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Decoding the Internet Trolls and their Implications on Female YouTubers

By Tanaya Salian¹ and Munmun Ghosh²

Abstract

YouTube was one of the first platforms fuelling every layperson's dream to get a taste of stardom. Standing true to its promise, it exposed everyone to content creation and every aspect of fame that comes with content creation. The good, the bad, and the ugly side of the online platform involve the trolls and hate comments on the online platforms. It was eventually noticed that the trolling phenomena are shaping up biasedly and follow gender inequality recently. The online trolls are severe and ugly, especially for female content creators. The comments were harsh, demeaning and sometimes vindictive. Looking at this aspect of gender-specific trolling, the study aimed to explore and understand the trolling and nature of the trolls that female YouTubers encounter day-to-day. A qualitative approach was used to comprehend the argument. In-depth interviews were conducted with female content creators on YouTube. The YouTubers considered for the study were first selected by reviewing their content and their number of followers. Later they were connected individually to participate in the study. A total of fifteen female YouTubers were interviewed across different genres of beauty, lifestyle, entertainment and art. The study further dissected these female Youtubers' trolling and backlash experiences and their effect on their content output. These YouTubers have been actively using the tools provided by the platform to block out the negativity from their channels. At the same time, they have realised that it may not be easy to cut the hate comments and trolls out entirely. The conversation highlighted the impact and severity of trolls and their efforts to refocus their energies and attention on improving and creating better quality. The study will act as a reference point for future feminist scholars across disciplines and further explore online trolling phenomena.

Keywords: YouTube, YouTubers, Content creators, Trolls

Introduction

The online environment has encouraged netizens to convert from consumers of online content to social prosumers (Fuchs, 2013). Social media platforms have turned into an outlet of creativity for content creators. The social media platforms have given the content creators liberty to post and put up the content of their choices and amuse the audiences. Founded in 2005, YouTube is a platform for amateur users who can upload or share their videos online. With time, YouTube established itself as a part of the entertainment industry and transformed from a simple video-sharing site to a platform for content creators in both new and mainstream media. YouTube started with posting a recorded video of its co-founder where he featured in front of the pachyderms at the San Diego Zoo. Greg Jarboe (2009) designates this video's representation as an "ordinary moment" to be "extraordinary" for its time. He indicated the

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vision of the YouTube co-founder where Jawed Karim tried to show the possibility of YouTube becoming in the future. According to Jarboe, the "Me at the zoo" video showed that YouTube was not simply about trying to "capture moments on video" but instead trying to make YouTube users "understand the supremacy of the content and how they can be the broadcasters of tomorrow". Although the footage was quite bland and unplanned, it did kick-start creating a much bigger content creation. This small, unplanned and unimaginative video paved the way for YouTube to now become the world's most popular online video-sharing community. It got people curious about this video-creation and video-sharing and brought them to express their creativity on the platform (Stokel-Walker, 2019). This step helped YouTube create a prominent space for itself in the ever-growing digitised society. Today, it has over one billion subscribers and arguably stands to be synonymous with internet entertainment. It has become a massive platform for content creators, also termed YouTubers, where an astonishing number of individuals have made YouTube their career (Olsson, 2019). These YouTubers attract huge audiences through their online persona and formed virtual yet powerful relationships with their viewers, which eventually made them a brand name. Viewers participation helped in creating stability as well as loyal audiences.

The varied assortment of content makes YouTube a place where just about anyone can find a video that interests them, whether they are looking for the highlight of a sports event, video game commentary or want to watch a beauty guru's daily makeup routine or a wellness and health tips. Of the 3.8 billion Internet users globally, YouTube has 2 billion logged-in monthly users and an upload of 500 hours of video every minute (Cooper, 2019; Soni, 2019). Today, YouTube has revolutionised how we consume content and spawned new and unique genres of YouTubers and pop culture icons. The YouTube creator community has wholly redefined entertainment, learning, shopping and many more aspects of regular life. The most popular YouTubers are in the area of Product Review videos, How-Tos/Tutorials and Vlogs. The audiences choose YouTubers that they relate with the most, the criteria of which includes – anyone under the same age group and with relatable personality traits (Rosen & Laihanen, 2017). While many creators look at it as a platform to display their work, many others also look at it as an additional platform to gain traction alongside their central content platform. With the enormous viewers and audience penetration, the content creators have managed to obtain a celeb status in a shorter span; they have also had a taste of the platform's dark side that is trolling and maltreating.

