

Digital Surveillance And Privacy Of Women

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the challenges and implications of digital surveillance and privacy issues affecting women. It discusses the gender-based disparities perpetuated by surveillance from government, corporate, and interpersonal sources, leading to psychological, emotional, and physical harassment of women. The collection and misuse of data through apps used for self-care and development contribute to violations of women's social, mental, sexual, and reproductive health. The paper argues for the need for legislative enforcement and policy development by governments and online platforms to support victims, promote women's awareness of their rights, and ensure the safety of digital spaces. It emphasizes the importance of secure communication platforms and encrypted messaging apps, alongside legal and technological measures to foster inclusivity and respect for privacy as a fundamental right.

Keywords: Digital Surveillance, Privacy, Gender Disparities, Legislation, Women's Rights, Cybersecurity

1.1. Introduction

Digital space helps connect local stories with global narratives. The social, political, and economic movements have been witnessed as 'waves' in the Western context. The first wave of feminism in the late 19th and early 20th century witnessed the securing of voting rights. The second wave of feminism in the 1960s called for securing reproductive rights and sexuality and issues of empowerment of minorities. The third wave of feminism addressed questions on the ideas of womanhood, femininity, and gender.

Indian feminism in the first wave focussed on education and social reforms like Sati, widow remarriage, and early marriage (Chaudhuri, 2012). They tried to reclaim political rights and employment opportunities and focussed on anti-colonial movements in the 19th century. Prominent figures included Pandita Ramabai who criticized the caste system and patriarchy. Tarabai Shinde wrote the first feminist text of India, *Stri Purush Tulana* in 1882 and Savitribai Phule started the first school for girls in 1848. It included male figures such as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Raja Ram Mohun Roy. The second wave of feminism dealt with issues in the private sphere like marriage, inheritance, succession, dowry violence, sexual assault, and divorce. It also saw an intersection of the issues of caste, gender, and class. The difference between the first and second waves of Indian feminism is that while the former was led by men on behalf of women, it still promoted the patriarchal structure whereas the latter was led by women and women-led organizations. The third wave of feminism saw the government's focus on women's health, education, and issues of employment. Women's groups redirected their efforts on economic and social reforms and took up causes for Dalit and marginalized women.

The fourth wave of feminism in India emerged synchronously with the West due to the emerging use of technology and the availability of the internet around the globe. It mainly focuses on the use of digital technology to address their concerns including sexual harassment, and rape culture amongst many others (Shiva & Nosrat Kharazmi, 2019). It also highlights the promotion of ethics in online spaces where the threats of death and rape frequently emerge. However, the language barrier is huge because of the geographical location and socio-economic class. The dominant language of conversation also plays a major role in who is seen and heard. It is felt that women in the Global South face discrimination when their voices are considered different from the issues in mainstream Western feminism. Despite the initiatives by the government, women's

empowerment seems to lag. Since the pandemic, women have been more susceptible to job losses and slow recovery of livelihood.

The United Nations Office of Secretary-General Envoy on Technology admits that digital technologies act as an end to human rights. They too emphasize extracting data from online platforms to find disinformation and look for ways to counter it along with enhancing transparency (*Digital Human Rights*, 2023). Under the guidelines of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the goal is to uphold the dignity of the people and maintain equality. But when it turns into a profit-making business exploiting the lives, especially of women, it becomes more of a problem rather than a platform meant for convenience for the people. This paper attempts to address these everyday challenges and bring in recommendations to bridge the digital divide.

1.2. Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence has significantly impacted the human world by reshaping the way we live and interact with the world. Its broad spectrum influences machine learning algorithms and advanced robotics. It is therefore important for us to understand how it impacts the various facets of our mortal existence. In the mid-20th century, pioneers tried to develop computational models that could imitate human cognitive processes. The applications of AI are widespread (Takyar, n.d.). It is used in healthcare to give personalized treatment and assists in diagnostics. It has extended its possibilities in the areas of environment, education, and media art. It has brought significant challenges, benefits and ethical questions since its advent. One of the most critical aspects of its ethical use is bias in privacy and algorithms. Striking a balance between innovation and responsibility is the goal that is meant to be achieved here. Ensuring technological progress aligns with societal norms creates a huge value.

