a target of trolling. Misogynistic comment's coupled with abuses are hurled under the guise of free speech. Rape threats, death threats more often than not, impact the future online activities by women.

Shaming women in order to silence them has been an age-old practice. Their private lives, sexual preferences, professional achievements, all are considered to be public property, one which can be laid bare anytime they dare to lead a voice of reasons to ongoing issues.

In India, the one land of trolls that stands out is the sanskari trolls, who for the lack of any other entertainment in their lives have taken it upon themselves to protect Indian Culture 'Sabhyata'. Targeting women who are leading professionals in their field are women in general; these trolls probably do not realise that they are committing the crime of cyber bullying.

Men are more likely to be outline trolls. This may be because they are more narcissistic. Researchers from Brund University and Goldsmiths University of London have found that men are more likely than women to use Facebook with an antisocial motive.

On March 20, 2019, the Pune Cyber Crime Cell arrested a man in a Cyber bullying case where the accused used to create fake Instagram. According to the report in Hindustan Times, the accused was identified as Ravi Paswan, he was arrested from Kolhapur. The local police told Hindustan Times that the accused used to be friend college girls from locations like Sinhgadroad,Kothrud and other areas of the city on Instragram. He would then gather their contact information and ask for their friends phone numbers as well.

Remember, if the woman denied sharing her friends phone number be would then make a victims fake account and reveal her contact information. Reportedly, the police received several such complaints from the college girls in the city and a cybercrime branch of police officials formed a team to investigate the matter. Further investigation in the case is underway.

The new headline in The Hindus National news stated that 8 out of 10 Indians have faced online harassment with 41% of women having faced sexual harassment on the Web, according to a new survey commissioned by cybersecurity solutions firm, Norton by Symantec.The online survey was conducted in the summer of 2017 with a sample size of 1,035 respondents drawn mainly from Tier 1 cities, with the objective to understand online harassment.

The most common forms of online harassment were found to be abuse and insults, which are reported by 63% of respondents. This was followed by malicious comments and rumors (59 %), malicious comments/threats on a social media site (54%), trolling (50%) and attacks/abuse from a coordinatedgroup (49%).

"Our research shows that the occurrence of more serious forms of online harassment were quite high, with 45% having experienced threats of physical violence and 49% at the receiving end of Cyber bullying", said Ritesh Chopra, Country Manager Norton by Symantec. The survey also revealed that the threats of physical violence experienced by the respondents was highesdt in Mumbai (51%) followed by Delhi (47%) and Hyderabad (46%). Similarly online sexual harassment was reported to be followed by Kolkata(37%) and Bengaluru (36%).

There are women who are attacked on social media, who are then attacked off social media. The threats can be online and then go offline. My colleague says Sagarika Ghosh, consulting editor of The Times of India, "Gauri Lankesh was actually shot in September 2017-------- she faced social media threats and she never used to take it seriously. But the fact is she was killed."

From the above discussion it is quite evident that in a male dominated and social and economically unequal society this has to be expected as a natural consequence. This scenario is not confined only to media. It prevails in all the fields with varying degrees.

However the violence women face in these social media has in many ways left them feeling vulnerable not empowered. They can endure complex and long lasting psychological damage. This can eventually break the mind and soul of a woman.

In order to bring the issue of online trolling under control woman should come forward and register their complaints using # I Am trolled Help. They have also the option of approaching the Cyber Crime Cell. Section 66 A of the Information Technology Act lists offensive messages sent

through communication services as punishable. At personal level avoid making your personal life public. Remember these trolls are some truly different people. It is others suffering that brings them pleasure, so that the best thing is to ignore them.

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