Internet trolls have continually proven to be a growing menace. Trolls behave in a deceptive, destructive or disruptive manner while conducting themselves online (Swenson-Lepper & Kerby, 2019). Studies have shown these trolls to have had a high score on negative personality traits such as sadism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism. The definition of internet trolls has often been debated. Trolling, in the beginning, was about provoking others for mutual enjoyment and entertainment ("Kudos Trolling") and later shifted to a showcase of abusive behaviour not intended to be humorous ("Flame Trolling"). Something that started as a sheer way of fooling around quickly took a dark turn. These internet trolls turn very nasty, and they irritate the victim to cause them further distress (March & Marrington, 2019). Although the other phenomena happen online, cyberbullying is often linked to trolls. However, studies have distinctively identified the difference between cyberbullying and trolling; cyberbullies are more personal and assaultive; nevertheless, cyberbullying can occur through trolling (Steffgen et al., 2011; Craker & March 2016). The anonymity provided to the users online gives them the courage to misbehave online, indulging in sexist, racist and demeaning comments. The distinctive victims of this misbehaviour online are sections in the community from a particular gender, sexual orientation, race, religion and disability (Swenson-Lepper & Kerby, 2019). The fact that Internet trolling is considered incorrect but not excessively provocative severely

downplays such crimes' severity. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge them beyond plain trolling and classify them under "cyber-crimes"(March & Marrington, 2019).

Researchers have also tried to identify the kind of trolls where they disclosed men to bear the harsher end of the criticism online, mainly directed towards addressing the quality of their work, and on the other hand, women have constantly been subjected to more sexually charged and inappropriate comments on YouTube (Herring et al., 2002; Fichman & Sanfilippo, 2014; Saarikallio, 2019; Ortiz, 2020). While both men and women get to experience the infamous trolls, it has long-established to be more demeaning for women getting flooded by misogynistic trolls (Wotanis & McMillan, 2014). Furthermost, the female content creators were motivated to create more feminist content or just their experiences in general, for which they are repetitively humiliated and criticised. In their study, Herring et al. (2002) reflected upon a compelling insight where they documented a case where the online community – a feminist web-based discussion forum are targeted by troll attempting to disrupt their discussion space constantly. The research provided enough evidence of other feminist online forums being disrupted by harassing trolls, especially males. They highlighted through evidence that a reaction with patterns of male domination in mixed-gender discussion groups on the Internet could be easily identified. Thus, their studies advocate that the feminist and other non-mainstream online forums are highly vulnerable having gender disparity, which publicly takes the form of sexual violence, suggesting vastly that the perpetrators were men.

Trolling is seen mainly as disrupting online communities wilfully, flaming a good strategy (Vera-Gray, 2017). The #MoreThanMean campaign that started on YouTube was one of the first to start the conversation surrounding the seriousness of the sexist and demeaning nature of the trolls washing over women's hard work. It highlighted the different levels of sexual assault that women Youtubers face online (Antunovic, 2018). In India, Swati Chaturvedi, a female journalist, was the first woman to officially report an account with the law officials for receiving a devastating amount of trolls and threats online. Agrima Joshua, a stand-up comedian, was bombarded with rape and death threats to misinterpret the YouTube video. Though these assaults may not be physical, they do create mental stress for the victims. Online trolling to be considered a severe cyber-crime would be a significant step towards making the Internet secure for content creators, especially women. Unfortunately, the revised IT Act, 2008 failed to add any particular safety and security provisions for women and children (Kashyap & Kalyan, 2019), highlighting the significant gap in the act that can be spanned through an in-depth exploration of the current situation.

Additionally, even social media platforms do not have many effective strategies against these abusers to battle the vicious backlash faced by these content creators. Trolls can heavily affect a person's sense of security (Swenson-Lepper & Kerby, 2019) and being in the public eye in such an environment can prove challenging. In such cases, it is not just the creators that experience mental and emotional stress, but even their families are reluctant and constantly worried about their security. Strong regulations will allow more female content creators to join the YouTube contingent and be encouraged to consider being YouTuber a serious career option.

Considering the discussion above and the fact that the online community of content creators is rising massively and so as the ever-increasing fury they face online; this research would like to explore the world of the female YouTubers; specifically the Indian Female YouTubers—understanding the consequence of the troll on their content and content creation process. It is crucial to identify the limitations and backlashes they face while creating and publishing their content, which will gauge the difference between their YouTube channel's original intent and the change (be it in content or production style) that the internet trolls might have pushed them to. The research proposes to explore the following research questions:

RQ1 – What sort of trolls are faced by female YouTubers?