1.3. The Dynamics of Gender and Privacy in Online Community

In real life, people generally presume that women are more responsible for their private conduct. They are often looked at from the lens of being a woman, wife, mother, or sister. Women do not enjoy the same level of privacy in the private sphere because they become softer targets as they have been considered inferiors and safe targets for a long time. The accountability of accusations is sometimes justified based on this perception and women are victimized. These gender norms of misconduct also expand from the real world to cyberspace creating a greater risk for them. Women have been subjected to too much privacy with confinement at their homes, frowned upon in terms of expression of their sexuality, and lack opportunities to engage in independent decision-making. They were for a long time excluded from social, political, and cultural leadership and mostly confined to the private sphere. Even those who worked outside were susceptible to autonomy-limiting practices and expected to reserve and have modest conduct. Women must engage in cyberspace for necessity and convenience. Just like others, cyberspace should be left for women to build their community and commerce with others away from these sex-specific problems.

Both men and women are using cyberspace to build careers, relationships, and businesses (Allen, 2000). Today, we do not only have social media platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram but also virtual marketplaces like Amazon, Flipkart, Zepto, and Blinkit along with personal gadgets of daily use like Fitbits, biometric software, cameras, etc. They use it as a channel to look for personal development and self-care, to buy products for themselves and their families, and to express political views on the happenings of the world. This also makes them vulnerable to invasion of privacy in cyberspace. Their data is exposed to the companies with whom they engage in business. This sometimes includes their financial data. The other side of granting too much privacy to counter this problem would be that anonymity and confidentiality of information could lead to the cropping up of communities that engage in criminality and misconduct. It is important to take into consideration digital privacy from women's perspective to evaluate the consequences of global networking in creating opportunities for them and at the same time facing predicaments.

The interplay between the collection of data and usage is significant as it can create repercussions in a person's life. The confidentiality with which data is consented to be given might reveal a person's identity thereby affecting their mobility and freedom. Sometimes due to technical glitches, their affiliations get erased. The biggest challenge yet to come is to make it more inclusive for the Indians. Storing data requires intersectionality to understand what the requirements of the platform are. For example, if data is collected for a gender case study for sanitation, it should be confined to the same and not reveal their castes in the process. Internet applications help women keep their sexual and financial health in check, but they are sometimes sold by companies infringing their privacy as they become susceptible to advertisement, hacking, and harassment (Reuters, 2023). Even male members of the family monitor the whereabouts of the women such as tracing their location or deactivating their devices. In a patriarchal society, regulations on the digital conduct of women must be considered violence curtailing their freedom. The targeting is rampant because of the non-confirmation of women to patriarchal stereotypes. Young girls and boys are exposed to adults who seek to sexually exploit them without the knowledge of their parents, making them more vulnerable to even staying at home and using the internet. Even women at home are vulnerable to fraud, pornography, and abuse since they lack the knowledge to operate the internet. Anonymity encourages people to live lives of duplicity. It is not

necessarily the good privacy but the 'bad' privacy too which results in heinous crimes that generally go unreported because of the societal pressures and fear of shame and ostracization.

In the face of turmoil and disturbances in a country, the first go-to is to disrupt the internet and telephone lines. Attempts are made to limit freedom of speech and dissemination of information by criminalizing them in the name of security. Facial recognition has been used to monitor people and their movements. In the event of shutdown, it largely affects the communities especially women who are at the intersections of poverty and gender (Mehta, n.d.). The exclusion also leads to an increase in the rate of crimes because they cannot share their concerns and safety. The emotions of powerlessness are ardent here. In these moments they sometimes need to share their passwords with their friends and relatives to retrieve important data which further adds to troubles in case their privacy is infringed intentionally by them. Technology determinism is a term used to resonate that technology is an upcoming force whose usage is inevitable. But women are demotivated to use them citing their safety which the platforms are not able to protect. The onus of responsibility is passed onto the women instead of putting the people responsible for the violence. The problems also aggravate because women lie at the intersection of class, caste, gender, and religion. The shift of hypocrisy against women is witnessed from the real world to the cyber world. Cybercrimes against women have increased to 110% between 2018 to 2020. The Centrally sponsored scheme, Cyber Crime against Women and Children has still to achieve a lot (Biswas, 2023).

1.4. Challenges of Artificial Intelligence on the Privacy of Women

- I. Biases in AI algorithms create discriminatory outcomes when these data contain gender biases. The algorithms perpetuate the problem.
- II. AI systems collect vast amounts of data. with AI applications using predictive analysis, it can manhandle the personal data of women which consists of unauthorized sensitive information.
- III. Facial recognition technology can lead to privacy violations making women more susceptible to harassment and stalking.
- IV. Women compromise autonomy when they are disengaged from decision-making processes when their personal information is used by AI without obtaining consent. The lack of transparency makes it difficult for them (Yu & Li, 2022). The algorithmic decisions reinforce stereotypes by making gender-based harmful assumptions with data.
- V. The lack of diversity in the development and decision-making processes of AI generates a lack of motivation to develop solutions related to the above-mentioned concerns (Joksimovic et al. , 2023).

