



LOOK AT DALIT IDENTITY FORMATION THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

A new arena for discussions on Dalits' plight has emerged in the age of digital media, particularly social media. Opinions and forms of self-expression have erupted due to the social media rallying. The extensive Dalit forum is a place where members discuss and debate many topics, and the collective wisdom of the community is shedding light on the caste system and the injustices perpetrated by the majority in India. Through their participation in social media, Dalits are drawing attention to certain crimes and situations, which in turn compels mainstream media to cover them. Like in the past, when a crime is committed against a Dalit, there will be an overwhelming amount of information, images, and videos shared on Dalit forums. This makes it impossible for the media to ignore such tales

Keywords: *Dalit, Caste System, Discrimination, identity, Digital Media, social media*

1. INTRODUCTION

People from marginalized groups have found a voice in the new media in recent years. Nevertheless, comprehending the social order in the current society is essential for studying the technology that opens new possibilities. One such social structure known as caste occurs in India. Many individuals at the bottom of India's caste system face discrimination at the hands of the culturally and economically affluent "upper caste," which controls the country's public discourse. By rejecting outmoded epistemological frameworks based on time and place, information societies powered by ICTs provide enormous chances to restructure human civilization and usher in the information era with new normative standards. Citizenship, which is emphasized as a legal entitlement bestowed to the nation-state, assumes geography. However, when the new ideas of place and time become irrelevant for new forms of online citizenship—due to the prevalence of ICT and sovereign governing outside designated pre-existing territories—this paradigm becomes insufficient.

The plight of India's Dalits is like a laundry list of catastrophes. An assault on a Dalit person occurs every 18 minutes, according to a 2010 NHRC study on the Prevention of Atrocities against Scheduled Castes. There are an average of three rapes of Dalits women, two murders of Dalits, and two arsons of Dalits' homes every day. Among the Dalits, 37% are poor, and 54% suffer from malnutrition, according to NHRC data compiled by K.B. Saxena, a former additional chief secretary of Bihar. Among Dalit households, a staggering 83% of infants do not survive until their first birthday, 12% do not make it to kindergarten, and 45% never learn to read or write. Another finding from the data is that 28% of Indian villages do not allow Dalits entry to the police station. In 39% of public schools, students from Dalit families are required to eat their meals at separate tables. In 24% of Indian villages, those who are considered Dalits do not get mail delivery to their houses. Similarly, despite the abolition of the caste system in 1955, it is still a harsh truth that 48% of our communities do not allow them access to water sources.

Any material that computers can read is considered digital media [1]. Publishing, journalism, entertainment, education, business, and politics have all been impacted by it and the rise of the PC and the Internet. A further consequence of the changes brought about by digital media is the growth of the open content movement, in which artists willingly cede





some or all of their legal rights to their creations. The widespread use of digital media and its societal impacts point to the beginning of the Information Age, a new period in industrial history that will eventually result in a paperless society where all forms of media are created and consumed on computers [2]. A new arena for discussions on Dalits' plight has emerged with the proliferation of India's online media, particularly social media. Opinions and forms of self-expression have erupted due to the social media rallying. The extensive Dalit forum is a place where members discuss and debate many topics, and the collective wisdom of the community is shedding light on the caste system and the injustices perpetrated by the majority in India. A plethora of internet platforms, including blogs, websites, forums, and social media groups, have emerged to break the silence that the caste system enforced on the almost 165 million Dalits in India. This online activity is enabling Dalits to bring attention to some crimes and concerns while simultaneously drawing the attention of mainstream media to a few of them. Following a crime committed against a Dalit, there will be an overwhelming amount of material shared on Dalit forums, including images and videos. This makes it harder for the media to disregard such tales, as has historically been the case. The Dalits' social media mobilization, according to journalist and Dalit thinker Chandra Bhan Prasad, is also shattering the upper castes' long-cherished preconceptions. It was formerly said that Dalits lacked intelligence, creativity, and the ability to debate persuasively. The higher castes are beginning to recognize that Dalits are just like them when they read poetry, articles about technology and wildlife, and discussions on foreign affairs.

In contrast, not long ago, Dalits faced brutality or even death if they dared to voice opinions that challenged the social order or caste system that upper-caste members imposed on them. The government has used affirmative action in an unsuccessful attempt to abolish the caste system for the last sixty years. Even now, the majority of Dalits are unable to change their destinies. The media is controlled by the Brahmin caste and other upper-caste members, even though a democratic society should allow all groups' opinions to be heard. No Dalits have been identified in any Indian media, according to many surveys. The 315 most powerful journalists in 2006 were all males from upper-caste Hindu families; not a single Dalit was among them, according to the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS). The dominance of the upper-caste media is one reason the Dalits media is unable to continue existing. In India, the communication industry has always been dominated by the upper class and focused on serving the wealthy. The media does not only ignore or downplay the problems faced by Dalits; they also face social exclusion and discrimination. Because of their remarkable achievement in establishing a unique identity on digital platforms, all of this is about to change. There, people of lower social class may express themselves freely without worrying that an upper-caste lynch mob would punish them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Digital Activism and the Increased Role of Dalit Activism in Intersectional Feminism in India

This study article delves into the complex web of online action that connects feminist and Dalit movements. According to the article, intersectional feminism in India now includes Dalit activism, which has never been more visible, thanks to social media. This research delves into the intersection between feminist hashtag activism (such as the #WhyLoiter campaign) with the media's portrayal of Dalit women, as well as their online reactions to this portrayal [3].