RQ2 – Do the trolls end up dictating the final output of content posted on YouTube?

RQ3 – How do female YouTubers prefer to tackle the trolls?

Background to the Current Study

The Content Creation Trend on YouTube

With its launch in 2005, YouTube is one of the most popular websites with over two billion users, localised in over 100 countries and available in 80 different languages (Iqbal, 2020). With YouTube, we have the giant cinema screen at our fingertips (Stokel-Walker, 2019). While the platform gives multiple content options ranging from clips of TV shows and movies to brand promotions, Burgess & Green (2018) uncovered that user-generated content is consumed the most. Few oddballs and backbenchers started producing and uploading these videos to entertain, express and relax after their daily routines. YouTube now has almost 500 hours of footage uploaded on it every minute of every day. The platform was a great success by 2011 and has grown tremendously in recent years (Stokel-Walker, 2019). This growth also goes to show the multiple career opportunities that the platform has opened. Self-generated content and multiple genres offered a broader reach to audiences (Rosen & Laihanen, 2017). The younger audiences prefer to spend their time on YouTube, given the convenience and ease in content choice it offers, along with the platter of unconventional content that it has to offer (Stokel-Walker, 2019). The most consumed content tends to be entertainment (40%), followed by channels producing music tracks (20%) and subsequently sports (10%) and sports channels (10%). This wide variety of content available on the platform suggests that YouTube has become par with the mass media (Burgess & Green, 2018). To monetise this opportunity, content creators, called YouTubers on this platform, as registered users enrol in the YouTube Partner Program, which allows YouTube to run ads in the middle of their videos. Google Ad Sense chooses these ads, and the creators earn based on the brand's ad revenue while consuming their content (Waseem, 2018). It is proven to be an effective way for a novice to monetise on their talents. Fostering this symbiotic relationship with social, economic and cultural perks through programmatic advertising, big fan and subscriber-base across all social media platforms help YouTube keep churning fresh content and earn its ad revenues (Mehta, 2019; Cortes, 2013). An activity that started as a simple hobby now helps these YouTubers mint millions (Cunningham & Craig, 2016; Stokel-Walker, 2019).

Moreover, along with the means to publish content, YouTube is also equipped with tools for viewers to comment on, rate and react to the content published, leaving the viewers to connect with the creators (Cortes, 2013; Waseem, 2018). The social media evolution has made content creators branch out in their approach. Burgess & Green (2018) state that creators have started adopting "cross-platform" strategies. They now publish their content across platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. However, for most artists, before other platforms popularised, YouTube was their primary claim to fame. Online content creators are now more streamlined to publish their content for self-expression, promotion or commerce (Mehta, 2019).

Content Creators on YouTube in India

According to the IAMAI and Nielsen 2019 Report, with the introduction of cheaper phones and affordable data, internet penetration in India reached a whopping 385 million users. This number is only expected to grow further in the future. The consumption of the Internet has led to increased digital video consumption in the country. Vlogging was introduced in India by YouTube (Vyomakesisri et al., 2020). As per YouTube's 2019 Report, the platform has recorded 265 million monthly active users from India and more than 1200 creators with more

than one million subscribers, telling the immense popularity of the Indian content creators. Also, the ever-increasing digital video consumption has further fascinated interest from media businesses, as evidenced by the presence of about 40 Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms streaming in India (Das, 2019; Mehta, 2019). Young content creators quickly identified this demand and began creating content on social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook (Kay, 2018; Waseem, 2018; Kumar, 2016). These platforms nurture the creator's creative autonomy (van Dijck, 2013) apart from the monetisation prospects.

Further leveraging these efforts to steer away from traditional media, alternative music and stand-up comedy became YouTube's flag bearers. Once this content caught on, multichannel networks like Only Much Louder (OML), All India Bakchod (AIB), The Viral Fever (TVF) and East India Comedy (EIC) took charge of producing entertainment-based content online, inspiring a variety of other channels and genres to hop in on the trend. Beyond this, The Indian Food Network of the PING Network partnered with Tastemade to introduce a new format of cooking tutorials on the YouTube platform, which got quickly popularised in the country. Other genres caught on to revolutionising traditional content as OML and PING did, and the YouTube scene has only grown since then (Cunningham & Craig, 2016). Thus, YouTube became the hub for popular content. Tech Guruji garnering 14+ million subscribers has been a massive testament to the growth of the platform in India (Vyomakesisri et al., 2020). With low entry barriers, more users are encouraged to turn into YouTubers (Mehta, 2019). Popularity garnered by these content creators has offered them multiple brand ambassadorships. Along with these opportunities, they have also mastered the art of balancing creativity and commerce (Cunningham & Craig, 2016).