1.5. Philosophical Foundations of Privacy in Feminist Care Ethics

Feminist care ethics is an ethical framework that places empathy, interconnectedness, and empathy under its realm. It provides a unique perspective in the domain of technology and digital ethics to examine decision-making. The papers shed light on the disproportionate gender implications of digital surveillance. Ethical theories by Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings put care as a fundamental moral principle in the dynamics of empathy, understanding, and compassion. Care ethics is a shift from abstract principles to shaped ethical responsibilities. (Gilligan 1982, Noddings 1984).

- I. **Autonomy** – The digital intrusion in personal spaces shakes the fundamental character of care ethics. Women may face threats to their autonomy. The ethical dimensions of digital surveillance must ensure respect for their autonomy (Nissenbaum, 2010).
- II. **Power Dynamics** – The digital realm has exacerbated power dynamics where women have become more vulnerable to discrimination, abuse, and harassment. A care-based approach ensures the prevention of gender inequalities (Mackinnon, 1989).
- III. **Emotional Labor** – surveillance systems have an impact on the mental well-being of women since it takes a psychological toll on them after being constantly observed. (Hochschild, 1983)

The ideas that define feminist care ethics in the realm of digital privacy are the relational nature of privacy, empathy and digital interactions, and power dynamics and intersectionality. The relational nature of privacy emphasizes that individual right is a relational concept. The interconnectedness of individuals concentrates on how the impact of privacy decisions affects the entire community. It highlights how digital practices affect the well-being and interrelationships of the people. Care ethics also emphasizes the design and development of digital spaces in such a way that prioritizes the emotional and mental health of its users (Yew, 2021). It prioritizes empathy and attentiveness to their needs. Feminist care ethics addresses the power dynamics. It examines the imbalances caused by the collection and use of personal data based on gender, caste, race, and other socially defined factors. The aim is to create just and inclusive digital environments.

1.6. Choice-based Use in Cyberspace

Cyberspace is used by women to express their individuality freely and sometimes anonymously beyond the social, cultural, and economic factors. They do not have to include their identity while engaging with technology (Daniels, 2009). They consider it to be a place for free expression of their individuality. They can interact with each other genderless and express themselves authentically. At the same time, some sites allow people to find their sexual partners.

The matter of choice comes into place when used in the cyberworld. There are two cases, one is of *iJustine*, a life-caster in 2007 who used to broadcast her life in front of the world. The same is the case of *Jennicam* by Jennifer Ringley who did the same from the span of 1996 to 2007 which required a 15\$ subscription to view her everyday life. The current social media presence of the influencers does the same with stricter regulations on the content that has been generated. The companies hold the authority to remove any conduct that goes against their policies. Online spaces perpetuate threats as image-based online crimes have reportedly increased. Non-consensual distribution of images leads to sexual abuse and intimate content being circulated. Misinformation and disinformation are different underpinnings of violence that target mostly women in popular positions. Their sexuality is generally targeted with attached prejudices and stereotypes which are passed on as truth. News about their personal and professional realms are generated and directed with personalized attacks of a synthetic nature.

As per 2022 reports, 70% male population and 63% female population use the internet (Statista, 2023), and in India, 52% of males as compared to 31% of women use the internet (Statista, 2021). The executive director of the nonprofit Internet Freedom Foundation, Apar Gupta says that the values of the Constitution – justice, equality, fraternity, and liberty are also reflected in the digital world today (*Indian Development Review*, 2022). The central government has invested in the creation of infrastructure to improve internet access. He admits that policymaking should reflect the realities of India today where freedom of speech and privacy must be protected.