2. Digital Activism and Dalit Women

In this article, we take a look at the ways in which Dalit websites and blogs in India are able to express themselves using social media. In it, the author explores how Dalits who have been historically oppressed might find a voice in the digital sphere [4].

3. The Dalit I Define: Social Media and Individualized Activism in Online Realms

This study is about the new modalities of Dalit activism in the virtual sphere. Examines the effects of social media on democratic speech and citizenship [5].





3. NEW NEWS OUTLETS FOR SUBALTERN CAUSES

The subaltern perspective is present in major online news channels, but it is under-represented; the growing strain on them is going unrecognized [6]. The Shudra, MookNayak, Dalit Dastak, Bahujan TV, National India News, Dalit Camera: Through Untouchable Eyes, and National Dastak are all part of the same network. A few instances of the material they have been generating while controlling diverse sources are AmbedkarNama, Dalit News Network, and Voice News Network. Viewers and subscribers to these networks number in the millions, and they come from all walks of life. Digital media has allowed subalterns to educate themselves more effectively than ever before, allowing them to selectively absorb information that is relevant, important, and meaningful. In order to overcome the state's hegemonic and biased policies and secure a pivotal role in democratic knowledge production and content creation, the subalterns must take collective action. In a striking display of how subalterns in India have been skilfully and effectively utilizing internet technology to assert their rights, since leaders have become irrelevant, the Dalits and Adivasis mobilized across all states of the country on April 2, 2018 [7] to protest the anticipated weakening and dilution of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, [8] following a supreme court ruling by two bench judges. In spite of this, the subaltern movement may grow into the biggest and most consequential one in recent history. Intentional digital ontology allowed subalterns to articulate their common concerns and goals in a way that was previously unimaginable, lending credence to my basic premise. Art, cultural expression, subaltern identities, emancipatory justice, and digital and analog aesthetics are all areas where Dalit organizing occurs, connecting political movements in both positive and negative ways [9].

A. Round Table India

The Indian Dalit population has been provided with a platform for expression through Round Table India, an online forum. On this platform, Dalit writers, researchers, and activists are provided with an opportunity to present their views and share their experiential knowledge. The forum discusses a number of serious issues ranging from social justice to identity and caste discrimination. In contrast to the service organization of the same name, Round Table India (RTI) is an active forum with the aim of promoting Dalit presence and debate in the Indian scenario. Targeted specifically at the Dalit-Bahujan population, RTI is an online forum publishing articles, essays, and commentaries examining the normally marginalized or overlooked positions and issues of such groups. The forum is of extreme importance to Dalit writers, researchers, and activists as it provides them with an opportunity to present their experiences, research work, and views. Apart from its efforts in fighting caste discrimination and promoting social justice, RTI provides educational content that gives insights into the cultural, social, and political issues faced by Dalit-Bahujan groups. It also provides community building by association of like-minded individuals, thus providing opportunities for collaborative work and ultimately promoting the pursuit of equality and inclusion in Indian society.

B. Dalit Camera

Interviews, videos, and talks on Dalit issues are uploaded on the Dalit Camera YouTube channel. Visually depicting Dalit stories challenges the limited representation of Dalit populations in mainstream media. Dalit Camera is a unique media platform that utilizes photographs, videos, and interviews to tell the stories of India's Dalits and other marginalized groups. In order to offer real stories and give a voice to the majority, who are largely ignored in mainstream media, it focuses on grassroots journalism by sharing real stories told by the affected parties. Using channels like YouTube and Facebook, Dalit Camera uploads such emotional stories to numerous people, both in India and around the world, and brings awareness to the issue of caste discrimination and inspires conversation about it. The content is a tool of activism and education, informing viewers about the details of social injustice while giving voice to marginalized communities through personal stories. Dalit Camera is a powerful tool in India's struggle for social equality and justice because it allows people to speak and shows that their stories count.

C. Digital Art by Dalit Artists

Young Dalit artists have taken to digital media, using it as a tool to produce excellent visual art from their lived experiences. Digital media has given voice to Dalits, enabling them to challenge dominant discourses and mobilize for social change, as evident in many initiatives and online platforms. These initiatives are part of a larger movement that





demands justice, equality, and the elimination of caste-based discrimination. Social media is one of the most effective tools for raising their voices and raising public awareness. The advocacy of Dalit rights in India is mostly dependent on these media and campaigns to raise public awareness, mobilize support, and campaign for their cause.