Trolling Culture faced by Content Creators Online

With YouTube providing features to react and comment on a video, it becomes convenient for individual users to wreak havoc by leaving mean and hurtful comments anonymously. Content creators are usually victims of various forms and types of cyberbullying, as stated in a few studies (Hassan et al., 2018; O'Connor, 2020)

- a. Harassment—sending offensive messages repeatedly
- b. Flaming—an online fight by exchanging e-mails and messages with harsh comments and sometimes derogatory images
- c. Outing—purposely publically posting sensitive and personal pictures and content
- d. Masquerading—using a fake identity to harass somebody anonymously
- e. Frapping—illegally impersonating someone else and logging into their account,
- f. Dissing—posting cruel information to damage reputation and relationships, and
- g. Trolling—deliberate act of provoking someone through comments

While trolling is highly debated, the School of Psychology and Counselling, University of Southern Queensland, defines it as an antisocial behaviour that aims to cause distress and disruption in an individual by leaving provocative comments online. Earlier studies proposed four distinct characteristics of this behaviour: Aggression (verbally attacking others); deception (using the anonymity of Internet anonymity), disruption (of social proceedings), and success (achieved when the "troll" receives their desired response or reaction) (March & Marrington, 2019). Trolling initially started as a medium of light-hearted humour but in recent times has been redefined and misused to hurt someone's sentiments intentionally and brutally. This peculiar kind of trolling is classified as flame trolling. This trolling behaviour commonly includes starting aggressive arguments and posting inflammatory and malicious messages on the online comment sections to provoke, disrupt, and deliberately upset others. This is lone

encouraging to the entertainment of self and other participants, at the target's expense. The only other people who find this kind of behaviour entertaining are those whom themselves indulge in this behaviour (March & Marrington, 2019). Thus, there exists a peculiar diversity when it comes to an understanding the trolls. The trolls exhibit the severity from “comparatively innocuous” teasing to behaviour that meets the legal definition of harassment and exhibits persistent antagonism. A public thread that seems to highlight a variety of trolling behaviour starts with the idea of deriving personal enjoyment where the “trollers appear to enjoy the attention they receive, even—and perhaps significantly—when it is incessantly wrong without further not even apprehending that their behaviour is triggering distress” (Lange, 2017). Hence it is crucial to treat trolling as cyber abuse and the crime to be taken seriously.

YouTube has often been criticised for its regulatory policies. While its guidelines state that bullying, stalking, and spamming is not allowed, the platform still supports freedom of speech and encourages its users to share their opinions even if the mainstream masses do not favour it. Instead, they rely primarily on content being reported to act upon a situation (Saarikallio, 2019). It has also been observed that YouTubers who were frequently subjected to trolling minimise their interaction with the platform; they reduce visiting and stop uploading, putting themselves at a professional disadvantage (Molyneaux et al., 2008). While YouTube gives the creators the freedom to hide specific comments, the publicly visible hate comments and trolls are only the problem's tips. YouTubers can turn off the comments entirely, but that may lead to them losing out on some constructive criticism (Döring & Mohseni, 2020).

Categories of Trolls & Trolling to Women

It has been observed that while eighty percent of the YouTubers are male and they also tend to receive criticism that is more critical and centred more around their work. Women receive more sexist flak and commentary, which has nothing to do with the quality of the work being put out (Saarikallio, 2019). Criticism directed towards women as compared to men is not only harsher but are also sexually aggressive. Female vloggers always replicate a low number of positive comments (Wotanis & McMillan, 2014). At the same time, female content creators receive negative comments for their personality and content but garner more positive ones for their physical appearance. To survive in this business, women must continually be conscious about their appearance considering “beauty is their only currency” (Döring & Mohseni, 2020).

It is primarily men commenters that leave gendered comments. They often use sexual terms like hot, sexy, cute, crush, tits, marry, beautiful, bang, fucking, boobs, dating, and dick. They even use the word ‘feminist’ as slang to insult women (Thelwall & Mas-Bleda, 2018). Broadcasting or normalising such sexist behaviour online also encourages similar behaviour offline (Fox et al., 2015). The outcome of such behaviour is that continued trolling put women into depression, hypertension, and anxiety, heart disease, diabetes, thyroid and many more stress-related diseases and further, it also demotivates them to engage in any activities online (Sankhwar & Chaturvedi, 2018).