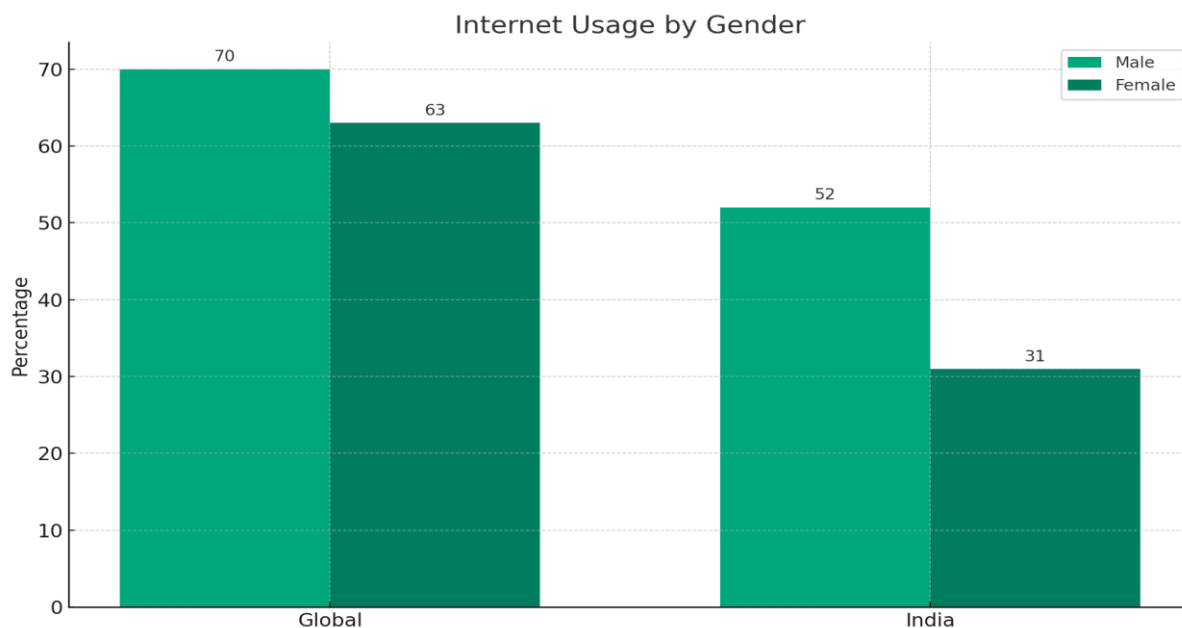


Figure 1.1: Comparison of Internet Usage by Gender Globally and in India

Feminist and women's groups have not only attempted to spread awareness in online spaces but have successfully challenged the status quo by causing a shift in the collective consciousness of society. Women's rights movement is a subgroup of socio-political movements that deals with the gendered experiences of women. Their nature could be related to financial empowerment and political visibility. Many of these groups organize and advocate activism in online spaces issues directly concerning these challenges and digital rights. Social media platforms like X, Facebook, and WhatsApp facilitate the same. These human rights movements have also proved to be successful, #MeToo, and #BlackLivesMatter, amongst many. They put in the groundwork to raise awareness both on the community and national level. The emphasis on civil society is to spread awareness about digital literacy and digital rights. This will create easy dissemination of information and function. There is a need to harbor and cultivate the online and offline modes of functioning and promote them amongst institutions (Milenkova & Lendzhova, 2021). These common practices can reach out to people and leaders and can be popularised through pamphlets, presentations, and speeches at different places.

Percentage of Women in the Indian IT Workforce

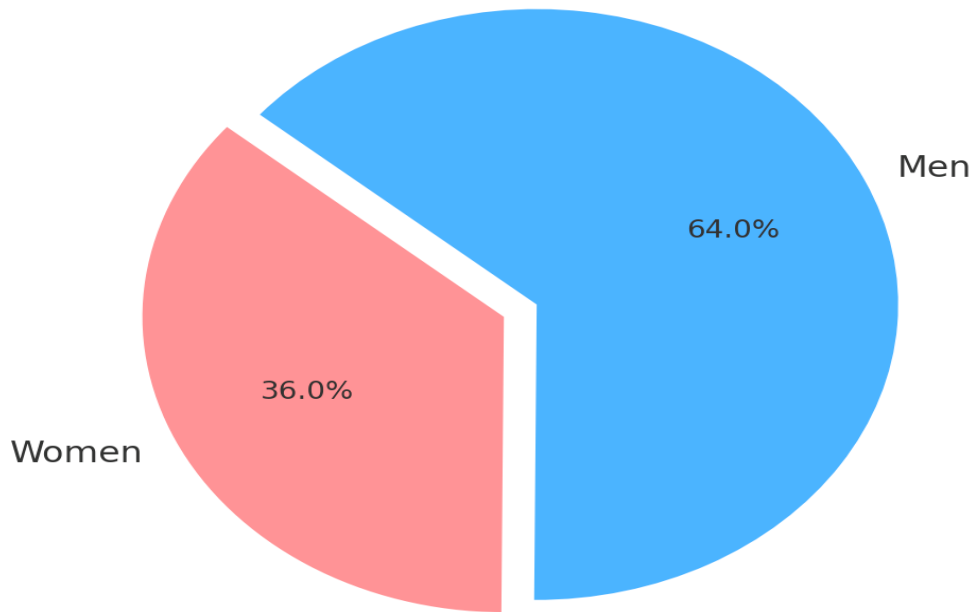


Figure 1.2.: Percentage of Women in the Indian workforce

More than 20 lakh women have been added to the Indian IT sector since the last decade. Out of the 50.3 lakh workforce in the industry, 36% are women. It has added to the critical organizational values of Equity and inclusion. “Even the number of seats in computer science engineering and related disciplines has expanded rapidly across India” (*The Economic Times*, 2023). With the advent of remote work, women in tier-2 and tier-3 locations have added to the workforce. Amongst other factors, the greater visibility of women in leadership roles has enabled their participation.