4. CHALLENGES IN THE DIGITAL SPACE

There are some challenges to internet activism, nonetheless. Dalit activists face cyber-and caste-based intimidation, which appears in the form of online trolling, abuse, and threats. There is a disturbing trend towards nasty cyberbullying of women activists, in particular to silence and intimidate them. The digital divide remains a massive issue. Large parts of the Dalit population reside in rural and economically underdeveloped areas, where internet access is patchy at best. This means that digital activity may not be able to reach its full potential and that representation may be biased. Social media can be an even more powerful weapon of Dalit activism as people become more comfortable with how to use technology to their advantage and more people become access-savvy. Future efforts may be towards directions such as the protection of activists from cyberbullying, the extension of internet access and online literacy to the Dalit population, and the use of new technology more effectively to increase connectedness and reach. In an effort to counteract prejudice in all its forms, Dalit organizations should establish links with other subaltern people from all over the world. There is little doubt that Dalit activism has been given an incredibly powerful weapon in the fight against centuries of oppression in the form of social media. There are still lots of obstacles to be overcome, particularly in terms of accessibility and safety online. However, efforts so far are promising for a future platform of activism that is more equal and inclusive. The tactics used by those seeking justice via digital platforms will also develop as these platforms progress, guaranteeing a digital version of this article is accessible at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4807043>). That everyone's voice, no matter how obscure, gets an opportunity to be felt. When it comes to advocating for change, connecting with like-minded people, and getting their voices heard, under-represented populations in the digital era have social media platforms to thank. Some important things to think about are these:

- **Hashtags and Visibility:** Social media has seen the rise of #WhyLoiter, #DalitLivesMatter, and #DalitWomenFight, among others, increasing their visibility. Dalits' experiences with violence, exclusion, and prejudice based on caste are brought to light by these initiatives. There is a new online network for Dalit activists to exchange tales, demands, and experiences thanks to these hashtags. This exposure dismantles hegemonic narratives and gives a platform to under-represented groups.
- **Representation and Empowerment:** Dalit people are able to show themselves honestly on social media, which empowers them and promotes representation. Without intermediaries, they may exchange art, stories, and opinions. Among Dalit women, social media has been a source of strength and empowerment. They show their resiliency, reclaim their stories, and defy preconceptions. The disruption of current power systems and the development of empathy are two important outcomes of representation.
- **Solidarity and intersectionality:** anti-caste movements, feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, and Dalit action all connect. By facilitating communication and teamwork, social media acts as a connector between these shifts. There must be unity among all oppressed communities. Activists are able to learn from one another and form coalitions thanks to the contacts made possible by social media.
- **Information and Conscience:** A digital version of this article is accessible at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4807043>). Dalit social media activism seeks, among other things, to bring attention to injustices, systematic oppression, and discrimination based on caste. The activists' goal is to educate the public and the Dalit communities at large via the exchange of information, publications, and personal experiences.
- **Empowerment and Agency:** Dalit people are able to narrate their tales via social media, which gives them agency and empowerment. For representation, they no longer look just to the mainstream media. By sharing stories, artwork, and poetry, activists regain control of their own lives. This empowerment enhances a feeling of pride and identity.
- **Fighting Back against Hate Speech and Violence:** Activists are not immune to online threats, hate speech, and violence despite the many positive aspects of social media. To combat this negativity, Dalit activists report



abusive material and strive to create a community that supports one another. Education, empowerment, advocacy, and unity are just a few of the goals of Dalit activism in the Internet era. The effect of social media on under-represented groups is dynamic and changes with the times.

5. CONCLUSION

Examining India's online social networks by applying the lenses of religious, tribal, and caste differences provides crucial information regarding the nation's contemporary socio-cultural dynamics. The findings indicate that online communities offer novel means for individuals to connect, mobilize, and create communities while, at the same time, mirroring and transforming traditional social structures. The use of online platforms has played an instrumental role in preserving and remaking social networks along caste lines. Socialization, aid, and consolidation of caste affiliations can all occur in web forums that are confined to some castes. Indian social justice movements, as well as globally, have been affected by Dalit action in the online age, particularly on social media. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook have provided the Dalit people with a global platform where they can articulate their experiences and challenges they have encountered. Shifts in discussion, such as challenging established prejudices and advancing necessary policy changes, have ensued from the increased profile. Due to the convenience of instant communication and the wide reach of information, social media has proved to be a powerful tool for activism, education, and mobilization against caste-based oppression. The determination of Dalit activists is a source of hope and transformation despite challenges such as cyberbullying and the digital divide. An online version of this article is available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4807043> and will remain so as digital technologies evolve. Activism strategies offer the potential for still more new ways of combating prejudice and promoting equality. One instance of how joint action might have a lasting impact and how technology might transform the quest for justice is the history of Dalit activism in the digital age.

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