Online Self-Representation of Women and Growing Misogyny on Social Media

Introduction

The online world and especially social media have blurred the boundaries that societies had imposed on women for generations. These platforms have given women a new voice to express themselves and their opinions in different self-expressions and representations. However, these have also attracted different types of misogynistic expressions by people who are unable to withstand the new freedom of expression and the showcasing of personal lives and choices by women. The problem has been aggravated by the advent of various social media platforms and other online media. The topic is important to the life of people as more and more people are now joining the online world and when the same becomes just another theatre of harassment, there is little if any window left for women to express themselves. The paper will discuss the various expressions of women and how it has invited misogynistic attitude online. The paper will support the view that the growing self-representations of women in the online space have helped to fuel more misogynistic expressions.

Growing Self-Representations of Women in Digital Space

The Internet has completely changed the dynamics of the way in which people interact with one another. For ages; women of the world have been fighting the forces of injustice (Jóhannsdóttir, 2009). The author has defined patriarchy as a social system where women are continuously abused and oppressed by men. The society was thus knitted in a manner where men were placed above women in six structures, namely the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in sexuality, male violence, etc. It has given novel ways of

speech to all and women who have been fighting patriarchy in many forms (Moussa and Mohamed, 2013). The scholars have shown that the internet has helped many women to fight oppression by raising their voices against injustice and helping them achieve social, political, and economic injustice. The Internet proved one mode where women could break the fetters of patriarchy and indulgence in a lavish expression of their selves, choices, talents, and lifestyles.

Nadim and Fladmoe (2019) have shown in their work that both men and women experience online harassment that is directed at their dignity and even opinions. However, scholars have mentioned that it is the women who experience more pain and are more prone to changing their online behavior. The research was proved that women who have found self-expression due to the internet after years of struggle again have to wage a long war against the growing incidents of misogyny. Misogynists have found the internet the safest way to harass someone as their identities are often hidden behind unknown names and profiles. The extent of anonymity helps them forward their nefarious designs.

It is important to know that the groups that are most likely to be abused are women, the people who belong to different minorities, and also the ones who are not light-skinned. The researchers have used the word 'vitriol' to refer to the abuses or derogatory language used by the people (Polak and Trottier, 2020).The researchers have used the term online vitriol to describe the growing incidents of hate against women.

It is no hidden secret that social media platforms have become a household name as more and more people want to be a part of the same. The number of users on platforms like Facebook and Instagram has been growing over the years (Caldeira, Ridder, and Bauwel, 2020). These platforms have led to the spread of many social media manifestations and usage by the people (Shah, Kumaraguru, and Satoh 2019). These can be posts, videos, reels, stories,

etc. It is important to mention the growing prevalence of selfies in the everyday life of people. Everyone from children to the elderly despite any barriers takes selfies and captures some of the best moments they have spent with their friends and family. Hence, Kapidzic and Herring (2015) rightly mention in their work that selfies have emerged as one of the most common and fastest modes of self-representation. However, women when they tend to share their lives on social media via selfies, they are often viewed through a different lens and many gender-based clichés are linked to their social behavior (Soudeh, 2020).

They are not seen in the right light by the torch-bearers of culture and tradition. Many women have to face severe trolls and other forms of social harassment for the pictures they post. Lumsden and Morgan (2018) have stated in their work that cyber-trolling is one of the most common modes of silencing women. It is a type of gendered violence that is being committed against women. The researchers have shown that this trolling has often also morphed into online teasing and passing derogatory remarks. There have been cases when women have received various threats to their life, dignity, and speech like rape or death threats, incompetence of females, and also framing of various women online. All these practices as mentioned by Lumsden and Morgan (2018) have led many women to leave their social media accounts and also abandon their online life.

Self-representation is regarded as the most important practice for the creation of different types of media texts (Senft and Baym 2015). Women often tend to take to these platforms to not just express their opinions but also showcase their choices and lifestyles. There are examples where many woman journalists have raised their voices against boiling issues of the nations. These representations of their opinions and other related things are not always well accepted by others and these women have to face trolls for their life choices and other posts. Gudipaty (2017) has shown in his research that trolling and harassment have become commonplace in the current age of the internet when more and more people are

going online to share their lifestyles with their followers. The researcher also discusses the fact that online trolling has become a common issue among women journalists who have to cope with vitriol multiple times. Wolfe (2019) has also shown in his work that there have been many incidents when women journalists have to face online wrath by the trollers due to their expressions and other self-opinions online. Thus, the role of the woman journalist is impacted and she can no longer propagate free speech. The research states that the misogynistic tendencies of the trolls make the work of these woman journalists more challenging than before.