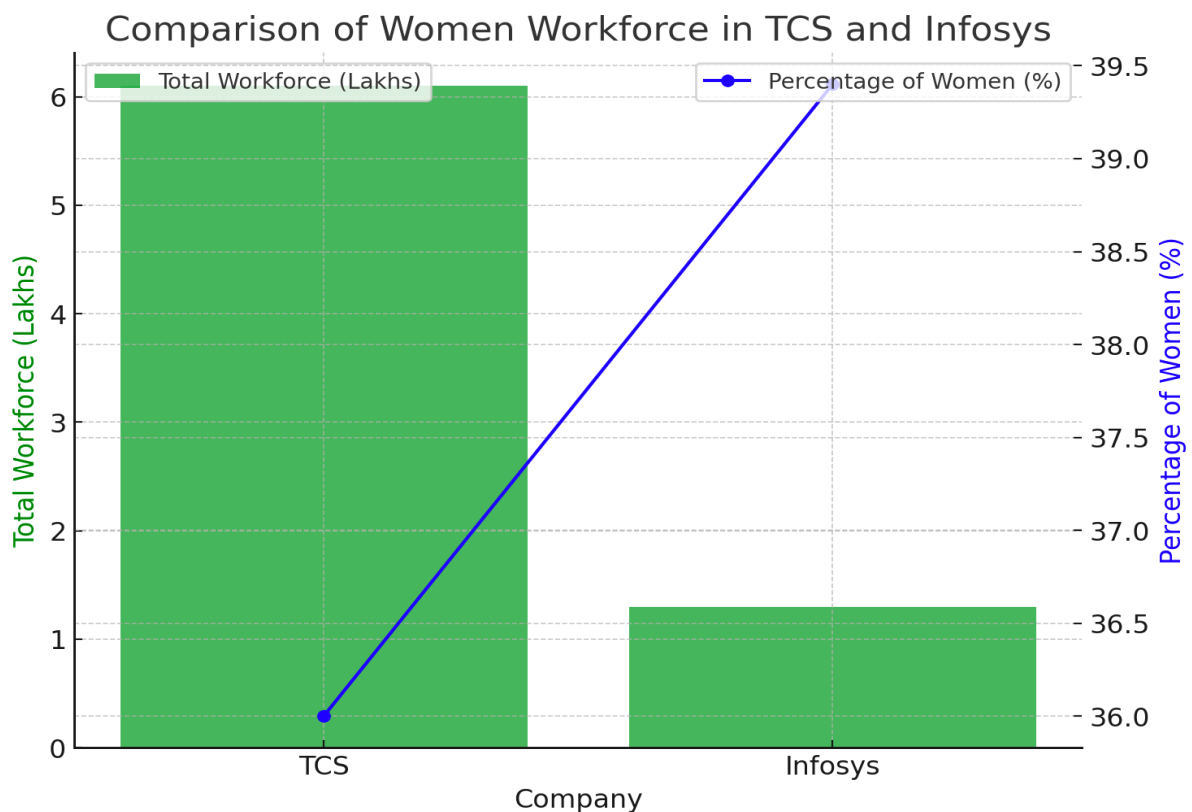


Figure 1.3.: Comparison of women workforce in TCS and Infosys

TCS has 2.2 lakh women employees, constituting 36% of its total workforce of 6.1 lakh employees. In its 2022-2023 annual report, the company said it had seen a 60% increase in senior women executives over the last five years. Infosys has 1.3 lakh women employees, comprising 39.4% of its overall workforce. Nasscom's Ghosh said their research shows that women's representation is 40% higher in organizations where the senior leadership or the CEO is driving the DE&I agenda (*The Economic Times*, 2023).

1.7. Moral Landscape in Technological Ethics

Ethical considerations play a crucial role in crafting the future. Shannon Valor in her work, "Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting" navigates technology's potential benefits and its moral challenges.