Laws against Cyberbullying and Trolling

The Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Information Technology (IT) Act of 2000 has laws to fight against women's privacy and cyberbullying. However, most of the time, women are unaware of their rights and the laws to protect them. Many crimes committed are under-reported due to the stigma that follows getting tangled into legal matters. They are still unaware of the procedure to file a report, and the absence of a designated Digital Police Department hampers the course of attaining protection and justice. Moreover, trolling has not yet been defined with clarity, classifying it as an official cybercrime. This leaves the proposed laws with loopholes (Sankhwar & Chaturvedi, 2018; Kashyap & Kalyan, 2019).

Methodology

The research used a qualitative approach to explore the findings and to establish the results. In-depth interviews were conducted to conclude the results. The participants were interviewed between July-August 2020 through telephonic call/video call, as per their convenient slots. The researcher used purposive sampling and snowball sampling technique to select the participants for the research who are Female YouTubers. The comments section of the videos posted by female YouTubers across the genres of beauty, fashion, lifestyle and entertainment is scrutinised thoroughly before selecting the YouTubers. This exercise was performed for videos that were posted within the last year. Videos with more than 50,000 views across the selected genres were considered for the study.

Additionally, ten videos made by YouTubers well known for their experience in dealing with internet trolls and hate comments were studied to understand the comments' nature. While interviewing them, these videos were referred to understand their perceptions about the trolling they faced and how they adapted to handle the same. Approximately forty YouTubers were approached to participate in this research by directly and indirectly reaching out to them (through their managers), extending them an invitation over e-mails by stating this research's scope. Out of which, fifteen of them agreed to be a part of the research process. The interviews lasted for a time frame of 30-45 minutes and were recorded with their permission. The discussion was later summarised and transcribed to gather themes. It is important to note that the participants being public figures and easily prone to receiving backlash, have been promised anonymity to maintain their privacy. The researcher followed a grounded theory approach to perform data analysis, which involved linking “analysis and data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area” (Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

Findings

Summarising from the discussion the nature of trolls that the female content creators face:

1. The critics: The first type of trolls that the Female YouTubers face question their knowledge of the content they have been covering in a particular video, their intellect, and their lack of video production skills with harsh and demeaning words.
2. Personal judgement: The second kind of trolls that outweigh the previous one is critical and personal. The trolls were explicitly focused on the female YouTubers' physical appearance—from their hair to nosea, to clothes, to their speech – no part of their body and personality is left unscrutinised and uncriticised.
3. Digital teasers: Lastly, some trolls are sleazy and are the most abstruse, easily characterised as the digital version of eve-teasing.

Embracing the Co-existence

Recognition and fame on YouTube have shadowed the trolling and hate comments on the creators' channels. Most YouTubers are aware of the severe backlashes and abusive behaviour online, which they have faced in their initial days, and now they have decided not to pay much attention to them. When the platform was initially launched, the YouTubers who joined the platform never anticipated the trolls they would have to deal with and were taken aback and learned to deal with the situation. The new generation of YouTubers has observed and understood the possible backlash they might face in their career as YouTubers and enter the field somewhat prepared to tackle these trolls. However, it was pointed out during the

discussion that the videos where the YouTuber speaks more and tries to be more interactive get trolled more heavily. While the YouTube tools allow them to block specific words out of their comment section, delete a comment or report them, their mechanisms and approaches to deal with them vary. However, these approaches can be broadly placed under the following brackets, which the YouTubers mentioned during the discussion:

- Monitor the comments and the trolls for a specific duration: A few choose to monitor their comments section only for a stipulated time to gauge the audience reaction to the video. They then perform a self-analysis of sorts and shape their future content accordingly.
- Completely shut the trolls down: Some of the channels and YouTubers are so heavily trolled that they decide to completely shut down comments to avoid getting affected and distracted by them. Instead, it helps them focus on their work, and they continue to deliver to the best of their ability.
- Open for all: A handful of the YouTubers have kept their comments section open for all and do not personally monitor them. Instead, their talent management agency sorts out and shares the necessary feedback and suggestions. Beyond this, they do not delete or block any comments because they believe that *any publicity is good publicity*. More number of comments results in a high rate of engagement. YouTube algorithm identifies these videos under high engagement content, which increases the probability of the platform promoting and recommending that content with a higher frequency.