Self-Representations as Modes of Empowerment

Self-representation helps many women to showcase their life and bring it to the public sphere subtly. Hill (2017) states that the expression also gives them a new identity and an air of confidence and makes them feel more empowered, important, liked, and beautiful. It is the display of their lifestyle that helps them share their lives with a much larger audience (Ehlin, 2015). It finally helps to extend the circle of influence and they get recognition beyond their families and friends. The much-needed visibility is the basic need that women have been longing for ages. They have been able to get much-deserved appreciation and attention. But Hogan (2010) states that some people who cannot withstand the rise of the female gender tend to view their representations as a form of empowerment and an instrument of self-objectification. Hence, a negative light is often attached to these simple expressions of self and everyday life.

Self-representations are the result of a conscious effort by the women to levy the desired impression on others and hence are in line with Goffman's theory of face-to-face interactions (Merunková and Slerka, 2019). The researchers have presented that the users often form their identities in five ways. These are the public diary, influencer, entertainer job,

and education and hobby, in addition to appropriate secondary roles that are carried out by the users who tend to interact with them (Merunková and Slerka, 2019).

There have been many feminist movements that have been successful in recent times due to their digital presence. It is noticed that the digital world gave them space for fearless expressions and sharing of pain that brought together millions of others who had suffered similar pain. The famous #MeToo movement has been one such example that led many women to come forward and share their experiences of abuse by the rich and famous on social media behind the hashtag MeToo. It is noticed that these movements were successful as they brought women together from all corners of the world.

Manral (2017) has mentioned in her article for Verve magazine that social media has given women a new voice and courage to stand up and speak for their rights. The age has been inspiring as many women have spoken fearlessly and brought their stories of woes to the world. The writer states that the movement had a domino effect in the world as it helped unite many women abused by men of authority to come forward and share their stories. The victim of the sexual crimes was thus finally liberated from the shackles of being held guilty and responsible in various societies and also media trials (Manral, 2017).As many women had come together so their voices were amplified by the impact of the numbers.

It is also relevant to mention the Pink Chaddi campaign which was launched against the actions of the members of Sri Ram Sena who had attacked women in a pub. The campaign was needed to raise their voice against the injustice that was meted out to the woman and spread awareness about their rights. This movement also gained a lot of recognition and many women groups raised their voices against any such incident. Subramanian (2015) stated that social media raised thus helped women to reach many others and send a message of unity and strength. Dhawan (2009) noted in his article that the

campaign drew nearly 34,000 members which were quite unprecedented before. This was one of the most popular sites in modern times. The organizers were of the view that the movements were the right answer and a strong blow to the subverted ideologies of the groups who did not like or appreciate the independence of women and stood against their choices in modern society (Dhawan, 2009). Likewise, these movements have helped the women to bring their plight in front of the world. Such media have thus helped the women to emerge silently and without getting into direct speech to many people. Thus, the idea of going online and expressing one's pain in front of an extended audience helped many women to come forward and express themselves against injustice being carried out anywhere.

Zaid et al. (2021) have mentioned in their work that the affordances of the social networking sites provide adults with to showcase various forms of gendered identities and also help in the construction of identity-related experiences. Adopting the concepts given by Goffman, the paper states that various social networking sites act as a liberating force to drive the change in cultures and put young people at the front of these changes. It is said that these identities led to the empowerment of various women by expressing them online.

Conclusion

Thus, it can be seen that such impressions made in different forms online presented a window for the women to express themselves and bring to light their innermost fears. It is seen that these women have found a way of self-expression and bringing their choices and talents to the public domain. Social media acted as a mode of liberation for these women as they tend to take on the platforms in various formats of self-representations. They can present mundane everyday affairs and their talents in a brighter way to their audiences. Apart from these, selfies have become highly popular over the ages and when it comes to women, even

these are laced with feminine tones. These are the closest onesthat can take the audience to one's life.

Contrary to the ones who leave positive comments and also shower praises on these women to encourage them to post more, there are many who do not like these little windows of freedom and liberties. These people could not break the patriarchal mindset and hence tend to carry out different forms of online abuse against such empowered women. There have been growing cases of men not accepting women showcasing their lifestyles, and even opinions online. These men try every means from simple trolls to online abuse to death or rape threats to curb the rise of women.

Thus, the internet has made it easier for women to make different forms of online self-representations and taste the freedom of expression that they have been devoid of for ages while also enabling the trollers to carry out the agenda of hate against such women.

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