- I. **Cultivating Technological Virtue** – Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* talks about character traits i.e. Virtue which is defined as a golden mean. It means how to love in moderation by avoiding extreme pleasure and extreme pain in life by following the middle path that is the Golden Mean. It motivates me to cultivate virtues such as courage, wisdom, and justice. Vallor proposes cultivating sustainable technological virtues for technological advancements for an ethically grounded future. To ensure positive individual and societal well-being, technological innovations must align with virtuous living (Tech Ethics Lab, 2022).
- II. **Social dimensions** – the social dimensions that come with the use of technology are the ethical responsibilities towards marginalized communities, future generations, and the environment. For an inclusive and equitable future in technology, the emphasis must be placed on the virtue of justice. Cultivating a sense of justice helps critically examine the distribution of benefits and burdens that accompany technology.
- III. **Mindful engagement** – An intentional approach with technology helps evaluate attention, and well-being relationships in a time full of full-time connectivity and digital distractions.
- IV. **Privacy** - Safeguarding privacy is a fundamental right. It protects a person's autonomy. Recurrent surveillance and data collection hampers the virtue of the integrity of a person.

1.8. Ethical Decision Making

- I. **Intersectionality** – There is a complex web of experiences that recognizes race, sexuality, social factors, and economic factors among many others. There is a varied impact on different groups of women (Crenshaw, 1989).
- II. **Trust** – A revaluation of technological ethics requires us to build and foster a sense of trust amongst individuals and technology. This will help mitigate any potential harm (Floridi, 2013). Therefore, highlighting the factors again taken into consideration and their elaboration are included in the next section of Intersectionality.

1.9. Navigating Intersectionality: Indian Context and Abroad

Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlee Crenshaw. It talks about the multifaceted experiences of women from various dimensions of their lives. It acknowledges the impact of race, sexuality, economic and social factors. It sheds light on the challenges faced by women. The concept of Intersectionality unravels the unique challenges that Indian women face specifically in digital surveillance and privacy concerns. In the growing digital landscape, surveillance technologies are continuing to increase with the advanced utilization of biometric identification systems for social media monitoring (De, 2019).

The different dimensions include:

- I. **Race and Gender** – Women of color face unique challenges which with historical systematic racism and gender discrimination coupled with economic inequalities create a framework of oppression that is complex. The struggle for women of color is compounded by both racial and gender equality (Crenshaw, 1989). The gendered Impact of Surveillance leads to the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes about women and exaggerates online harassment, bullying, and virtual abuse (Sen, 2016).
- II. **Sexuality and Gender** – Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer women find themselves at the crossroads when societal norms and prejudices amplify their diverse experiences. Their issues encompass healthcare inequality and legal recognition. Access to resources and overall well-being are influenced when they face discrimination based on sexual orientation (Collins, 2000). The socioeconomic Factors also lead to limited access to digital literacy and resources prompting economic disparities due to a lack of opportunities and information (Gurumurthy, 2012).
- III. **Caste and Gender** – B. R. Ambedkar first talked about the challenges that Dalit women face as compared to women belonging to the higher castes in Indian Feminism. The former are more poor, socially marginalized, and uneducated. He said that the progress of a community can be measured by the degree of progress that women have achieved. Inspired by leaders like Ambedkar, Dalit women formed feminist groups such as the *National Federation of Dalit Women* and the *All India Dalit Women's Forum*. They rallied against the systemic violence and structural violence that they faced due to the lack of impunity and comprehensive legal support for the protection of the victims which are different from non-Dalit women.

There has been a disproportionate advancement of Digital India progression. The Digital India initiative opens up new opportunities but according to the Annual India Inequality Report by Oxfam, the financially challenged section of the society struggles to catch up.

- I. **Social Factors and Gender** – Social factors like class and education play a significant role in shaping one's experiences. Women from the working class face economic inequality and limited opportunities and women from higher socioeconomic status face challenges on societal and professional expectations (hooks, 1984).
- II. **Economic Status and Gender** - Economic disparities include limited education, health access to resources, financial independence, and employment opportunities. They can prolong the cycle of poverty in which one gets caught. Women belonging to lower-income backgrounds may face challenges in securing economic stability (Lorde, 1984). Lack of access to Digital Spaces causes urban-rural divides to impact education levels based on digital participation and surveillance exposure (Janakiram, 2019).
- III. **Legal and Policy Implications** – Technology is power, and access to the internet is an essential part of human rights, but in a country where women repeatedly face gender-based violence and discrimination in areas of employment and education, along with access to proper healthcare, it is of no surprise that the denial of access to technology is another strong patriarchal tool helping in the subjugation of women (Biswas, 2022).

The crafting of legislation must be inclusive and consider the diverse experiences of Indian women. There is also a failure from the side of the government as they are not providing accessibility and connectivity as a public utility. Instead, it is seen as a privilege.

1.10. Artificial Intelligence Used in the Privacy of Women

With the advent of AI, concerns of security issues concerning women continue to grow. AI can also act as a crucial tool to tackle online harassment and data breaches to fortify digital infrastructure.