YouTube all the Way

Internet trolls and hate-mongers have found loopholes in the YouTube policy and found ways to be still able to troll the YouTubers. The response time for YouTube when reporting an account is comparatively slow. Since these YouTubers are also present across other social media platforms, most interviewees have agreed that the offerings in terms of reach and monetisation are mainly best offered by YouTube. While the positioning of YouTube from “accessible creative home-made videos” has shifted slightly towards favouring videos with slightly higher production value, Tik Tok did come close to being a strong contender in terms of its recommendation algorithm, reach and ease of content creation. However, in the current scenario, the monetisation policy of YouTube keeps the creators enticed towards improving and delivering more content and avoiding the trolls to a much possible extent.

Discussion and Conclusions

YouTube is one of the initial few platforms that fostered and encouraged content creation among the audiences has still managed to stand its ground and stay prevalent in both the creators and audience’s consideration. Over the years, the platform has evolved and framed its policies to encounter daily challenges. While YouTube has a few policies to tackle trolling, there are many loopholes that online trolls have identified. Trollers can make multiple accounts to spread the hate; they can still use abusive languages by getting innovative in their approaches. YouTubers in the initial days were not equipped or prepared to respond to or deal with the trolls. Nevertheless, the female YouTubers face an unimaginable amount of backlash, for which no one can be prepared in advance, so everyone uses a different approach to deal with the trolls.

While YouTube’s policies and the algorithm block out a fair amount of negative comments, these female YouTubers are always aware of the judgements’ possibilities that might be prone to the work they do. It takes much courage for women on YouTube or any other online social platform to open up and express themselves, showcasing their creativity. The

criticism faced by the trolls makes them question their efforts and time invested. The trolling might even reach an extent where they are discouraged from creating more content. Other than female YouTubers trying to get a little accustomed to this culture, even their families increasingly get concerned about their safety online.

On the other hand, many younger audiences seem to be in awe of these YouTubers and are heavily impressed and inspired by them. The trolls in no way can take away the opportunity to reflect upon the work that they delivered. There are also plenty of comments with constructive criticism that help them improvise their content and lift their morale. Trolls like to hide behind their anonymity on the platform since the probability of facing any severe consequences is quite low. While YouTube may need to review its policies, it is undeniable that YouTube still stands to be the best social media platform for content creators when it comes to monetising their creative content and hence despite the severe trolls, the content creators prefer YouTube. Finally, to conclude the findings, it can be implied through the study that severe trolls are a more common phenomenon for female YouTubers, and while it does impact the female content creators, it does not stop them from creating what they do aspire to. The good, bad and the ugly co-exist in the online platform, and the trolls are just one aspect that, directly and indirectly, impact the content creator.

Although trolling is an outcome of society's cultural production, it also plays an active role in shaping society (Craker & March 2016; Ortiz, 2020). Since trolls facilitate racism and sexism, it also specifies a broader meaning-making process in people's everyday lives that revolve around hostile online and offline environments. Thus, trolling is a mechanism of spreading disparity and divided society. Only positioning this behaviour as a mere unfortunate act in online life will normalise the experience, which otherwise was exhausting, traumatic and sad. The study also tried to put the female trolling as discrimination that is not randomly distributed but socially patterned. Future studies should compare the experiences and the discrimination online and offline and map the contexts that might also work in the future frame of cultural and political contexts. The study conceptualised gender trolling and putting forth it as a part of an academic study where the victims of the trolls and the other content creators have voiced their experiences. It will also create a premise for cross-disciplinary studies in this area.

Limitations and future scope of the study

YouTubers are now widely recognised public faces, and it has been a challenge to make them comfortable sharing their thoughts during the interview despite being promised anonymity. An element of distrust and being misrepresented only to face more backlash ultimately led them to give more politically correct answers. Some seemed to be very reluctant to elaborate on the challenges they faced initially and seemed keener on giving a more positive picture of their battle with the trolls. Additionally, while scrutinising the comments, it was found that a lot of negative comments had already been blocked or deleted. That hinders getting an exact picture of the extent of the brutality inflicted by the trolls. However, considering that the researcher's discovery may only be a small tip of the troll's iceberg, it indeed emphasises the situation's gravity.

The study will act as a reference point for many young women content creators who aspire to become professional YouTubers. This research can guide them to prepare beforehand with strategies to face this hindrance and deliver their creative outputs on the platform to the best of their ability. In addition, the professionals working at the backend of this platform could gain insight and work toward providing the YouTubers with a better experience and security on the platform.

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