- I. To combat online harassment, AI algorithms can analyze communications and flag any harmful content potentially. This could include threats and abusive messages. This proactive approach by these platforms will enable women to freely express themselves.
- II. Due to the increasing digitization of personal lives, the risks of unauthorized access and breaches continue to grow. To tackle this, advanced AI algorithms will detect threats and create alerts and anomalies of potential threats to ensure the confidentiality of data.
- III. To provide personalized privacy controls so that women can make settings accordingly and adjust preferences. Having granular control over personal boundaries in digital space will help in having a responsive approach to safeguarding behavior and personal preferences.
- IV. Educating and empowering women on digital literacy is crucial to help them navigate the digital landscape smoothly. By teaching how to use the resources and inculcating awareness, women will be able to regulate their online presence accordingly (Naim, 2023).

1.11. Feminist Method: Consciousness Raising

One of the feminist methods is 'Consciousness Raising' given by Catherine Mckinnon which would help throw some light to overcome challenges. The accumulation of shared experiences by women will help them to mobilize and question the restrictions based on the above-mentioned domain of intersections. This section elaborates on these dynamics. The need for resistance is required not only on legal terms but as a social collective as well. She says,

The Collective reconstitution of the meaning of women's social experience, as women live through it. Consciousness raising inquiries into an intrinsically social situation, into that mixture of thought and materiality which comprises gender in the broadest sense. It approaches its world through a process that shares its determination: women's consciousness, not as individual or subjective ideas, but as a collective social being (Mackinnon, 1989).

It draws awareness on the restrictions at both home and workplace based on sex. All revolutionary movements start with a matter of creating respective perceptions for themselves. The groups that are oppressed need to demolish the pertinent ideas surrounding them and project an identity of their own. One of the first steps is to gather these women together and connect them to articulate and confront. The two broad areas will consist of the private sphere and their sexuality (Mackinnon, 1989). Mckinnon says that women are subjected to such denigrated treatment that they perceive themselves to be responsible for it. This happens because women have learned that men look at them from their vision and they have learned to look at themselves from the latter's context of vision.

Sexism is something that has already been accepted in the background as a form of habit. One of the other things which catches attention is that being a woman can be defined as socially about their personal and public relations. So, consciousness-raising can be said to be a focus on the social reality of being a female (Mackinnon,

1989). Social conventions have also made them inwardly dependent. They feel that they require the presence of others in their lives to live a holistic life which encompasses being in a marriage or aligning themselves with household work. The exercising of the position of power by men in certain ways defines them and women respectively. When this power is challenged it is sometimes seen as a threat to the identity and definition of men. Power is perceived socially as a male form. It is not only that men treat women badly, although they often do, but that it is their choice whether or not to do so. This understanding of power is one of the key comprehensions of feminism. The reality points to it because it is everywhere and relatively invariant; appears to be nowhere separable from the whole, and from the totality it defines (Mackinnon, 1989).

It can be understood that the structure in the private sphere through which women maintain the position of submission influences the public settings. Catherine Mckinnon states that 'personal is political' comes out of Consciousness Raising and has interconnected facets:

- I. Women as a group are dominated by men as a group, and therefore as individuals.
- II. Women are subordinated in society, not by personal nature or by biology.
- III. The gender division, which includes the sex division of labor which keeps women in high-heeled low-status jobs, pervades and determines even women's personal feelings in relationships.
- IV. Since a woman's problems are not hers individually but those of women as a whole, they cannot be addressed except as a whole.

Co-operative rationality in the last instance aims at participatory democracy and the common good, whereas instrumental rationality results in particularism and the last instance fascism. In class societies, there is a history of antagonism between instrumental and cooperative rationality. Dominant classes and groups develop ever newer methods of exploitation and domination that instrumentalize humans so that particular groups benefit at the expense of others (Fuchs, 2020).

Consciousness-raising tries to strike a redefined meaning of social relations and reconstitute the meaning. For McKinnon, "one form of male power is inside women. Male power both is and is not illusory. As it justifies itself, namely as natural, universal, unchangeable, given and morally correct, it is illusory; but the fact that it is powerful is no illusion (Mackinnon, 1989)." Men formulate a woman's collective realities by stigmatizing their thoughts and living. In a stereotyped setting, women select the events which they are encouraged to feel and choose even though it feels to them that they don't belong there. This can be also called distortion of self.¹ Thus, it can be realized that these universal judgments cannot be true. The process of consciousness-raising "affirms a product of the determinants - self as the knower of one's condition - while building a criticism of the conditions that have produced one as one is (Mackinnon, 1989)." For women to become their persons they have to set new conditions and choose their determinants. In a system like this, these factors create hindrances for a person to realize one's potential. To overcome it, the idea of Appropriation is used to seize the condition of domination and shape one's own life for common benefit. When a subjective alienation is overcome, it then leads to active citizenship.

1.12. Promotion of Digital Literacy

Women need to control their digital lives. They must have digital and data literacy skills to do that. The National Digital Literacy Mission in 2014 put the digital literacy program into focus. They brought digital literacy sessions on accessing government schemes and services along with skills training that provided a platform for young people, especially in rural villages to help build their knowledge. It encouraged women to learn technology and provided online courses for girls in skill development. The awareness was spread through Anganwadi. It has enabled women to start collectives and opened the use of online commerce platforms.

According to Nadia Rasheed (2021), "United National Development Programme (UNDP) opened economic opportunities for underprivileged and marginalized women, including by investing in skilling programs that increase digital literacy and familiarity with technological tools and platforms." Through these initiatives, a group of women in the bangle-making business were able to list their business on Facebook and were able to recover losses incurred after covid 19. Similarly, two thousand handloom weavers were able to connect to markets and expand their businesses.

Blogging and social media have been used as tools for building transnational networks, encouraging accessibility and community building. A blog called 'When Women Refuse' was started for women to share their experiences around sexual violence when several women were killed for rejecting advances made by men in California, US (The Indian Express, 2015). Blogging has several times called for inciting micro-rebellions against misogynist and patriarchal actions against women. There are about 45 percent of young cyber feminists between the ages of 18-29 years (Anderson *et al.*, 2018). According to Faith Wilding (2006), the Internet provides women a platform to separate from their material selves to create a fluid identity and multi-subject to initiate a new platform and redesign their spaces. To change their feminine condition. In 2013, The Delhi bus gang rape case mobilized people from all corners of India to protest and bring in policy changes for the

¹ Self is taken as an independent agency.

safety and security of women. In 2013, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of regulating the sale of acid when the acid attack survivors fathered 27,000 signatures through an online petition 'StopAcidSale.'

1.13. Steps taken by the Government

The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 highlights the following –

- I. Social media intermediaries, with registered users in India above a notified threshold, have been classified as significant social media intermediaries (SSMIs)
- II. The Rules may be going beyond the powers delegated under the Act in certain cases, such as where they provide for the regulation of significant social media intermediaries and online publishers and require certain intermediaries to identify the first originator of the information.
- III. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology noted that the changes were necessitated due to widespread concerns around a) prevalence of child pornography and content depicting sexual violence, b) spread of fake news, c) misuse of social media, d) content regulation in case of online publishers including OTT platforms and news portals, e) lack of transparency and accountability from digital platforms, and f) rights of users of digital media. The validity of the Rules has been challenged in various High Courts.
- IV. As per the rules, the Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting may pass an order to block the content of an online publisher in case of emergency. (PRS Legislative Research, 2021).

1.14. Way Forward

To counter the mentioned challenges, the below initiatives are recommended:

- I. Data processors should publish an annual statement detailing the storage and usage of the data.
- II. To mitigate compulsive behavior, online platforms must use the data for how it has been used by the consumer.
- III. An annual audit should inform for what purpose the consumer's data are being used and how the algorithms are working to drive their behavior (Sartor & Loreggia, 2020).
- IV. Terms of Service should be written in plain language for the understanding of a common person.
- V. Maximum safety and privacy settings must be formalized as a standard.
- VI. The Digital Authority must work with the Policymakers of the country.
- VII. The companies are recommended to use artificial intelligence to identify bullying and illegal content.
- VIII. Community standards must be updated to moderate behaviors on these platforms and should be consistent with age policy.

Conclusion

Addressing these challenges requires stricter ethical guidelines in terms of increased transparency, continuous improvement, and inclusive representation in decision-making and design processes. There is a need to strike a balance between technological development and the protection of fundamental rights.

Shannon Vallor centers choices and innovations of technology on ethical grounds to advance a future worth wanting. Feminist care ethics help ground empathy and compassion in the digital age and will give valuable insights into the gendered implications of technology. Intersectionality encourages us to recognize the critical web of experiences that women must navigate. They include sexuality, economic and social factors, race, and disability amongst many others. Recognition of these perspectives promotes social justice and encourages inclusivity in this interconnected world.

To achieve democratic online feminism, the focus of the country should be on recognizing the gap and teaching underrepresentation groups of digital literacy so they can communicate with transnational agencies. Any online backlash leads to psychological and professional impact on the affected women. The digital space for a woman acts as a refuge and a room to find information on the legal system and financial support that they might be battling in their personal and professional spaces. It also helps them engage in local and community-based activities like peer support and raise awareness about the issues that matter.

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